Achieving Your Optimal Weight
An Ayurvedic Guide to Weight Management

Do you consider yourself to be underweight or overweight? Do you feel unsatisfied or uncomfortable in your own body? These days, body weight can be a bit of a touchy subject. There is no shortage of evidence that our culture has adopted a very narrow set of physical standards that are considered normal, healthy, and beautiful. Of course, these standards vary slightly according to one's gender, age, ethnicity, and community. But on the whole, our culture's positive representations of the human body are very homogenous. This selective portrayal of beauty can greatly influence how we feel we should look, can dictate very unrealistic expectations about how much we think we should weigh, and can also be incredibly damaging to our self-esteem.

This is rich territory—filled with complex emotional, psychological, physical, and cultural factors, all influencing how we feel about our body type, our body weight, and ultimately, how we feel about ourselves. Thankfully, Ayurveda is a holistic healing tradition that honors all of who we are. In Ayurveda, the body, mind, and spirit are all seen as part of the same integrated whole. Therefore, anything that we do to enact change in the physical body, the emotional body, the mind, or the spiritual body will inherently affect every other aspect of our lives. As a result, when it comes to achieving a balanced body weight, Ayurveda informs an approach that is unique, insightful, and refreshingly sane.
Prakriti and Body Weight

According to Ayurveda, the person being treated is every bit as important as the imbalance being addressed. The Ayurvedic concept of prakriti (constitution) is incredibly relevant to any discussion of the Ayurvedic approach to weight management. In fact, it transforms the tone of the entire conversation because it embraces the inherent diversity among us.

Ayurveda recognizes that each of us has an unequivocally unique constitution—a personal reference point for optimal health that is established at conception, cemented at birth, and that remains stable throughout our lives. Vata, pitta, and kapha describe distinct forces at play within each individual’s constitution. All of the doshas are present in everyone, but in different quantities. Our constitutions influence our physiology, our physique, our likes and dislikes, our tendencies and habits, our mental and emotional nature, as well as our vulnerabilities toward imbalance and disease. Your constitution may not be the only factor in your particular struggle with body weight, but it is very likely an important consideration—whether you are underweight or overweight. If you do not know your Ayurvedic constitution, please consider taking our Prakriti Quiz.

Typically, individuals with lighter constitutions (usually vata- and sometimes pitta-predominant) tend to have a slighter build and a leaner physique overall. These individuals sometimes long to be heavier—bulkier. But try as they might, they often struggle to gain or maintain weight. Their constitutions simply do not build bulk naturally or easily. By contrast, those with heavier constitutions (usually kapha-predominant) tend to be naturally sturdy, strong, and stocky. Many of these individuals would swear that they can gain weight simply by thinking about it, and losing weight can be quite a challenge for them. The important distinction here is that there is a difference between being naturally lean and being underweight. Likewise, there is a difference between having a naturally heavy build and being overweight.

When it comes to issues with body weight, our very first task is to ask ourselves if we truly have an imbalance at all or if we are simply unhappy with the normal, healthy tendencies of our constitutions. In the context of a culture that has dictated such narrow standards of beauty, this can be a challenging first step, but it is an important one. If you are not familiar with how your predominant doshas inform your physique, you might appreciate our resource, Vata, Pitta, Kapha, and You, which explores how the doshas influence our bodies, minds, and experiences on many levels.

If you determine that you are dissatisfied with your body’s natural expression of health and wellness, we would recommend that you begin to explore the origins of this internal discord. You might also evaluate whether there are ways that you can more fully embrace who you are—recognizing the inherent intelligence and beauty of your body. If, on the other hand, you determine that you do have a weight imbalance to address—whether you want to gain or lose weight—Ayurveda offers a number of practical tools for reclaiming optimal health.

The Importance of Agni

In Ayurveda, strong agni (the metabolic fire) is the very foundation of optimal health, while impaired agni is at the root of every imbalance and disease. Agni very directly informs our metabolic functions throughout the body.
Therefore, balancing agni is a critical first step in addressing all kinds of weight imbalances. This can be a multi-faceted process, including changes to the diet, lifestyle, as well as herbal support. Ayurveda teaches us not only what to eat, but also when and how to eat, in order to support a return to balance. Exercise also greatly influences agni, but Ayurveda offers the unique perspective that the appropriate type, duration, and intensity of exercise can vary widely between individuals. Tending to agni is a very personalized process that should be tailored to address the specific concerns and challenges of each individual. If agni and its role in overall health are new concepts to you, our resource on The Importance of Healthy Digestion might help you to more fully appreciate the foundational importance of the metabolic fire.

The Ayurvedic Difference

Whether you are looking to gain weight or lose it, the Ayurvedic approach illuminates a simple set of principles that help us to improve digestive health, balance the metabolism, support the mind and the nervous system, and manage stress. At the same time, it invites us to commit to powerful forms of self-care that can help to reduce or eliminate the psychological and emotional imbalances that might otherwise prevent us from achieving our goals.

One of the most beautiful things about Ayurveda is that it meets each of us exactly where we are. Perhaps you’re deeply motivated—truly ready to revolutionize your habits in order to achieve your goals as quickly as possible. Or perhaps you’re a bit tentative and need to implement changes slowly, gradually—as you’re ready and able. It truly makes no difference. You can adopt Ayurveda’s diverse set of therapeutic strategies at your own pace and still reap the rewards. Obviously, the more discipline and commitment you bring to the table, the faster you’ll see and feel improvements. But rest assured that the process will not feel torturous or unsustainable. Instead, you’ll be embarking upon a clear, holistic, and time-tested path toward optimal health, promoting wellness from the inside out. What’s more, you’ll be eating a wholesome, healthy, and deeply satisfying diet—using practical guidelines to ensure your success. The desired changes in body weight are almost a side effect—the natural outcome of resolving the underlying imbalances in your system.

Choosing the Weight Balancing Resource that Is Right for You

The next step is to choose the appropriate weight balancing resource for your needs. Click on one of the links below and get started in reclaiming your health and vitality.

- An Ayurvedic Approach to Losing Weight (page 4)
- An Ayurvedic Approach to Gaining Weight (page 17)
An Ayurvedic Approach to Losing Weight

Are you tired of suffering through one diet after another without getting the results you want? Fed up with the endless yo-yo effect of losing weight again and again, only to gain it back? Perhaps you’re just ready for a more holistic approach to weight loss—one that feels healthy and balanced rather than promising unrealistic results.

It doesn’t matter how long you’ve struggled with your weight, how much you want to lose, how many times you’ve tried to shed those pesky extra pounds, or if you’re just looking to reset after a brief period of feeling out of sync with your diet or lifestyle. The tenants of Ayurveda provide us with a simple approach to weight loss that’s easy to follow, very doable, and incredibly effective. Along the way, you’ll also be reclaiming a vibrant sense of health and well-being—physically, mentally, and emotionally. So, if you’re willing to give an entirely different strategy a fair try, then prepare to usher in both a new relationship with your body, and an inspiring journey toward improved overall health. Welcome to the Ayurvedic approach to weight loss. You can do this. In fact, you may find it enriching your life in ways that no other “diet” could.

The Ayurvedic Perspective

According to Ayurveda, being overweight involves an inherent excess in kapha dosha. While kapha may not be the only factor at play in your struggle with excess weight, it is certainly an important player. One of the foundational principles of Ayurveda is that like increases like and that opposites balance. Kapha and excess weight share many of the same qualities; they are both heavy, slow, cool, oily, smooth, dense, soft, stable, and gross. Therefore, being overweight can provoke kapha in the body, and excess kapha in the body can lead to being overweight. Conversely, a return to balance requires an increase in opposing influences—those that are light, sharp, hot, dry, rough, liquid, mobile, and subtle.

