

# *Ayurvedic Perspective on Skin Problems*

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### *What is Ayurveda?*

Ayurveda is an ancient philosophy based on a deep understanding of eternal truths about the human body, mind and spirit. The traditional healing system of India, Ayurveda is thoroughly comprehensive; it embraces medical science, philosophy, psychology, spiritual teachings as well as astrology and astronomy. It is based on the accumulated knowledge and understanding of millennia and yet it is very up to date, offering practical and effective treatment for many modern disorders such as asthma, IBS, anxiety as well as skin disease.

The name Ayurveda derives from two Sanskrit words: *ayur* meaning life and *veda* meaning knowledge or science; it provides us with insight and knowledge of how to live. According to Ayurvedic philosophy, the fundamental purpose of life is *moksha*, true inner knowledge and liberation from suffering, to enable us to reach our full potential. So much more than a system of medicine, Ayurveda offers us a complete way of life that aims to enhance health and wellbeing and increase longevity through a union of physical, emotional and spiritual balance as a prerequisite for attaining *moksha* or self realisation.





At the heart of Ayurveda lies the understanding that everything is one, that everything exists in relation not in isolation. Body effects mind and vice versa, feelings and thought processes have physical effects just as disorders of the body affect our psychological state. *Moksha* / enlightenment can be attained by those who enjoy good physical and mental health, and this is the goal of Ayurveda.

Ayurveda offers us a constitutional approach to understanding the skin and addressing the underlying causes of the many skin problems that can arise. It enables us to have a deeper understanding of the skin in relation to ourselves from a wider perspective, physically, emotionally, mentally and perhaps spiritually. The skin paints a picture of our internal state and Ayurvedic skin care involves not only the application of remedies topically, but also internal treatment to help restore balance inside and out.



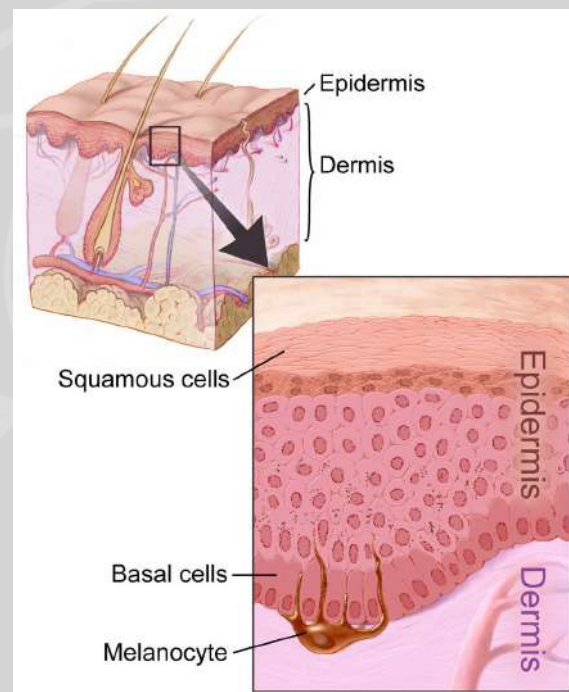
### *Let's talk about the skin...*

The skin is wonderfully designed to fulfil many different functions. It protects the body against infection, pollution, extremes of temperate and climate, sunlight and physical injury. Antiseptic substances are secreted by the skin to ward off infection, and beneficial bacteria on the skin act as a back up in defence, inhibiting the growth of unfriendly microorganisms that could upset the balance of the skin and cause problems.

The skin is also involved in our temperature regulation. When the weather is cold, blood vessels in the skin constrict to keep the heat inside the body and when it is hot, blood vessels dilate to bring blood to the surface allowing the body to loose heat and maintain its optimum temperature.

With its several million sweat glands, the skin is also a major organ of excretion. Sweat contains water, mineral salts, nitrogenous wastes and other toxins and is similar in content to urine. Most adults excrete about one pint (600 mls) of fluid through the skin every day. When exercising or in hot weather, this can increase by ten times or more.

