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# Insights and Practices from **Yoga and Ayurveda**



## About Ayurveda

Many of us in the western world are aware of Yoga, yet less are aware of its sister science of Ayurveda – which translates as the Science of Life. Both originate from my homeland of India and are powerful tools to add to our toolkit for optimal mental health and wellbeing.

To understand how and why they work, it's important to notice how we have arrived at a time and place in our world, where so many of us are suffering from chronic stress, anxiety, overwhelm and burnout, with the pandemic exacerbating all these existing conditions.

The fact we can even say "chronic stress" without batting an eyelid, is a reminder of how we have over the course of the last half century, normalized a way of life that is not supportive of our wellbeing as human beings connected to our larger environment.



## Dear Readers

Our hope is that you feel empowered to feel calmer and thrive.

## What do I mean by this exactly?

Well, we are now products of our modern, technological age. With this arises an incredible amount of power at our fingertips. We have the ability with a click of a mouse to buy whatever we want immediately, to talk to someone across the world and conduct business; to exercise with a video app in our living room and live in a way that is so disconnected from our immediate environment that we sometimes even forget where we are in geographical space.

This may excite our brains, but it has a very detrimental effect on the health of our bodies. Our bodies do not exist simply from the neck up. When we ignore our bodies' physical needs just to get stuff done; to scroll social media, attack another slew of emails, or simply keep up with the overwhelming pace of life hitting us in this hyper technological age, we start to suffer from disconnection.

This disconnection then results in our disassociating from how we feel. In Ayurveda and Yoga we look to the body first for insights into what may be going on at a mental and emotional level; as the body can offer signals when things are wrong; and with some smart shifts, we may be able to alleviate more problems later on.

With disconnection, we are no longer listening to our internal compass of wellbeing and truth guiding us on what our bodies need to eat and do in order to thrive, and we no longer following habits that help to sustain us versus harm us. This in turn affects us emotionally and mentally, causing anxiety, overwhelm and a feeling of unease.

## How can we use Yoga and Ayurveda to help us navigate the intensity of modern life?

We tune into practices that help to calm our nervous system so we are not in a state of fight or flight, which then allows us to navigate whatever life throws at us with more ease and flow.

Here are some practices and suggestions that I hope you can include into your daily life. Remember less is more. If you can commit to a few of these practices daily, vs. doing all of them just once in a while, you will have a higher degree of success with following them, as well as being able to experience their benefits.

- 1. Commit to a daily routine:** Western science is catching up with what Yoga and Ayurveda have been telling us for centuries. Routine helps us to thrive and to make sense in a chaotic, outwardly focused world. Researchers call the habits that we commit ourselves to, anchor habits, i.e. they help to give us a sense of stability in our life. Once we start to cultivate habits that support our wellbeing, we no longer have to worry about what we are doing next. We can simply start to move from one habit to the next, without using up mental or emotional energy in the process; and we are less likely to procrastinate.



## What does an ideal daily routine look like?

Here, I map out a daily routine that works with our circadian rhythms, using Ayurvedic insights. When we are in touch with the natural rhythms of day and night; and the seasons, and when we tune into nature, we start to cultivate calm and peace from the inside out.



**Wake up early:** ideally somewhere between 5:30 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. Ayurveda tells us that since this is the time of day when the air or Vata element is heightened, a bio-energy that is responsible for all movement and communication in the body, it is a good idea to wake up close to dawn as our body is primed to eliminate yesterday's waste matter out of the body.

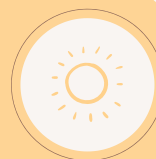
1.

**Why?** Because when we have irregular digestion in the physical body, it causes anxiety in the mind.

**Hot tip:** To activate your body's digestion/elimination pathway, drink a glass of water with fresh squeezed lemon juice. Try water that is room temperature to warm (depending on your taste). Lemon water is alkalizing for your body and gently cleansing for your organs. This will help to lessen your need for a cup of coffee to go to the bathroom.

### Take in the morning light.

Ayurveda has been telling us to wake up with the natural light of the day for more than 5000 years!