The benefits of this approach are available to each of us, no matter how quickly (or slowly) we make the journey. What’s more, Ayurveda does not focus on short-term gains, only to fail us later, so you won’t need to starve yourself, or unrealistically limit the variety of foods that you can enjoy. Nor will you quickly lose a few pounds only to see them creep back on. Instead, you will be following a clear and time-tested path toward optimal health.
Five Simple Commitments

Consider making just five simple commitments to help you achieve your ideal weight.

1. Practice fifteen minutes of yoga every morning.
2. Eat three satisfying meals daily.
3. Follow a kapha-pacifying diet.
4. Exercise at least three days per week.
5. Establish a daily routine to support your commitments.

These commitments are simple. They are intuitive. And while it’s entirely possible that you will require a bit of discipline in the beginning, it won’t be long before the body’s natural intelligence begins to resurface—replacing unhealthy cravings with more balanced urges. As this occurs, maintaining these commitments becomes easier and easier, until the routine becomes second nature. Below, we will explore each of the five commitments in depth—explaining what’s involved and highlighting why each of them is so critical to your success.

1. Practice Fifteen Minutes of Yoga Every Morning

Establishing a daily yoga practice may seem a surprising first step in a comprehensive set of weight loss recommendations. But it is no coincidence that this is the first suggestion, nor that you are being asked to practice yoga first thing every morning. Yoga is an incredibly powerful practice that benefits the entire being—body, mind, and spirit. It awakens, lubricates, and cleanses the body, massages and stimulates the organs of digestion and elimination, tones the joints and muscles, increases circulation, kindles healthy internal heat, activates the digestive fire, and facilitates detoxification. But the practice of yoga also balances the mind and emotions, calms the nervous system, and activates prana—the vital life-force within each of us. Ultimately, starting your morning with a few minutes of yoga sets the stage for a balanced and successful day—one less influenced by unnecessary stress and unhealthy cravings, and instead guided by clarity, insight, and a natural inclination to honor one’s Self and one’s body.

There is certainly no harm in doing more than fifteen minutes, but you are much more likely to succeed if your commitments feel doable. And truthfully, fifteen minutes of yoga is enough to be transformative. So commit to at least fifteen minutes. Every day.

If you are new to yoga, a simple series of Sun Salutations (Surya Namaskar) is a great place to start. This practice is dynamic, rhythmic, and flowing. Sun Salutations balance the entire system, and can be modified to be more or less challenging—depending on the condition of each individual. Start with a series of four and slowly build up to ten or twelve, if that feels appropriate to you. If fifteen minutes is up after eight or ten sun salutations, it’s also fine to stop there. The important thing is to work with the breath and to cultivate presence throughout the mind and body as you flow through the asanas. If you already have a well-established yoga practice and would like to adapt it to more actively support your weight loss efforts, please explore our resource on Kapha-Pacifying Yoga.
Whatever practice is right for you, attending a yoga class on occasion (or even regularly) can provide an important sense of community, as well as the added depth of being guided by a qualified instructor. Yoga classes can also inspire a more engaged home practice and support you in maintaining this important commitment.

2. Eat Three Satisfying Meals Daily

Any routine that is tortuous to sustain is destined to fail. Eating three satisfying meals each day will support you in being able to maintain a healthy diet. But this recommendation also makes sense physiologically. In the Ayurvedic tradition, the concepts of fire, transformation, and digestion are intricately linked. There is an art to starting and tending a fire, and the same is true for the digestive fire.

Imagine for a moment trying to start a fire by holding a small match up to a sizable log. Hopeless, right? Even once a fire is burning, it’s entirely possible to smother the flames by adding too much fuel all at once, or by adding little bits of fuel too frequently. Now imagine how absurd it would be to expect any fire to go on burning without the addition of any fuel.

In much the same way, maintaining a healthy metabolism requires appropriate kindling, and a regular and reliable source of fuel—with appropriate spacing in between. If we stop eating entirely, the digestive fire will inevitably die down. In other words, eating too little can actually further slow a sluggish metabolism. Effectively stoking the digestive capacity requires eating appropriately sized meals at suitable intervals so that the body is neither overwhelmed with the quantity of food to be digested, nor the frequency at which it is coming in. Eating three healthy, digestible meals each day without snacking in between strikes an important balance. It ensures that the digestive fire is adequately stimulated and actually encourages it to grow stronger.

What you eat will matter; that’s where your next commitment comes in. But when and how you eat is equally important. The following guidelines will help to maximize your progress.

Avoid Snacking Between Meals

While this is often a challenging adjustment to make, eliminating snacks is powerfully supportive of weight loss. The digestive fire is strongest and most efficient when it can fully digest one meal before being asked to digest anything else. Therefore, it is best to separate meals by at least four hours. Interestingly, fat metabolism is kicked into high gear during this natural break between meals; without it, the body does not tend to use accumulated fat as energy. Therefore, avoiding snacks is a fantastic way to invite your body to burn through the accumulated excess. If the desire to snack arises, have a cup of hot water with 1 teaspoon of honey and a squeeze of fresh lime juice instead. Or, if you must have something to eat, try a few raisins or some carrot or celery sticks.

Make Lunch Your Main Meal

Digestive strength is strongest at mid-day, so eating your main meal at lunchtime (ideally between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.) capitalizes on your body’s naturally increased digestive capacity at this time.
Make Dinner as Light as Possible

Eating a light dinner (ideally eaten by 5 or 6 p.m.) allows your stomach to empty itself before you go to sleep and supports the natural detoxification processes that occur overnight. Even if it’s not possible to eat this early, you will be more successful if you avoid eating anything after 7 p.m.

Offer Your Full Presence to Each Meal

Eating is a sacred act, an act of love. It is therefore best to eat in a calm, peaceful environment, free of emotional upset, intense conversation, television, or multi-tasking of any kind. Be present with the gift of nourishment that your body is receiving. And listen for the subtle signs within that you are satisfied—ideally, completing your meal before you feel full. These practices allow your body to fully register the tastes and textures of your food, reduce the likelihood of overeating, encourage an experience of satisfaction, and help to prevent the occurrence of unhelpful cravings between meals.

Optional: Stoke the Digestive Fire Before Meals

If you feel inspired to go even further, you can stoke the digestive fire about thirty minutes before lunch and dinner by chewing a slice of fresh ginger (about the size of a nickel) with a pinch of sea salt, a few drops of lime juice, and about ¼ teaspoon honey.

3. Eat a Kapha-Pacifying Diet

As we have seen, excess kapha is inherently involved in being overweight, but it can also cause attachment, greed, resistance to change, lethargy, excessive sleep, heaviness in the mind and body, congestion, depression, a sluggish metabolism, and water retention (among other things). Eating a kapha-pacifying diet helps to clear excess kapha from the system and can affect change in all of these areas—supporting the body in achieving a more balanced weight while improving overall health.

In essence, a kapha-pacifying diet seeks to neutralize excess kapha by emphasizing foods that are light, warm, dry, rough, and very digestible. In general, choose whole foods that are freshly prepared and seasonally appropriate over processed foods, or cold, stale foods. Beyond that, there are a number of additional practices that can effectively reduce excess kapha. We’ve created two resources to support you in balancing kapha with your diet. Please click on the links below to learn more.

- Kapha-Pacifying Diet: a comprehensive overview.
- Kapha-Pacifying Foods: a list of foods to favor and avoid.