Through its production of sweat, the skin plays a vital role in the maintenance of homoeostasis by regulating the water and electrolyte balance in the body and supporting the work of the kidneys. Sweat also forms a protective acid mantle which acts to inhibit the growth of harmful microorganisms. If we don't regularly take sufficient exercise to produce a sweat, this can increase the burden on other eliminative pathways - the lungs, bowels and kidneys.





It is important to the health and balance of the skin that its acid mantle is not disturbed by over-use of creams, moisturisers, deodorants, perfumes and cosmetics that contain substances that could be harmful, such as mineral oils, petroleum, nitrates, ammonia, artificial colours and fragrances. Biological washing powders can also cause problems.

As a sense organ, the skin is richly supplied with nerve endings which carry messages to the brain about the environment, heat or cold, pleasure or pain. It is the point of contact between our inner and outer worlds, so it is hardly surprising that many skin problems arise not only from physical abuse of the skin, but also from emotional disharmony. The skin also relays messages from inside out and reflects how we feel physically and emotionally. The pale pinched face of an anxious person, the rosy lustre of someone happy and carefree, the glow on the cheeks of a healthy person and the sallow complexion of someone sick, can speak volumes about a patient before the consultation formerly begins.



When the function of the skin becomes disturbed, it can manifest in a variety of different skin problems. These can reflect a person's reaction both to their outer environment and their inner mento-emotional state. Rashes and eczema for instance, may be related to contact with outside allergens, microorganisms, chemicals, sunlight, pollutants and so on, or they may be related to tension, anxiety, anger, grief or fear.

The skin's ability to deal with potential irritants depends to some extent on the nutrients brought to the skin by the underlying blood vessels and ultimately from the digestive tract. A healthy skin does not develop a fungal infection, for example, because its local immune mechanisms are able to inhibit fungal growth. Impaired skin function will prevent local defence mechanisms from resolving the infection without treatment.

Poor digestion and absorption can lead to deficiencies of minerals, vitamins, essential fatty acids and trace elements and impair the skin's natural defences, predisposing us to a variety of skin disorders. The vibrancy of the skin not only depends on blood-flow bringing nutrients to the skin, but also carrying away the waste products of metabolism. Toxins accumulating in the gut from poor digestion and eating the wrong foods, are taken into the bloodstream and carried to the skin, meaning that poor circulation or a state of toxicity of the blood can contribute significantly to skin problems.

### *The Principles of Ayurveda*

Before discussing Ayurvedic treatment for skin problems, it is appropriate to explain some of the principles of Ayurveda to you. For those who already have a comprehensive understanding of these, you may want to jump straight to the treatment section on page 28.



### *The Doshas.*

Each of us is born with our own unique constitution which determines the kind of skin we have and any problems we may be prone to. Our constitution is determined by the balance within us of three primary life forces or humours derived from the five elements known as *doshas*, namely *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*.



Ether and air create the air principle, *vata*

Fire and water yield the fire principle, *pitta*

Earth and water produce the water principle, *kapha*

To be alive and well, we need all five elements and all three *doshas*, though we generally have a predominance of one or two of them. The main *dosha*, or *doshas* in our constitution determine our physique, our mental and emotional tendencies and our predisposition to certain health problems.

Our constitution (*prakruti*) is largely determined when we are conceived and remains unaltered throughout our lives. It depends on our parents' constitution, the balance of their *doshas* and their mental and emotional state at the time of conception, and of course *karma*. When our *doshas* are in balance, that is they remain in the proportions we were born with, they maintain our health and well-being and when unbalanced we become unwell.







