

Ayurveda - Health notes

Weight Imbalance - Kapha

Vital Health Topic: Enhancing the Fire Element: A Unique Approach to Kapha-Related Weight Gain

Like in every other area of health, Maharishi Ayurveda recommends a holistic approach to weight management. In Maharishi Ayurveda, the emphasis is on determining the cause of the individual's health need, and based on that analysis, offering an individualized treatment that includes diet, daily routine and herbal formulas. It is a very safe, holistic approach that is very different from prescribing the same isolated ingredient to everyone to fix a certain problem.

There are three major causes of weight imbalance, and these can be thought of in terms of the three main doshas: Kapha, Pitta and Vata. In this article, we examine Kapha-related weight imbalance and ways to manage it through diet, lifestyle and herbal formulas.

KAPHA - RELATED WEIGHT IMBALANCE

The most common type of weight gain is caused by having a slow metabolism. This is common for a person who is a classic Kapha type.

Kapha dosha is comprised of the earth and water elements, so this type of individual will reflect those qualities. A Kapha person will be structurally bigger, with bigger bones and a more easy-going, stable, gentle personality.

For a Kapha person, being skinny is usually not a healthy goal. If you are prone to gain weight, and are always five to ten pounds overweight no matter how little you eat, it would go against your nature to ever be really thin. Rather, it would be better to balance your metabolism, increase your ability to digest sugars and carbohydrates by adopting a Kapha balancing diet and lifestyle, and allow your body to naturally find its ideal weight. You may not be skinny, you may always weigh five to ten pounds more than average, but you will feel better and look healthier, and you will lose most of your excess weight.

BALANCING KAPHA DOSHA THROUGH DIET

The main principle for balancing Kapha is to introduce some of the fire element into your food and lifestyle. This will balance the earthen and watery elements of Kapha dosha.

Flavor your vegetables and dhal soups with spices that are mildly pungent, such as black pepper, fresh ginger, and turmeric. Research has shown that turmeric helps promote digestion, reduce cholesterol and allergies, and metabolize fat. (Important note: Turmeric activates the liver, so if you have any history of liver or bile duct disorder, consult your doctor before including it in your diet.)

Other tastes to balance Kapha dosha are the bitter and astringent tastes. These include green leafy vegetables, split mung dhal soup and other bean soups, and astringent vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower and brussels sprouts. It's important to cook your vegetables and eat them warm, rather than relying on raw vegetables. Raw vegetables are difficult to digest, whereas to balance Kapha dosha you want to eat warm, light, cooked foods.

Quinoa is an excellent grain for managing weight, as it has high protein and zinc content (4 mg of zinc per cup). But it should be cooked with a bit of ghee or olive oil, as otherwise it may be too drying.

Basmati rice is also a good grain for Kapha dosha, because it has a more drying quality than other types of rice, but quinoa is better because it has the intelligence of fire to support

other types of rice, but quinoa is better because it has the intelligence of fire to support weight loss.

The fire element can even be added to the water you drink. If you boil your water for five minutes on the stove, you are adding the intelligence of fire to your drinking water. If you sip the water throughout the day, the intelligence of fire will permeate the molecules of water, and thus permeate your body. You won't notice anything right away, but if you continue with this routine, in time you will feel less fatigue. This is because Kapha dosha tends to create a feeling of lethargy, and by introducing the fire element in the water, you'll gradually feel more energetic.

If you are Kapha by nature, you'll want to stay away from heavy, cold desserts such as ice cream and cheesecake, as these will only slow your metabolism and increase the cold, heavy qualities of Kapha in your body. Rich desserts, fried foods, foods made with refined sugar and refined flour, cold foods and drinks--all of these should be avoided if you want to balance Kapha and your weight. Specific food guidelines for balancing Kapha are available in the Foods section at <http://www.mapi.com>. Click on the Kapha icon and follow the links on the Kapha page.

LIFESTYLE TIPS FOR BALANCING KAPHA

Regular exercise is the most important change you can make to improve your metabolism. The problem is that people with excessive Kapha dosha often feel somewhat complacent or even lethargic, and they might have to push themselves a little to exercise every day. Usually Kapha types need more vigorous exercise for a longer period to have the same effect as milder exercise would have on a Vata person.

Even making a habit of breathing more deeply can help charge the metabolism with more of the fire element. When Kapha dosha is out of balance, one of the first things that happens is that the person becomes a shallow breather. Deeper breathing is healthy for all body types, but especially for Kapha dosha, because deeper breathing helps wake up the body's metabolism. When the metabolism is lower and breathing is shallow, the body's channels get blocked and cause even more lethargy, which becomes a vicious cycle.

Don't try to force your breathing, but just easily make a habit of breathing more deeply. You can also consult an expert in Maharishi Ayurveda to learn pranayama, the yogic breathing exercise that prepares the mind and body for meditation. These gentle exercises cultivate deeper breathing and help cleanse the pathways of prana, or life breath, in the body, removing obstructions and enhancing metabolism.

People with more Kapha dosha need to be sure to eat their main meal when the sun is strongest, right at noon. This is because the body's internal digestive fire, called agni, is also strongest at noon. If you eat your main meal then, you'll digest it more easily and create less of the waste product of digestion, the toxic ama, which blocks the channels and slows metabolism.

The digestive fire is weaker in the morning when you wake up and in the evening before bed, so breakfast and dinner should be lighter meals. An excellent breakfast for balancing metabolism for all three body-types is a cooked apple or pear with cooked prunes and figs. This breakfast choice is light and sustains most people until noon, when they can eat their heaviest meal. A healthy supper for a Kapha person might be soup made with vegetables, grains and dhal and flavored with spices such as cumin, fresh ginger, black pepper, and turmeric. Or kitcheri, a light meal made with rice and split mung dhal, is also a light Kapha-reducing meal (recipe available at <http://www.mapi.com>). Kapha Churna is an excellent spice mixture for balancing Kapha dosha.

HERBS THAT HEAL

Be Trim Herbal Tea and the Be Trim Type 1 herbal tablets are excellent formulas for enhancing metabolism of carbohydrates and sugar. Be Trim Tea also helps curb cravings and false hunger pangs.

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Be Trim Type 1 tablets help control the appetite and slow absorption of carbohydrates. This formula supports the body's ability to metabolize fat, improves liver function, enhances the assimilation of food and aids digestion. It also helps remove toxins (ama) that have built up due to incomplete digestion, and by clearing them away prepares the body to burn fat more efficiently.

Gymnema sylvestre and Indian Kino help balance fat metabolism and slow carbohydrate absorption. Indian Bedellium helps balance fat metabolism and the accumulation of cholesterol. Zinc Bhasma aids fat metabolism. Heart-leaved Moonseed, Indian Sarsaparilla, Nutgrass and Cumin boost digestion and assimilation.

All of these herbs together create a balanced, holistic effect to help support a slower metabolism. Be Trim Type 1 is ideal for someone who has Kapha-related weight management challenges. (Please note: If you have low blood sugar, do not take Be Trim Type 1. Check with an expert trained in Maharishi Ayurveda to find out the herbal formula that is healthiest for you.)