Proper food combinations can also be tremendously helpful in supporting improved digestion. In our fast-paced modern culture, this ancient understanding of which foods should and should not be eaten together is quite foreign to many of us. That being the case, it is best to embrace proper food combining slowly, by first simply becoming aware of improper combinations that occur regularly in your diet. As you are ready, make slow, manageable changes—one at a time. Click here for more information about proper food combining.
It is also important to remember that an Ayurvedic diet does not require us to give up everything we’ve come to love. Simply finding moderation in our choices can be a great first step in restoring balance. Because cravings for detrimental foods will subside as our health improves, our bodies become better and better able to recognize wholesome, life-affirming foods, and increasingly reject dietary choices that compromise our well-being. This process takes time, but it’s important to be both patient and persistent. Ultimately each step along the way will support our overall progress.

4. Exercise at Least Three Days Each Week

Aerobic exercise is an important component of any weight loss strategy. This commitment is in addition to your daily yoga practice. Focus on activities that are invigorating, doable, and fun for you. For those of us with busy schedules, committing to a shorter exercise program can significantly reduce our sense of overwhelm and encourage success. The great news is that workouts as short as fifteen to twenty minutes can be tremendously beneficial. Of course, if your preferred exercise routine is longer, that’s fine too.

How and when you exercise can also have an impact on the efficacy of your exercise program. Ayurveda teaches us that certain times of day are more conducive to exercise than others. These are the kapha times of day (approximately 6–10 a.m./p.m.), when atmospheric conditions lend a little extra strength and stamina to the system. For the best results, plan your activities within this window in either the morning or the evening. Obviously, if those times will not work for you, find one that will; exercise at any time will be better than none at all. Ayurveda also recommends that we exercise at fifty to seventy percent of our capacity—ideally, breathing through our nostrils the entire time. This prevents physiological stress, and allows the body to benefit more deeply from our efforts. You can apply this approach to walking, hiking, running, cycling, yoga, swimming, as well as cardio workouts at the gym.

Another method is to alternate between short, intense bursts of physical activity and carefully interspersed recovery periods. This technique allows the body to rest between periods of intense activity, and is thought to
more accurately mimic our evolutionary activities as hunter gatherers. In recent years, a method of exercise known as High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) has emerged around this concept. Because workouts typically range from eight to thirty minutes, HIIT may be particularly useful for those of us with less time to devote to exercise. A HIIT routine usually involves a short warm-up period, a series of three to ten short sprints (twenty to sixty seconds each) interspersed with short recovery periods in between (ten to sixty seconds each), and a cool-down period. Interestingly, there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that HIIT may actually boost metabolic function, reduce insulin resistance, burn fat, and support weight loss more effectively than traditional cardio workouts.

Regardless of your preferred activity, the most important thing is to make your exercise regimen an inspiring and energizing part of your week so that you are motivated to keep at it. Please check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

5. Establish a Daily Routine

In the context of our busy modern lives, establishing a daily routine can actually be the key to success with this approach. Not only does it ensure that our commitments become a natural part of each day, and that we develop helpful, supportive new habits; a sense of routine also has a soothing effect on the nervous system, supports a calmer, more centered state of being, and helps to reduce stress. On an intuitive level, it makes sense that reducing stress would support weight loss, but there are compelling physiological reasons that this holds true. While those specifics are beyond the scope of this article, the take home message is that where stress is concerned, establishing a daily routine may be the single most important commitment you make.

A daily routine is a central element of an Ayurvedic lifestyle—one that is recommended for everyone—and there are a wide variety of traditional practices to choose from. That said, it is very important not to overcommit. Start with the basics. You can add to your routine as you become accustomed to the new rhythm and are inspired to expand your practices. Below are a number of daily routine elements that can be particularly supportive of weight loss.

Establish Routine Sleep and Wake Times

Ayurveda has some valuable insights to offer about the timing of our sleep. The evening time (from about 6-10 p.m.) is a kapha time of day, and is especially heavy, slow and dull—an ideal time to let our systems settle down and prepare for sleep. Many people actually feel a natural lull in energy during these evening hours. However, pitta’s fiery influence takes the reins after about 10 p.m., so if we are not already headed to bed (or asleep) by 10 p.m., we may feel reinvigorated and it can be extremely difficult to wind down and go to sleep until much later. In the interest of aligning with the cycles of nature and getting good rest, an earlier bedtime is undoubtedly more supportive. Kapha time reoccurs in the early morning, from about 6-10 a.m. This time of day lends extra strength and stamina to morning workouts, but if we are not fully awake ahead of its arrival, it has the potential to leave us feeling sluggish and groggy. Therefore, we recommend that you wake up by 6 a.m. Not only will you feel more alert and awake, your body’s metabolic capacity will be better supported as well.
Getting enough rest is critical to your health. Sleep and wake times should not be established independent of one another, but should be considered in tandem to ensure that you get the sleep that you need. For example, if 5:30 a.m. is your ideal wake time and you know that you need at least seven hours of sleep in order to feel your best, then you should be in bed no later than 10:30 p.m. If on the other hand, you need eight hours of sleep in order to thrive, then your bedtime should be 9:30 p.m. If any of this will require you to significantly change your current sleep habits, consider adjusting your sleep and wake times by about fifteen minutes at a time, working with each new time for several days before adjusting by another fifteen minutes.

There are three important things to consider when establishing your sleep and wake times.

1. You need to get enough rest.
2. It is best to wake by (or even well before) 6 a.m.
3. You are likely to rest better if you retire by or before 10 p.m.

Many people find that the success of their daily routine depends largely on when they go to bed. This is because our bedtimes can either support the flow of the next day, or sabotage our ability to follow through on good intentions. Consistency and discipline around sleep and wake times can truly be an invaluable catalyst for positive change.

Set Aside a Time to Practice Your Fifteen Minutes of Morning Yoga

It's only fifteen minutes, but it's incredibly important to carve out a specific time each day for your yoga practice; otherwise, it may fall by the wayside. It is best to practice in the early morning before breakfast, but if that simply won't work for you, find another time of day when you can practice on an empty stomach.

Eat Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner at About the Same Time Each Day

Eating your meals at consistent times from one day to the next ensures that there is adequate space between meals and reinforces the predictability of a routine—both for your metabolism and for your nervous system. Classic Ayurvedic meal times are roughly 8 a.m. for breakfast, 12 p.m. for lunch, and 6 p.m. for dinner. This exact timing may not work with your schedule, and it's important that your meal times are compatible with your daily routine. That said, your body will benefit from eating lunch (your biggest meal) between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., when the digestive fire is strongest. Similarly, eating a light, early dinner will be the most supportive of your weight loss efforts.

Create an Exercise Schedule

The primary objective behind creating a schedule here is to make sure that your three days of exercise happen, but creating predictability with your new habits will have its own benefits. It may require some experimentation to determine what works best for you, but once you find a rhythm, stick with it and be persistent. Being consistently active will help you immensely.
Optional: Quiet Time for Pranayama, Meditation, or Prayer

Ayurveda recognizes the power of a number of subtle therapies. In many cases, attributing excess weight to improper diet and inadequate exercise alone is a gross oversimplification—ignoring important emotional, psychological, and even physical patterns underlying the imbalance. Emotional unrest is often a significant factor in poor eating habits, lethargy, depression, and anxiety. Undigested, unprocessed emotions quickly interfere with our physical health and our mental ability to authentically care for ourselves each day. A mindfulness practice can begin to neutralize the powerful hold that these patterns often have on our behavior.