### *Vata*

*Vata*, a combination of ether and air, is the principle of movement. The word *vata* means wind, from the Sanskrit root “*va*” to blow, direct, move or command. *Vata* is our life force (*prana*), derived primarily from the breath. It is the energising force for everything in body and mind, and this is reflected in the circulation of blood and lymph and every impulse of the nervous system. It is the motivating force behind the other 2 *doshas*, which are incapable of movement without it. For this reason, disturbances of *vata*

tend to have more far reaching implications than those of the other 2 *doshas* and often affect the mind as well as the entire body.

**The qualities of *vata* are dry, cold, light, irregular, sharp, hard, mobile, subtle, rough and clear.**

In the body, *vata* controls all movement: the blinking of the eyes, pulsations of the heart, movement of air in and out of the lungs, working of the nervous system, movements involved with digestion and metabolism, elimination of wastes, circulation of blood and lymph, movement of nutrients into and wastes out of cells, and the homoeostasis (balance) of the whole body. Mentally and emotionally, *vata* governs the movement of ideas in the mind, inspiration, creativity, spiritual aspiration, mental adaptability, comprehension, fear and anxiety.



*Vata* is air contained in space (ether). It is found in the empty spaces in the body, like the heart, thorax, abdomen, pelvis, pores of the bones, bone marrow, brain, the bladder, and subtle channels of the nervous system. The colon is the site where *vata* accumulates. The thighs and hips are the main site of musculo-skeletal movement in the body which *vata* is responsible for. The ears and skin, the organs of hearing and touch, are governed by *vata*. *Vata* is excreted from the body via gas and muscular or nervous energy.



Like the wind, *vata* predominant people are changeable and irregularity will feature strongly in their physical and emotional make-up. They can be very tall or very short, with a narrow or irregular frame and slight build. They may have crooked teeth, or irregular eyes, perhaps one being larger than the other, or their nose may not be straight. Their weight can change quickly, and when unhappy or stressed they can lose weight easily. Some find it impossible to put on weight while others become overweight from stress, digestive problems and eating badly. They tend to have prominent bones and joints that often crack.

Their appetite is variable, sometimes they are ravenous, other times they have no appetite at all. As a result, they tend to eat irregularly, often living on snacks eaten on the hop. They find it hard to sit still and may get up and down from the meal table. However, if they do not eat regularly they can become hypoglycaemic and feel faint or weak and then more anxious.







*Vata* predominant people tend to feel the cold and may have poor circulation, and any symptoms they have tend to be worse in cold weather. They love warmth and sunshine. Because they are so active and use up so much energy, *vata* people tend to become dried out. They can get dry skin and hair, but the variability that characterises them means that some parts of the skin may be dry while others are oily. Their skin may become dehydrated and wrinkly when they are still comparatively young.

*Vata* people tend to suffer from dry bowels and constipation. With their erratic digestions, they can suffer from wind, bloating and discomfort and tend to be prone to bowel problems like irritable bowel syndrome. *Vata* women tend to have irregular cycles and often miss periods due to stress, over activity or being underweight. Their bleeding tends to be light and can be accompanied by cramping pain.



*Vata*-predominant people are active and restless and find it hard to relax. Their sleep tends to be light and easily disturbed with many dreams, and they may suffer from nightmares and insomnia. They can easily get over-stimulated and drive themselves beyond their energy resources. Their stamina tends to be low and they may tire easily, but they still push themselves on with their nervous energy until eventually they become exhausted. Vigorous exercise like running and aerobics will aggravate their symptoms even though they may temporarily feel better from it. Gentle exercise like yoga or Tai chi is much more suitable and they need to relax.



When in balance, *vata* types are bright, enthusiastic, creative, full of new ideas and initiative, idealistic and visionary. They think fast, talk fast and love being with other people, like travel and change. They are good at initiating things but may not be at following through.



A clue to their constitution might be had from observing how many unfinished books there are on the bed side table! They are prone to poor memory, lack of concentration, disorganisation, fear and anxiety and can suffer from nervous problems like disorientation, panic attacks and mood swings.







