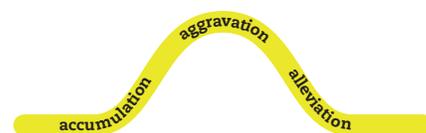

– Cycles of Time –

According to Ayurveda our routines should mimic and occur in harmony with nature. The fluctuations between the vata, pitta, and kapha doshas within our bodies are naturally aligned with the rhythms of nature. These doshic fluctuations correlate to the circadian rhythms and to the environmental cycles of nature to ensure that our bodies function optimally. Ignoring these natural rhythms leads to imbalance within the bodily system and sets the stage for disease. Unfortunately, our modern lifestyles make it very easy for us to lose touch with these natural rhythms. Electricity allows us to have the stimulus of light twenty-four hours a day, at the flick of a switch! There is no longer a natural darkening time urging us to go to bed and to sleep. We can work and be productive whenever we chose. Supermarkets stock foods that travel from far away and that are grown out of season in conditions that mimic optimal growing conditions. Foods are even grown and transported from different hemispheres of the planet where the season is the opposite of our own! It's easy to forget that strawberries have a growing season when we have ready access to them anytime we want them. The ways in which we have manipulated our natural world are very empowering and helpful, but they carry a price with them, also. We no longer have a memory or understanding of what is optimal in nature and what supports us in health and wellness.

THE DOSHAS AND THE DIGESTIVE PROCESS

The doshas have regular cycles that ebb and flow in accordance with our digestive process. When graphed these look similar to a bell curve. We call the rise uphill “accumulation”; we call the peak at the top “aggravation,” and we call the descent back down “alleviation.” It looks something like this:



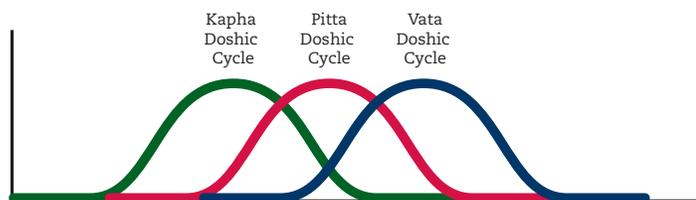
Within digestion Kapha is the first dosha to gain momentum (“accumulate”) as soon as we experience hunger or appetite and as we take a first bite of a meal. Kapha is primarily concerned with the Ayurvedic taste of sweet and as such takes the form of salivary amylase in the mouth that breaks complex carbohydrates. Kapha continues to rule the breakdown of carbohydrates into simpler sugars in the stomach.

While Kapha is peaking in the stomach, Pitta begins to accumulate. Pitta’s role in the digestive process revolves around the digestive enzymes, hydrochloric acid, and bile. Pitta is most active during the transit of food through the entire length of the small intestines; this is where Pitta peaks (aggravates). Once food enters the small intestines, Kapha begins to alleviate (as its services are no longer needed) while Vata accumulates in readiness.

Once the digested food particles pass from the Pitta small intestine into the Vata large intestine, Pitta’s job is done and it alleviates while Vata peaks, doing its work of consolidating the spent food particles into cohesive masses and absorbing excess water for use by the body. Once this process has moved the fecal matter to the descending colon, Vata alleviates, and Kapha is primed to begin the cycle over again as soon as we again experience hunger and begin to eat.

Here is what this three-part cycle of accumulation, aggravation, and alleviation might look like:

THE DOSHAS AND THE 24-HOUR DAY



Just as the doshas have regular cycles that flow in accordance with our digestive process, so too the doshas exert natural rhythms within the period of a day, a year, and a lifetime. The order of the doshas remains the same: first Kapha, then Pitta, and last Vata, which sets the stage for Kapha to begin anew. Within a 24-hour period, each dosha has two stretches where its energetics predominate:



Kapha peaks during	Pitta peaks during	Vata peaks during
6:00am and 10:00am	10:00am and 2:00pm	2:00am and 6:00am
6:00pm and 10:00pm	10:00pm and 2:00am	2:00pm and 6:00pm

The earthy and watery influences of Kapha begin the day, approximately at sunrise, when it is ideal to awaken and begin a gentle emergence into the activities of the day. Kapha morning time is a great period for doing any morning wellness practices and meditation as these help to bring focus and energy to the day. A light, warm breakfast is recommended as digestion can be sluggish during the morning.

At 10am Kapha gives way to the heat and fire of Pitta, which lasts until 2pm. This is the peak of the day, the peak of the body's expenditure of energy, and the peak of the sun in the sky. We are at our most productive during this time. Accordingly, lunch should be the largest meal of the day and the primary (or only) one to contain protein. Doing so gives us the fuel we need to do our work and takes advantage of a naturally high agni (digestive fire). Exercise should be avoided at this time as it is too heating (and Pitta increasing).

At 2pm Vata's influences of air and ether take over and predominate until 6pm. This is a time when creativity is initially high but then falls off. Physical energy, too, begins to wane as we become a bit restless. A light supper ("supplemental meal") will tide the body over until the next morning's breakfast and won't unduly tax the digestive process as it begins to shut down for the day.

At 6pm the cycle begins again with Kapha bringing a slowing down, a heaviness, a drowsiness. This coincides with the setting of the sun and the earth naturally cooling off. This can be a good time to take a gentle walk or do other calming activities before going to bed and to sleep.