We also know that long-term stress can lead to weight gain by overtaxing the endocrine system, and ultimately, by compromising our metabolism (think adrenals, thyroid, and pancreas). Spiritual practice can help to reset the nervous and endocrine systems—supporting improved metabolic function, and beginning to unwind the cycle of chronic stress that is frequently behind excess weight. In short, if stress, anxiety, and feeling overextended have become an integral part of your life, consider making a sixth commitment to some sort of daily mindfulness practice.

This does not have to be a lengthy endeavor. Even ten to fifteen minutes can have a profound impact on your state of mind. If you don’t have an existing practice, consider one of the following:

**Pranayama.** Working with the breath through the practice of *pranayama* is a powerful way to access and reset longstanding patterns in the energetic body. While there are several pranayamas suitable for weight loss, such as *Kapalabhati* (Skull Shining Breath) and *Bhastrika* (Bellows Breath), those that are soothing, slow, grounding, and calming, like *Nadi Shodhana* (Alternate Nostril Breathing) will be best for clearing stress, anxiety, and other unresolved emotions. If you prefer a guided practice, Dr. Claudia Welch’s *Prana CD* consists of four tracks—each working with the *prana maya kosha* (energetic body) in a different way. The final track is a beautiful, hands-free version of *Nadi Shodhana*, which is a particularly powerful tool for balancing hormones, supporting the endocrine system, and mitigating stress.

**Meditation.** Meditation can help us to re-pattern the brain on a very profound level—supporting our health in a myriad of ways. If you do not have an existing practice, Dr. Lad’s *Empty Bowl Meditation* is a simple yet powerful technique, suitable for anyone.
Herbal Support

In addition to the above commitments, consider supplementing with herbs and formulas that will support your efforts. The following herbs are particularly supportive of a robust digestive system and proper metabolic function overall.

**Triphala** is a traditional Ayurvedic formula comprised of three fruits that is balancing for *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. It is revered for its unique ability to gently cleanse and detoxify the digestive tract while replenishing, nourishing, and rejuvenating the tissues. About half an hour before bed, take two Triphala tablets with a glass of warm water. If you prefer, steep ½ teaspoon Triphala powder in a cup of freshly boiled water for ten minutes; cool and drink. Or try 30 drops of Triphala liquid extract in warm water before bed instead.

**Trim Support** tablets gently detoxify the body, supporting proper nutrition and metabolic function. Improperly digested food can create toxins that coat the digestive tract, inhibiting absorption and leading to the accumulation of fat in the tissues. Trim Support gently scrapes these toxins from the system while kindling the digestive fire, allowing for proper digestion, absorption, and assimilation.

Lastly, consider one of Banyan’s digestive formulas—*Vata Digest*, *Pitta Digest*, or *Kapha Digest* tablets. Each one helps to support optimal functioning throughout the digestive tract by balancing a specific set of digestive tendencies. The descriptions below are meant to help you determine which one would best serve you.

**Kapha Digest.** This is the tablet form of a classical Ayurvedic formula known as Trikatu. It contains the herbs *pippali*, *ginger*, and black pepper. This powerful combination is traditionally used to enkindle the digestive fire and to burn fat and natural toxins. Kapha Digest tablets support a healthy metabolism, allowing nutrients to be properly digested and assimilated, aid in weight management, and rejuvenate kapha, supporting healthy lungs and clear breathing. If you prefer a powder, use Trikatu powder. In either form, this formula is quite heating and is therefore not the best choice for those who have excess heat in the digestive tract (acid reflux, heartburn, loose stools), or high pitta in general.

**Pitta Digest.** This formula is a dynamic combination of herbs formulated to strengthen digestion without aggravating pitta. Excess pitta causes increased heat, sharpness, and oiliness in the digestive tract, which can aggravate and inflame the digestive fire, and cause discomfort. Pitta Digest tablets cool and soothe the digestive fire and the tissues of the GI tract, help to maintain healthy digestive acid levels and a healthy stomach lining, support a comfortable post-meal experience, and simultaneously support healthy, balanced digestion overall. If you prefer a powdered formula, Avipattikar powder is a classical Ayurvedic formula with similar indications and benefits.

**Vata Digest.** This is the tablet form of the classical Ayurvedic formula known as Hingvastak. The vata-pacifying combination of herbs supports the entire digestive process, from appetite to elimination. In excess, vata’s cold, light, and dry qualities tend to inhibit proper digestive functioning and can cause gas, bloating, or constipation. Vata Digest tablets contain herbs that are heating, grounding, and oily, effectively countering excess vata. This formula also kindles the digestive fire, stimulates a healthy appetite, calms excess movement of air, lubricates the intestines, helps to ensure that nutrients are properly absorbed and
assimilated, and supports regular, thorough, and healthy elimination. If you prefer a powder, use Hingvastak. In either form, this formula is somewhat heating and is therefore not the best choice for those who have excess heat in the digestive tract (acid reflux, heartburn, loose stools), or who have high pitta in general.

Optional Additions to Accelerate Your Progress

The following additions may offer powerful support, but taking on too much too fast will surely backfire. These additions are meant to give you room to grow, and to provide a few additional tools for those of you who may have some of the above recommendations in place already. For best results, add more only as your initial commitments become relatively effortless to maintain. And even then, prioritize the additions that truly inspire you—introducing them one at a time.

Consider a Cleanse

A dietary cleanse can offer a profound reset to the digestive system in much the same way that restarting a computer eradicates glitches and idiosyncrasies that can interfere with routine functioning. The basic premise of a cleanse is that our bodies are inherently intelligent. When we provide a break from the barrage of potentially harmful inputs, they immediately allocate the extra energy to repairing and rejuvenating the system for optimal performance. Cleanses can be as simple as a half or full day fast, a short juice cleanse, or a longer monodiet of something like kitchari. Ayurveda offers a number of effective cleansing techniques. If you are intrigued, please visit our Cleansing Department to see instructions for several different cleanses.

Expanded Morning Routine

If you read the classic texts of Ayurveda, you’ll notice that most of the practices in a traditional daily routine are done upon waking, and are completed before breakfast. This is an especially powerful time to engage in loving self-care, reflective practice, and the intention to heal or re-pattern the physiology for improved overall health—and it sets the tone for the entire day. An expanded morning routine may be especially beneficial when stress and busyness are at the root of your struggle with excess weight. If you are drawn to the idea of an Ayurvedic daily routine, please visit our Daily Routine Department, which explores this concept in depth, and offers personalized daily routine recommendations for different constitutions and imbalances. The following aspects of an Ayurvedic daily routine are particularly supportive of metabolic balance and weight loss.

Wake Between 3 a.m. and 6 a.m. The classics of Ayurveda recommend that we rise during the “ambrosial hours” of the morning, sometime between 3–6 a.m. This is a vata time of day. The atmosphere is infused with lightness and clarity, which helps us to awaken more easily, but it is also easier to connect with our deepest inner nature and consciousness at this time. Waking early helps to shake kapha’s characteristic heaviness from the mind and body, infuses us with the clarifying energy of dawn, and supports a healthy metabolic capacity.
Cleanse the Tongue. Tongue cleaning is considered an important element of daily oral hygiene, removing bacteria and toxins that have accumulated on the tongue overnight. Because this practice serves to stimulate and cleanse the digestive tract and the vital organs, it also supports the natural detoxification of the system at large, and can bolster digestive and metabolic function. Beyond that, scraping the tongue each morning allows us to take notice of the coating on our tongues and to begin to see how our dietary choices and lifestyle habits influence our overall health from one day to the next. Banyan’s stainless steel Tongue Cleaner is balancing for all three doshas.