### ***Pitta***

*Pitta* is the principle of transformation and heat, because *pitta* is responsible for the chemical and metabolic conversions that create energy and heat. All *pitta's* processes involve digestion or cooking, including the *cooking* of thoughts into theories in the mind. It governs mental digestion, clarity, perception and understanding. *Pitta* comes from the Sanskrit root “*tap*” meaning to heat, cook or transform. *Pitta* is the energy that digests nutrients to provide energy for cellular function.

**The qualities of *pitta* are oily, hot, light, subtle, flowing, mobile, sharp, soft, smooth, clear and malodorous.**

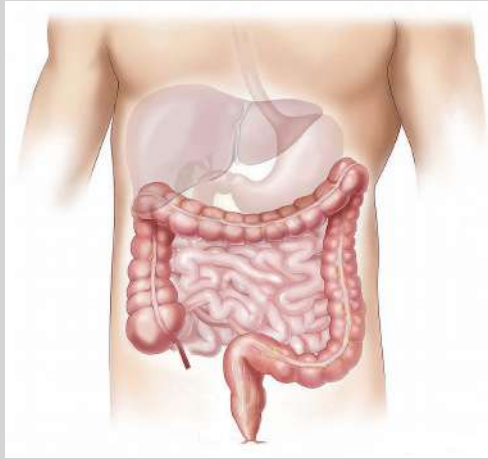


Enzymatic and hormonal systems are the main field of *pitta* activity. *Pitta* governs appetite, digestion and metabolism of nutrients, thirst, body heat and colour, the lustre of the skin, the shine of the hair and the light in the eyes. Mentally and emotionally, *pitta* governs perception, judgment, discrimination, penetrating thought, willpower, enthusiasm and joy, competition, irritability, anger and courage.

*Pitta* is composed of fire and water and it is the job of *pitta* to make two normally antagonistic elements cooperate together. All the fires in the body, like digestive acids, are contained in water. If there is more fire than water it will, for example, burn the lining of the stomach or intestine and create an ulcer. If there is more water than fire, water can drown out the digestive fire and cause indigestion.







The stomach and small intestine are the main sites of *pitta*, where the digestive acids with their fiery nature create a storehouse of digestive activity. The blood containing heat, colour and water, is also a *pitta* site. The skin is one of the main sites of *pitta*. The eyes are the sense organ that belongs to the element of fire. Other sites include the liver, brain, spleen, the hormonal system, sweat and sebaceous glands. *Pitta* is excreted from the body via bile and acid.

Physically, *pitta* types tend to be medium build and weight, with attractive, well proportioned figures. Their eyes are medium size, often light in colour and shiny bright; they can be sensitive to sunlight and irritants and easily become inflamed and watery.

Their skin tends to be warm to the touch and pale or pink in appearance. It can be sensitive to heat, sunlight and irritants and prone to rashes and pimples. *Pitta* skin burns easily and there are often moles or freckles. *Pitta* types can blush easily or flush with anger. They sweat easily, even in cold weather and never seem to feel the cold. They are more likely to be intolerant of heat.



They may have blond or red hair which is fine, often straight and oily, and in adulthood turns grey early. Men who go bald early are mostly *pitta* as the high levels of testosterone that is associated with baldness is a *pitta* phenomenon.

*Pitta* predominant people have good appetites and love eating. They hate to miss meals and when hungry can be irritable and hypoglycaemic, with headaches, dizziness, weakness and shaking.





Their digestion is good and their bowels efficient, but if they get hot, agitated or angry or eat too many hot spicy or fried foods, they can suffer from indigestion, heartburn and loose burning stools. Women tend to have regular cycles but may have heavy or long bleeding with bright red blood, preceded by feeling hot and irritable. It is those with high *pitta* who are more likely to suffer from skin conditions related to hormones such as acne.