10pm again brings Pitta to the forefront. As is typical for Pitta, this is a time of productivity. This time around, though, it is the liver's productivity that is being exploited. Mid-night is a time for cell regeneration, for general cleansing of toxins, and of synthesizing necessary compounds such as hormones. Those who stay awake past 10pm will experience a surge of energy and heat as Pitta ignites. Oftentimes people will even become hungry and will eat a meal! This is using the natural energetic of Pitta, but there is a high price to be paid: the liver has no chance to do its important work; this dynamic leads to the accumulation of additional toxins in the system *and* diminishes the removal of existing toxins.

2am brings Vata back to center stage. Vata's natural creativity is expressed through vivid and fantastic dreams. Nervous system and brain impulses are very active. The body begins to activate and prepare the previous day's wastes to move out of the body when we naturally arise again with the sunrise.

THE DOSHAS AND THE SEASONS OF THE YEAR

Just as the doshas strongly influence our process of digestion and our energetics throughout the day, they also correlate to and influence the seasons of the year.

Simply put, Kapha's heavy, wet, dense qualities align with late winter and early spring; the time of sap beginning to run again, of snow melting away, of life returning to budding plants, of the gradual return of sunlight, and of the lengthening of the days. This is a time of growth and of casting off the heavy sleepiness of winter.

In late spring Kapha gives way to Pitta and the energetics of summertime. Again we see Pitta's influence of light (longer days), heat (warmer temperatures), and greater activity.

With the gradual shortening of the days in autumn we return to the influences of Vata: windy, dry, cold weather moves in. We stay under the influence of Vata until Kapha again predominates.

THE DOSHAS AND THE SEASONS OF LIFE

In the extended cycle of a lifetime we see Kapha active in the period of time from birth until late adolescence. This is a time of growth and of development, a time of being nurtured and support by others. The earth and water elements are heavily accentuated in the creation of all bodily tissues and in the development of the brain and nervous system.

Pitta takes over during adulthood, again a time of productivity and work. This is a time of contribution to society and of providing for a family and/or a profession.



As we transition out of direct responsibility for others and into a phase of the elder, we move again into Vata time: a time where the body begins to lose its solidity in favor of drier and lighter conditions. This is a time of divesting possessions and disseminating accumulated wisdom. It is, in fact, a preparation for dying and moving onto what lays beyond.

BALANCING THE EFFECTS OF THE DOSHAS

In Ayurveda we always work to oppose the dosha that is out of balance, to apply the opposite qualities of those that are in excess. In applying these principles to the cycles of time we can:

eat intelligent meals to aid the natural doshic process of digestion;

eat the largest meal of the day at midday and make sure to be asleep well before 10pm;

work proactively to balance the excessive qualities of the doshas as they seasonally accumulate and peak to avoid their unpleasant effects (ie: hay fever in the spring, overheating in the summer, and feeling cold in winter);

and move purposefully through life's larger transitions.

When eating a meal, it is to our benefit to eat carbohydrates first so that Kapha can efficiently begin the digestive process by breaking down the complex carbohydrates. We finish a meal with bitters (such as greens or a salad) to signal to Vata that we have finished eating and to shut digestion down. This order of eating accords naturally with the order of the doshic tides and "makes sense" to the body. Our American habit of beginning a meal with a salad and finishing with dessert is the opposite of what the doshas expect and is the cause of much digestive upset. Finish your meal with a salad, and, more importantly, eat dessert first! Along with eating only when we are hungry and observing other Ayurvedic food routines, these practices keep our digestive system functioning optimally.

Weather and seasonal changes affect our balance. Everyone can benefit from adapting his/her routine to the current season. November through February, when it is cold and dry, is Vata season. When wind, cold, and dry weather continues Vata accumulates in the environment, which can cause a Vata imbalance in the body. Vata has accumulated and aggravated in the macro environment of the outer world as well as in the micro environment of the body. During this season it is a good idea to adopt a more Vata-pacifying diet and routine to keep Vata in balance. This means staying warm, eating warm foods, and taking time to rest.

Pitta season comes during the summer, July through October, when the weather is hot. To keep Pitta in balance during this time, eat cool foods, such as salads. Drink cool (not ice cold) liquids, and avoid excessive sun.

March through June is Kapha season when it is cold and wet. This is the time when you are more likely to get a cold and nasal congestion from an aggravated Kapha imbalance. Stay warm, eat light meals, and get enough regular exercise to help keep Kapha in balance.

During the span of our lifetimes we can also support ourselves by moving naturally and easefully through the various roles and phases of our lives (child, student, adult, parent, retiree, teacher) and by accommodating and balancing our doshic tendencies. The elderly can benefit by taking in warm, moist, nourishing foods to counter the drying and light attributes of Vata. The hard-working adults can take time to play with their children and friends to counter Pitta's strong work ethic. The very young can stay active and engaged in life so that they can ward off the heavy, wet, dense tendencies of Kapha.

All of this focus is meant to provide us with tools to live in the best health possible so that we might enjoy life and its process of growth and change. Working *with* the doshas instead of being a victim to them or in reaction to them is more efficient in the end and affords us greater joy in life.