Splash Cold Water on the Face and in the Eyes. Splashing cold water on the face and in the eyes helps to eradicate any residual heaviness, sluggishness, or lethargy that is present upon waking—whether mental or physical—and can help us to feel more vibrantly awake and motivated. The cold water also supports firm skin, and cools, soothes, and relaxes the eyes, which work very hard throughout the day and tend to accumulate a lot of heat.

Drink Warm Water. Drinking a glass of warm water cleanses and awakens the digestive tract, hydrates the tissues, and promotes peristalsis—which can encourage a bowel movement even when there is a tendency toward sluggishness or constipation. It is best to drink water only after the mouth and the tongue have been cleansed so as not to swallow the bacteria and toxins that have accumulated there overnight.

Eliminate. Ayurveda views morning elimination as a natural element of daily hygiene and health. Proper elimination is especially important when trying to lose weight. If you do not typically have a bowel movement first thing in the morning, some of the above practices (like cleaning the tongue and drinking warm water) may help you regulate this function in your body. Or consider taking Triphala to support healthy and regular elimination.

Cleanse or Lubricate the Nasal Passages. Excess kapha is especially prone to accumulating in the respiratory passages, and often causes excess mucus, congestion, or blockage—which can hinder us physically, and dampen our mental clarity. The practices of Nasya and Nasal Rinse support both the nasal passages and the mind. These therapies have very different energies and are best practiced separately. It may be that one of the two appeals more to you. Or if you find that you like them both, you can alternate by day, by season, or by symptom, according to what works best for your body.

- **Nasya**
  Nasya is the practice of applying an herbalized oil to the nasal passages to soothe these delicate tissues, promote unobstructed breathing, relieve accumulated stress, and support mental clarity. This practice is also said to improve the quality of the voice and to strengthen vision. Nasya should not be performed by pregnant women or menstruation. If this practice is new to you, please watch our short instructional video on How To Do Nasya.

- **Nasal Rinse**
  Nasal Rinse, or Neti, is the practice of pouring warm salt water through the nasal passages. It moistens the mucus membranes and cleanses the nasal passages of dust, dirt, pollen, and excess mucus. If you find that your nasal passages feel dry afterwards, you can use your pinky finger to lubricate the nostrils with a bit of Sesame Oil or Ghee when you’re finished, or at another time of day. If this practice is new to you, please watch our short instructional video on Using a Nasal Rinse Cup.
Do Abhyanga (Ayurvedic Self-Massage). This ancient practice of self-massage with oil can be life-changing when we are feeling especially stressed, busy, scattered or overextended. It is no coincidence that the Sanskrit word for oil, sneha, also means love. Abhyanga benefits both the physical body and the more subtle realms of consciousness. It calms the nervous system, lubricates and rejuvenates the tissues, promotes healthy circulation throughout the body, and creates an insulating and protective barrier around the Self—shielding us from the onslaught of disruptive energies that we inevitably encounter every day.

In the morning, before a shower or bath, massage about ¼ cup of warm Kapha Massage Oil or Organic Sesame Oil into the skin. You may also use Trim Balm on specific areas of the body. For more detailed instructions and a helpful video explaining how to practice abhyanga, please explore our resource on Ayurvedic Self-Massage. Pay careful attention to the section outlining kapha-pacifying abhyanga.

Practice Udvartana. This practice of massaging the body with a powder (like chickpea flour), stimulates and moves the lymph, balances kapha, further encourages circulation, liquefies fat, and helps to remove excess oil from the skin following abhyanga. A powder can be used instead of, or in conjunction with, traditional oil massage. Try chickpea flour, rice flour, or calamus powder.

The above practices can be done daily, or just occasionally. Either way, they will support both weight loss and overall wellness.

By Way of Encouragement

Keep in mind that this program is a general introduction to the Ayurvedic approach to weight loss. Any specific health concerns should be taken into consideration and discussed with your health care provider as you implement these recommendations. Regardless of your circumstances, achieving your ideal weight may require some commitment, discipline, and time. But don't lose sight of what the journey itself has to offer. Ayurveda is a Sanskrit word that literally means “knowledge of life,” and the Ayurvedic tradition is about improving overall wellness and vitality—reclaiming optimal health by making sustainable changes that support our entire lives. Each step along the way is a step toward a richer, more vibrant experience of being. So while Ayurveda can certainly support us in achieving reasonable weight loss goals, it also has the capacity to dramatically improve the trajectory of our lives moving forward. Relish in that potential. If you find yourself overly focused on your destination, take a step back and ask yourself what positive outcomes have emerged already? Stop, breathe, and enjoy the ride. Here's wishing you an immensely rewarding journey on the path of Ayurveda.
References


3 Ibid..


5 Ibid.


9 Welch, Dinacharya, 9.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid, 13.
An Ayurvedic Approach to Gaining Weight

Are you tired of hearing the latest pitch on how to lose weight when all you really want to do is gain a few pounds? The reality is that there is a ton of information out there about how to lose weight, and far less available on how to gain it—especially in a healthy, balanced way. In Ayurveda, your optimal weight is determined less by a number on a scale, and more by your constitution. A lighter constitution will naturally have a lower ideal body weight than someone of a similar height with a denser constitution. That being said, when it is appropriate, Ayurveda offers a number of effective strategies for building and nourishing the body that encourage a balanced approach to gaining weight.

It doesn’t matter how long you’ve struggled with being underweight or if you are just looking to reset after an unusual period of stress or depletion. The Ayurvedic approach is simple, holistic, healthy, and effective. More importantly, it looks beyond the symptom of being underweight to address the deeper imbalances that are driving the condition. Therefore, even if your system has been depleted for some time, the process will support you in reclaiming a vibrant sense of health and well-being—physically, mentally, and emotionally. This approach is not about packing on the pounds as quickly as possible, and it will not require you to eat vast quantities of unhealthy foods. Instead, it will teach you how to eat a deeply nourishing diet while balancing agni (the digestive fire) in order to ensure that your body can actually absorb the nutrition you are eating. It also serves to address the more subtle influences (like stress and emotional discord) that so often interfere with our ability to receive nourishment. In fact, you may find the process enriching your life in ways that no simple building “diet” ever could.
Softening Self-Criticism, Cultivating Discernment

Being underweight can be a lonely and isolating experience; there is so much cultural focus on being thin, trim, and lean, that many people simply can’t understand why anyone would want to gain weight. But having a very light constitution can dictate a consistent struggle with maintaining a healthy bodyweight. In these cases, it is often quite appropriate to focus on building the physical body. That being said, it is incredibly important to understand your constitution and to be honest about how it naturally influences your physique. You can take our Prakriti Quiz to help you determine your constitution and our Vikriti Quiz to identify your current state of balance. This process can help to illuminate both your natural, healthy tendencies, as well as any imbalances that may be interfering with optimal health. You can also peruse our resource, Vata, Pitta, Kapha, and You, which explores the many ways that the doshas inform our lives in both healthy and imbalanced ways.

Whatever your constitution, we suggest that you begin this journey with a sincere look at your personal motivations. Is your desire to gain weight due to an underlying dissatisfaction with your body’s natural expression of optimal health? Or are you truly undernourished and underweight? Cultivating this level of discernment is important, though certainly not always easy. Making the distinction can be especially difficult for men, who are generally taught that a masculine physique should embody a certain strength and bulk. Still, the same dynamics of discontent can be at play in anyone. If you are aware that you reject or judge your physical nature in some way (no matter how subtle), cultivating appreciation for your body as it is may prove essential to your healing process. Softening any self-criticism can also help to support more realistic goals and expectations as you begin to build and nourish your body.