*Pitta* types are quite methodical and organised. They can be rather obsessive about time and tend to be perfectionists. They often wake up and go to sleep at the same time every day. They sleep well unless they are worried about something such as school work, or an exam the next day. They are highly competitive and their main fear is fear of failure. *Pitta* types are naturally intelligent and quite fiery. They can be domineering, critical, self critical, intolerant and do not suffer fools gladly.



Hot weather, getting overheated by vigorous exercise, hot spicy food and red meat for example, can all increase *pitta* and predispose to *pitta* type skin problems. Relaxing especially in cool places by water can be very beneficial.



When *pitta* is high, acids or bile accumulate in the tissues, predisposing to fermentation and infection and skin disorders such as *Herpes*, eczema and acne. High *pitta* can also cause feelings of increased internal heat, inflammation and fever, and a tendency to be irritable, angry, critical and achievement-orientated.



There is a tendency to be workaholic. Bleeding such as heavy periods, and excessive discharges like sweat or urine, often occur as the body tries to release the excess *pitta*. High *pitta* causes yellow colouring of the stool, urine, eyes and skin, strong smelling secretions such as sweat and urine, as well as excessive hunger and thirst, burning sensations in the body and difficulty sleeping.







### ***Kapha***

*Kapha* is earth and water, the principle of potential energy, growth and protection. It is responsible for nourishment and it makes up the bulk of the body's structure, the bones, muscles, tissues and cells, as well as the body fluids. It governs stability and lubrication, moistening mucous membranes and synovial membranes of the joints and serving to cushion the whole body. It is responsible for supporting and holding the body's structures together. On a psychological level provides our emotional support in life.

**The qualities of *kapha* are wet, cold, gross, dense, smooth, static, dull, soft, cloudy and heavy.**

*Kapha* engenders emotional calm and endurance and enables us to feel love, compassion, devotion, patience and forgiveness. *Kapha* gives us a sense of well being. *Kapha*-predominant people tend to be grounded, emotionally and physically strong, stable and resilient. They are placid, kind and thoughtful. They tend to be sweet natured and will often avoid confrontation. They don't like change or the unpredictable aspects of life.



With their heavy and stable qualities, they may have a tendency to like nothing better than sitting around, relaxing and doing very little. Exerting themselves often doesn't come naturally, although vigorous exercise can make them feel very good and healthy.



Physically, *kapha* types have the biggest and strongest builds of all three types. They tend to have large bones, broad shoulders and big muscles and have a tendency to put on weight easily. Their hair is thick and lustrous, their eyes calm, large and moist, their nails are wide and strong, their lips full and their teeth strong and even. Their appetite is stable, though they are often not hungry first thing in the morning when they tend to feel sleepy. They sleep heavily and love to lie in the morning.

Their skin is usually cool to the touch, they don't tend to mind extremes of weather, but their symptoms like colds and mucous congestion, are often worse in cold, damp winter weather.



*Kapha* promotes stasis, which can lead to inertia. Those with excess *kapha* may feel slow, heavy, lethargic, inactive and have a tendency to accumulate more earth and water, to put on weight and retain water. Emotionally they may feel complacent, greedy, materialistic, acquisitive or possessive, and mentally passive, slow and dull. There may be a tendency to be stubborn, obstinate and narrow minded. Excess *kapha* can predispose to stagnation in the tissues, lymphatic congestion, cellulite, mucous congestion, breathing problems, pallor, feeling cold, sleepiness and low thyroid function. It is associated with low digestive fire causing a feeling of heaviness in the stomach, nausea after eating and sluggish bowels.

The primary site of *kapha* is the stomach and respiratory tract. The chest or lungs produce phlegm, as do the throat, head, sinuses and the nasal passages which are also *kapha* sites. The mouth and tongue produce saliva, another *kapha* fluid. The tongue is the organ of taste, the sense that belongs to the water element. Fat tissue, brain tissue, the joints, lymph, the pleural and pericardial cavities are also the province of *kapha*. It is excreted from the body via mucus.