**Why?** When we awake and are exposed to daylight, sleep inducing melatonin secretions in the body decrease while cortisol increases, which is needed to get us up and going.

**Hot tip:** Wake up gently. Create a small habit of giving yourself 5 minutes every day to sit down on a cushion or a chair in a quiet spot in your home and take 10 deep, long, slow breaths, followed by a few minutes of observing your thoughts. This will help you to walk into the morning with a feeling of calm and ease. Over time you can increase the 5 minutes to 10 and so on. Think of this as your own oxygen mask time. Do not look at any devices before you have some time to simply check in with yourself.

2.



### Get outside for a short walk, bike ride or run, or do a yoga practice.

Something that creates some sweat in the body and amps up your inner fire in a holistic way (without the assistance of coffee!).

3.

**Why?** From around 6 – 10 a.m., we move into the earth element or Kapha bioenergy, which is stable and grounding yet can also cause some lethargy. Moving during this time will literally help you to move stagnation out of the body and create space for a new day.



## Eat a light yet filling breakfast



**Why?** Breakfast should not be overly heavy, but filling enough to keep you sustained until lunch. Our digestive system works best when we don't keep snacking as it has to work harder to keep breaking down the new food we take in, vs. simply focusing on assimilating, absorbing and transporting the nutrition we have taken in already.

4.

**Hot Tip:** Eat your next meal, when you feel real hunger. Yes, try to eat meals at regular hours, but notice that you feel hunger before you simply start to eat as it's easy to eat when we are bored, when we want to take a break from something else or simply because everyone else is eating at a certain time. Your body will thank you for noticing it's signals.



**Plan your most productive meetings and work sessions between 9:30 to 12 noon.**

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## Eat a sustaining lunch



**Why?** This is a good time to eat a substantial meal. Your digestion is strong, as is your metabolic rate, which makes it easy to digest food well. This does not mean overeating, but you should again be able to sustain yourself until your next meal (ideally).

6.



**Plan on more creative brainstorming or writing work in the afternoon.**

7.

**Why?** We're back in the time of the air element. We could feel spacy or overwhelmed if it's been an especially busy day, so it's a good idea to focus on projects that you are really enjoying working on, perhaps projects that may not need a lot of organization at this stage of their inception.

**Hot tip:** Right around 4 p.m., when you start to get a sugar crash, instead of reaching for a soda or caffeine, try having a turmeric latte, a handful of roasted nuts and some fruit to keep your energy up. Snack recipes follow.



### Enjoy your evening

Create boundaries when you finish work. Especially if you are working from home. Try to have a movement practice in the evening or spend time with friends and family.



**Hot Tip:** Think of the evening as a downflow of energy from the day. Ayurvedically it is a time for cool thoughts i.e. to do things that relax vs. stimulate the mind and the nervous system

8.

### Make Dinner Simple

Instead of making dinner lavish, eat a lighter meal. Favor soups and stews and curries vs. dense meats. Your body will digest lighter foods better in the evening. It's not just the Ayurvedic texts that tell us this, other countries such as France also eat this way.



**Why?** In Ayurveda we believe that our digestive / metabolic fire is highest around midday vs. the evening; as our digestion is also connected to our circadian rhythms. At night our body is trying to digest and direct the right hormones in our endocrine glands which is much more challenging after a heavy meal.

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### Wind down by 10 p.m.



**Why?** Around 10 p.m. is when we get back into the time of the fire element and feel a second wind of energy coming on. It is important to sleep before we catch that second wind as over time staying up late disrupts our circadian and hence sleep cycles. Instead consider that time after dinner as a welcoming sleep time. Dim the lights. Minimizing your exposure to very bright lights will help increase melatonin levels in your body which will in turn help you to sleep more peacefully. **This is probably the smartest thing you can do for your mental wellbeing as without adequate sleep we are restless, anxious and apt to reach for something sugary to sustain us through a day.**

10.

**Hot Tip:** Be sure to be off devices at least one hour before bedtime; and try to remove all devices from your bedroom. Treat yourself as though we live in a time before electricity and instead light a candle in your room, offer gratitude and get yourself to sleep.