Ayurveda on Being Underweight

One of the foundational principles of the Ayurvedic tradition is that like increases like and that opposites balance. Typically, excessive weight loss and the condition of being underweight are vata disorders. Vata is light, dry, rough, mobile, subtle, and clear—all qualities that are considered to be reducing, or lightening in nature (langhana, in Sanskrit). Appropriate treatment strategies therefore emphasize the building and nourishing qualities that best pacify vata. This can be accomplished by introducing foods, experiences, and herbs that are heavy, oily, smooth, stabilizing, gross, and substantive. But if the body’s ability to receive nourishment is compromised in any way, this strategy alone will be inadequate. Ayurveda therefore simultaneously focuses on balancing agni so that the deep tissues can properly assimilate the nourishment that is being introduced. Any hyperactivity in the metabolic pathways is carefully slowed while the body’s ability to absorb nutrition is recalibrated. The following strategies work on all of these levels to build the physical body in a balanced way. However, because this is a general introduction to building the body, any personal health concerns should still be taken into consideration and discussed with your health care provider.
Quiet the Mind, Calm the Nervous System

We will begin with a number of subtle therapies intended to settle the mind and the nervous system, and it is no coincidence that our discussion begins with these more subtle realms of consciousness. As we have seen, being underweight is a vata disorder—involving vata’s light, dry, rough, mobile, subtle, and clear qualities. An excess of these qualities can leave the mind and the energetic pathways extremely sensitive to stimulus, even hyper-vigilant. When the system is constantly on high-alert, it becomes very difficult to successfully ground and nourish the body. On the other hand, when we foster a sense of calm, stability, safety, and rejuvenation in the mind body organism, we can encourage the body to be more receptive to deep nourishment. Not only do the following practices help to ease stress, quell anxiety, and unwind the nervous system, they can also help to reframe our relationship with the day-to-day challenges that inevitably arise. And because they tend to address systemic patterns of depletion, these practices can be even more essential to our success than any dietary adjustments we might make.

Establish a Daily Routine

Ayurveda recommends a daily routine for everyone, but it is particularly important when we are trying to balance excess vata and redirect long-standing patterns of depletion. Our physiology is very much adapted to—and supported by—some sense of regularity. Think about the natural world and how prevalent routines are; most plants and animals are profoundly attuned to the cycles of day and night, the seasons, and other cyclical patterns that direct the broader community of life. By contrast, the human experience seems increasingly disconnected from these natural rhythms. Adopting even a modest sense of routine gives our nervous systems a number of comforting and reassuring reference points throughout each day. These touchstones send a resounding message to the deep tissues of the body that all is well, that we can be at ease. Over time, a context of predictability and safety allows the nervous system to relax, slows the consumption of biological resources, and improves the body's ability to receive nourishment.

If the idea of a daily routine is new to you, begin with a commitment to wake up, eat your meals, and go to bed at consistent times each day. If at all possible, consider maintaining a consistent work or activity schedule as well. To create a more elaborate routine or to expand on one you already have, please visit our Daily Routine Department, which explores this concept in depth, and offers personalized recommendations for different constitutions and imbalances. If being underweight is one of your primary concerns, then a Vata-Pacifying Daily Routine will likely be the most supportive for you.

Practice Fifteen Minutes of Pranayama Daily

Prana (the vital breath) is the subtle essence of life force that animates each of us. It is carried on and stimulated by the breath, and it permeates every cell and tissue throughout the body. Imbibing prana helps to restore fluidity and vitality to the subtle energy channels of the body, while digesting and eliminating stagnation and ama (toxins). One of the best ways to bathe our tissues in fresh prana is to practice pranayama (yogic breathing exercises). In particular, the practice of Nadi Shodhana (Alternate Nostril Breathing) is deeply calming to vata,
soothing to the nervous system as a whole, and serves to quiet stress and tension throughout the system. This pranayama can therefore help to preserve vital resources, redirect them to the deep tissues of the body, and encourage an improved mental disposition in the face of everyday stressors. Just fifteen minutes each day can be transformative.

Prioritize Proper Rest

Sleep is critically important to our overall health, but it is particularly crucial when we are trying to build the body. Sleep’s heavy, stabilizing nature helps to ground the excess lightness and activity that tends to cause excess weight loss. In fact, a generous amount of rest is an important antidote to the reducing, lightening qualities that so often underlie depleting patterns in the body. Ironically, an excess of these same qualities often disturbs sleep, causing us to get even less sleep than we require—not more.

If sleep is a challenge area for you, or if you feel that your sleep cycle could use some support, you might be interested in our health guide, An Ayurvedic Guide to Balanced Sleep. Otherwise, prioritize getting adequate rest—maybe even a little extra. You may also find it helpful to build some routine into your sleep cycle. For instance, it can be very helpful to go to bed and get up at about the same times each day, aiming to sleep for a minimum of eight hours each night.

Manage Stress

Stress depletes the nourishment available to our tissues by reallocating vital resources in order to ensure our immediate survival. Excess stress can therefore be a causative factor in being underweight. Reducing our exposure to stressful situations can certainly help, but addressing our response to them is a far more effective means of affecting change. Our Ayurvedic Guide to Stress Management explores the Ayurvedic perspective on stress and offers a number of useful tools to support you in this process.

Nourish the Tissues through Diet

While subtle therapies can be incredibly supportive of building the body, diet matters, too. In Ayurveda, when and how we eat are just as important as what we eat. Together, the following dietary adjustments will encourage proper digestion, absorption, and assimilation of the foods that you eat.

Eat Three Satisfying Meals Daily

Creating predictability and routine around our meals ensures that the body is fed regularly, and promotes balance on more systemic levels as well. We have seen that our systems are very supported by routine, but they are also highly provoked by a lack of routine. In modern life, we often eat with extreme irregularity, eat on the run, or skip meals altogether in order to accommodate whatever else might be going on in our lives. These habits can be extremely vata-provoking, destabilizing, and often reinforce the patterns of depletion that tend to
cause undernourishment. Embracing a predictable meal schedule safeguards against the consequences of such irregularity.

As a starting place, commit to eating three solid meals at consistent times each day, and plan ahead as much as possible to ensure that you can follow through. Even better, set aside twenty to thirty minutes to stop what you are doing and receive each meal. Try not to multitask or eat while distracted. It is best to offer your full attention to your meal and to focus on connecting with—and being nourished—by your food. Notice your body's response to being fed. Envision your digestive fire transforming your food into perfectly refined nutrition, and visualize your circulatory system delivering this vital energy to every cell and tissue throughout your body. Finally, when you are finished eating, take a couple of deep, full breaths, allowing yourself to register satisfaction before moving on to your next activity.

**Eat a Vata-Pacifying Diet**

A vata-pacifying diet emphasizes the qualities that most effectively support building; it consists of foods that are generally grounding, warm, oily, smooth, stabilizing, and substantive. The following suggestions will introduce you to the most important elements of this type of diet. For a deeper understanding, you may enjoy our resource on following a vata-pacifying diet as well as our list of vata-pacifying foods, which highlights the foods to favor and avoid in order to support a return to balance.

**Ingest Generous Amounts of High-Quality Oils**

Because it is heavy, oily, smooth, stabilizing, and substantive, oil is one of the best remedies for an excess of the reducing, lightening qualities (and for excess vata in general). But quality oil also provides the body with an important source of lipids. In fact, depleted fat reserves can be the result of insufficient oil in the diet. In general, high-quality, organic oils are best, and most varieties of oil will be beneficial. In particular, favor Sesame Oil, Ghee, olive oil, and Sunflower Oil while limiting your intake of corn, flax, and soy oils (which are lighter, drier, and can further provoke vata).

**Focus on Foods that Are Nourishing and Building**

You will want to orient your diet around healthy, whole foods that are deeply nutritious. Choose foods that are warm, moist, oily, grounding, nourishing, smooth, and stabilizing, over foods that are cold, dry, light, or rough. Favor the sweet, sour, and salty tastes over the pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes. Build your meals around staple foods that naturally taste sweet, such as fruits, grains, root vegetables, milk, ghee, fresh yogurt, eggs, nuts, seeds, and vata-pacifying meats (refer to our list of vata-pacifying foods for more specifics). Nourishing and rejuvenating dishes such as Sweet Potato Halva and Urad Dal are fantastic, as are substantive soups and stews. You can also include grounding, nutritive snacks in between meals. For instance, fill a jar with pitted medjool dates, pour warm Ghee over them and let the ghee solidify. Eat one or two of these ghee dates in the early morning or any time between meals for a rejuvenative boost of energy. Other supportive snacks include soaked and peeled almonds, soaked cashews, Date Shakes, and Dream Date Balls. Experiment with what works for you and keep snacks handy so that you can reach for quality nourishment rather than a quick fix of empty energy (i.e., sugar or junk food).
Follow Intelligent Cravings

When the body is depleted, cravings for heavy, building foods like meat and cheese are often the body's way of asking for exactly what it needs. If you are craving these and other healthy, building foods or the sweet, sour, and salty tastes, trust your cravings and indulge them—in moderation, of course. If on the other hand, you are craving pungent, bitter, or astringent foods, it is likely that an imbalance is disturbing your body's natural intelligence. In general, indulging cravings for lighter, drier foods will not be particularly supportive of your efforts to build the body.

Stay Hydrated

Just as with oil, insufficient hydration can dry up and deplete the adipose tissue (fat). On the other hand, drinking plenty of fluids—preferably warm and caffeine-free—will help to maintain moisture and hydration throughout the system. Staying hydrated allows the metabolic pathways to function more efficiently and can also improve nutrient absorption. This is true both within the digestive tract and throughout the system at the cellular level. One of the best times to hydrate is first thing in the morning. Try starting your day with 1–4 cups of warm water on an empty stomach. This practice flushes natural toxins released during the sleep cycle, hydrates the tissues, awakens the digestive capacity, and supports healthy elimination. It is a wonderful way to start the day, even after you regain your optimal body weight. Throughout the rest of your day, be mindful of drinking plenty of warm water, herbal teas, and other hydrating fluids—primarily between meals, if possible.

Begin to Pay Attention to Proper Food Combining

According to Ayurveda, some foods digest well together while others do not. Combining foods with radically different energies can overwhelm the digestive fire and can cause indigestion, fermentation, gas, bloating, and the creation of toxins. On the other hand, careful food combining can dramatically improve the quality of digestion, support the body in receiving a deeper level of nourishment, and positively impact our overall health. In any case, it is usually best to embrace this idea slowly and to make changes gradually—at a pace that feels completely manageable to you. Often, the best starting place is simply to notice improper food combinations that show up regularly in your diet and to begin to take note of how they affect you. If you would like more information (or support refining your current practices), please visit our resource on Ayurvedic Food Combining.

Prioritize Proper Exercise

Exercise naturally tends to increase the mobile, light qualities of vata. Done improperly, exercise can be very physically depleting and can contribute to an inappropriate loss of fat. However, the right kind of exercise can help to release accumulated tension, improve circulation, kindle agni, support proper digestion and elimination, promote relaxation in the body, and encourage sound sleep—all of which support physical nourishment. Ayurveda offers the unique perspective that, for each of us, the appropriate type, duration, and intensity of exercise depends largely on who we are as individuals. To build the body, follow a vata-pacifying exercise routine that includes gently-paced and grounding activities like tai chi, walking, mellow hiking, or gentle cycling. You can also practice Vata-Pacifying Yoga or a handful of slow and purposeful Sun Salutations (Surya Namaskar).
The frequency of your activities is also important. When balancing excess vata, it is generally a good idea to have a recovery day in between days of exercise, meaning that three or four days of exercise per week is usually sufficient. If you are an avid athlete, try cutting back for a while and notice how your body responds. If you do not exercise much right now, three days per week is likely an appropriate starting place, and remember that something as simple as a twenty-minute walk can do wonders for the entire system—body, mind, and spirit.

Ayurvedic Herbs that Support Deep Nourishment

There are a number of herbs in the Ayurvedic tradition that support proper digestion, absorption, and assimilation of nutrients. These herbs often have an affinity for specific tissues and systems in the body such that each of them supports the process of building and nourishing the body in its own way.

Building Rejuvenatives

Ashwagandha is an impressive *rasayana* (rejuvenative). It offers deep nourishment to the tissues, supports the proper functioning of the adrenals, bolsters the immune system, and helps to build *ojas*. It is also a highly regarded adaptogen that helps the body to resist stress—preserving vital energy during the day and encouraging sound sleep at night. *Ashwagandha tablets, liquid extract, and powder* allow you to choose the form that is most appropriate for you.
**Shatavari** is a nourishing tonic for both men and women. Its unctuous, grounding, and cooling, qualities make it a powerful rasayana (rejuvenative). It helps to strengthen and nourish the tissues while supporting both physical and mental digestion. Shatavari is also very sattvic (pure and harmonious) in nature, so it supports a calm mind and helps to promote love and devotion in our lives. **Shatavari tablets, liquid extract, and powder** allow you to choose the form that is most appropriate for you.

**Chyavanprash** is a traditional Ayurvedic herbal jam made in a base of amalaki fruit. This balancing formula is deeply rejuvenating, but it also kindles agni, helps to buffer the body against stress, and bolsters the immune system. A daily dose of this nutritive jam can support energy, vitality, and overall well-being. Take 1–2 teaspoons daily, or use as directed by your health practitioner.

**Triphala** is revered for its unique ability to gently cleanse and detoxify the digestive tract, while replenishing, nourishing, and rejuvenating the tissues. It encourages balanced agni throughout the system, helps to eliminate ama, and supports ojas. About half an hour before bed, take two **Triphala tablets** with a glass of warm water. If you prefer, steep ½–1 teaspoon **Triphala powder** in 1 cup of freshly boiled water for ten minutes; cool and drink. Or try 30 drops of **Triphala liquid extract** in warm water before bed.

**Balancing the Doshas**

Herbs and formulas that specifically balance the doshas can be instrumental in correcting the underlying cause of your weight imbalances. If you are unsure of which doshas are primarily behind your struggle with maintaining or gaining weight, our **Prakriti Quiz** can give you a better sense for the predominant doshas in your constitution, our **Vikriti Quiz** can highlight any current imbalances, and our resource, **Vata, Pitta, Kapha, and You**, can help to illustrate how the doshas influence our experiences in both healthy and detrimental ways.

**Pacifying Vata**

If your struggle with being underweight is primarily due to excess vata, consider taking **Healthy Vata tablets** to balance vata systemically and **Vata Digest tablets** to more specifically support vata in the digestive tract. If you prefer a powder, **Hingvastak** is the powdered form of the Vata Digest formula; it can be taken alone or sprinkled on your food like pepper.

**Haritaki tablets** can be taken instead of triphala for anyone with excess vata in the digestive tract. Haritaki is one of the three herbs in triphala; it is very lubricating, moisturizing and particularly balancing to vata. It is a potent rejuvenative that nourishes the tissues, gently removes natural toxins, supports the colon, and builds ojas. Take one or two tablets, once or twice daily, or as directed by your health practitioner. If you prefer, haritaki is also available as a **powder**.

**Pacifying Pitta**

Excess pitta can cause the digestive fire to be exceedingly hot, hindering the absorption of nutrients and inhibiting the process of building the body. If your struggle with being underweight is primarily due to excess pitta, consider taking **Healthy Pitta tablets** to balance pitta systemically and **Pitta Digest tablets** to more specifically support
pitta in the digestive tract. If you prefer a powder, *Avipattikar powder* is a formula with very similar indications and benefits as Pitta Digest.

Amalaki tablets can be taken instead of triphala for anyone with excess heat in the digestive tract. Amalaki is another one of the three herbs in triphala and it is particularly balancing for pitta. Amalaki provides a highly concentrated source of antioxidants and is a potent rejuvenative that nourishes the tissues, gently removes natural toxins, and supports ojas. Take one to two tablets, once or twice daily, or as directed by your health practitioner. If you prefer, amalaki is also available as a powder and a liquid extract.

**Complementary Herbs**

If there are specific areas of your life—like stress, sleep, or frequent travel—that are especially depleting for you, you might consider one of these:

*Stress Ease tablets* support the resiliency and tone of the neuromuscular system, helping the body to better cope with stress and providing a sustained source of natural energy. This herbal formula is naturally rejuvenating and therefore may also benefit anyone prone to fatigue, weakness, or a sense of overwhelm. Take one to two tablets, once or twice daily, or as directed by your health practitioner.

*I Sleep Soundly tablets* contain natural muscle relaxants to help release accumulated tension from the neuromuscular system and encourage sound sleep. This formula contains rejuvenative herbs (like ashwagandha) that serve to restore vitality throughout the body and mind. It also has a subtle, soothing effect on the mind as a whole, which helps to ease mental restlessness. Remember, sound sleep will support the building process. Take one to two tablets about a half hour before going to bed, or as directed by your health practitioner.

*I Travel Well liquid extract* was formulated to support the body through periods of travel, when our schedules are generally hectic and irregular, our sleep may be disrupted, healthy meal choices are often few and far between, and our bodies are trying to cope with rapid time zone changes. Travel can be very physically depleting, so if you do it often, it could be a factor in your struggle to maintain a healthy body weight. This liquid extract bolsters the body’s natural adaptive mechanisms to support the digestive, immune, respiratory, and nervous systems while eliminating natural toxins and supporting the body in reestablishing healthy sleep patterns. Take 30 drops in water or juice one to three times daily, or as directed by your health practitioner.

**Optional Additions**

The following additions may offer powerful support, but taking on too much too fast will surely backfire. These additions are meant to give you room to grow, and to provide a few additional tools for those of you who may already have some of the above recommendations in place. For best results, add more only as your initial commitments become relatively effortless to maintain. And even then, prioritize the additions that truly inspire you—introducing them one at a time.
Ayurvedic Self-Massage with Oil

It is no coincidence that the Sanskrit word for oil, sneha, also means love. Applying oil to the body is a profoundly rejuvenating practice of loving self-care that benefits both the physical body and the more subtle realms of consciousness.

Abhyanga (the ancient practice of full-bodied oil massage) calms the nervous system, lubricates and rejuvenates the tissues, and promotes healthy circulation throughout the body. In addition, the oil itself forms a protective sheath around the body—shielding us from the onslaught of disruptive energies that we inevitably encounter every day. This practice can be life-changing when we are feeling especially stressed, busy, scattered, overextended, or under-nourished. In the morning, before a shower or bath, massage about ¼–½ cup of warm, organic oil into the skin. For further instructions on this rejuvenating technique, and for support choosing an appropriate oil, please see our resource on Ayurvedic Self-Massage. Pay careful attention to the section outlining vata-pacifying abhyanga, as it will be the most supportive of building the body.

Massaging your feet and scalp with warm oil before bed can serve as a simpler alternative, or a regular supplement to the full-bodied practice of abhyanga. Before bed, simply apply some warm Sleep Easy Oil to your feet, and, if you like, to your scalp as well. This practice grounds the energy, soothes the nervous system, reduces stress, quiets the mind, and promotes sound sleep. Remember that sleep is one of the body’s most essential means of building and rejuvenation. Be sure to wear some old socks to bed to protect your sheets. (If you are oiling your scalp, cover your pillow with an old towel.)

Meditation

Meditation can be a potent addition to anyone’s daily routine. It is especially supportive of building the body if stress, anxiety, and other mental and emotional influences are involved in your struggle with maintaining a healthy body weight. Because meditation helps us to re-pattern the mind, it tends to support us on a very fundamental level—often reaching well beyond the symptoms we are trying to address. If you do not have an existing practice, Dr. Lad’s Empty Bowl Meditation is a simple yet powerful technique, suitable for anyone.

Consider a Cleanse

A dietary cleanse can help to reset to the digestive system in much the same way that restarting a computer eradicates glitches and idiosyncrasies that interfere with routine functioning. The basic premise of a cleanse is that our bodies are inherently intelligent. When we provide a break from the barrage of potentially harmful inputs, they immediately allocate the extra energy to cleaning house—repairing and rejuvenating the system for optimal performance. That said, cleanses tend to be mildly to intensely depleting. Therefore, for those of us who are underweight, it is important to favor a more substantive cleanse over an all-out fast or juice cleanse. We also highly recommend that you seek the support of a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner to minimize the potential depletion of a cleansing program. If you are intrigued, please visit our Cleansing Department to access instructions for several different types of cleanses—from simple half- or full-day digestive resets to longer monodiets of kitchari.
Consider a Period of Rejuvenation

Ayurveda has a rich tradition of rasayana, otherwise known as a period of rejuvenation. In essence, the idea is to nourish yourself deeply, on all levels, for a designated period of time. This rejuvenation process allows the body to repair, regenerate, and revitalize all of the organs, tissues, and systems, and benefits the whole of who we are—body, mind, and spirit. Ayurvedic rejuvenation therapies can include dietary changes, specific lifestyle choices, the use of rejuvenative herbs, or a combination of all three. Rasayana is about building and nourishing the entire organism, so it is very much in line with the desire to build the physical body, and people generally find the process soothing, sweet, grounding, and enjoyable. If you would like to learn more about the practice of rasayana, please see our Rejuvenation Department, which covers specific therapies for different constitutions and imbalances.

Embrace Your Unique Path

Ayurveda is a Sanskrit word that literally means “knowledge of life,” and the entire tradition is about improving overall wellness and vitality—reclaiming optimal health by making sustainable changes that support every aspect of our lives. As such, each step along the way is a step toward a richer, more vibrant experience of being. So while Ayurveda can certainly support us in achieving an optimal body weight, it also has the capacity to dramatically improve the trajectory of our lives moving forward. And remember, an Ayurvedic lifestyle serves us best when it is undertaken gradually—at a sustainable pace—over time. With this in mind, take a deep breath and move into your process with the intention to make slow, manageable changes that you can realistically maintain. Be gentle with yourself. Honor your unique strengths and challenge areas. Enlist support where you need it. And most importantly, move at your own pace. If you find yourself overly focused on your destination, take a step back and ask yourself what positive outcomes have emerged already? Stop, breathe, and enjoy the ride. Here’s wishing you an immensely rewarding journey on the path of Ayurveda.

References