*Kapha* serves as a support and a vehicle for the other 2 forces, *vata* and *pitta*. It acts as a conserving and restraining force on *vata* and *pitta* and their active and consuming effect on body and mind, which may otherwise disperse and dissipate vital energy. The subtle energy of *kapha* is called *ojas*, which is the prime energy reserve in the body responsible for our strength, vitality, immunity and fertility.





When *kapha* is low due to high *vata* or *pitta*, from stress, over-working, poor diet, illness and so on, our immunity as well as our emotional and mental well-being that *kapha* engenders will be compromised.



*In summary....*

#### ***Vata traits***

- A thin frame, erratically proportioned
- Tends to be underweight or lose weight when under stress
- Prone to dryness and dehydration
- Rough, dry skin which can crack easily and age prematurely
- Eats irregularly and quickly
- Erratic appetite
- Erratic memory, takes things in quickly and forgets easily
- Prone to anxiety, fear, insecurity
- Light sleeper, prone to insomnia
- Active, restless, thinks and does things quickly
- Difficult to sustain energy, concentration, activity
- Changeable mood, intense feelings
- Feels the cold, often dislikes wind. Symptoms worse in cold weather
- Dreams of running, jumping, flying, often fearful



### *Pitta Traits*

- Medium build and weight
- Regular features, well proportioned body
- Smooth oily skin, often with moles and freckles, which burns easily
- Skin is prone to rashes and inflammation
- Good, regular appetite, but not prone to gaining weight easily
- Fine shiny hair which falls out easily and goes grey early
- Men are prone to early balding.
- Profuse perspiration, smelly secretions
- Highly intelligent, good memory
- Tendency to be irritable, angry, intolerant and judgmental
- Decisiveness and leadership qualities
- Dislikes intense heat, symptoms often worse in hot weather or if over heated
- Dreams of fire, war, aggression, competition

### *Kapha traits*

- Large frame, heavy bones, big muscles
- Prone to overweight, feeling heavy
- Thick lustrous, oily skin and hair
- Large clear eyes
- Tendency to oversleep
- Tends to be lazy and inactive
- Resistant to change, slow to react
- Loyal and dependable
- Calm, affectionate, forgiving and compassionate
- Slow to learn and slow to forget
- Symptoms worse in cold, damp weather
- Dreams of water, nature, birds and gentle romantic images



In terms of the cycle of human existence, *kapha* is responsible for the growth of children to physical maturity, age 0 to 18, *pitta* is responsible for the maintenance of the body in its maturity, 18-45, and *vata* is responsible for the decline of the body, 45 to the time we die. These cycles can be extended as we achieve greater longevity (one of the aims of Ayurveda) so that the *pitta* cycle could continue in some people until age 50 or 55.



To be healthy, the balance of the *doshas* we have at birth needs to be maintained. If the balance is disturbed by diet, the weather or season, lifestyle or state of mind for example, illness of one kind or another eventually results. The disruption may be felt in physical discomfort and pain, inflammation such as in skin problems or in mental and emotional suffering such as fear and anxiety, anger or jealousy. The current state of imbalance causing such symptoms to manifest is known as our *vikruti*.



When it comes to treatment, being sensitive, small framed and with a tendency to low weight, *vata* types generally need smaller doses of medicine and benefit from warming, nourishing and calming herbs. More robust *pitta* types can be given medium doses and more cooling and detoxifying herbs, while slow-reacting *kapha* types require higher doses of warming, energising and decongestant herbs over a longer period of time.





## Agni: The Vital Role of the Digestive Fire

According to Ayurveda, our appetite and ability to digest and absorb nutrients with the help of digestive enzymes is known as *agni* or digestive fire. *Agni* is a Vedic term meaning to burn, transform or perceive, from the root *ang* meaning to burst forth. From *agni* we get the word ignite.

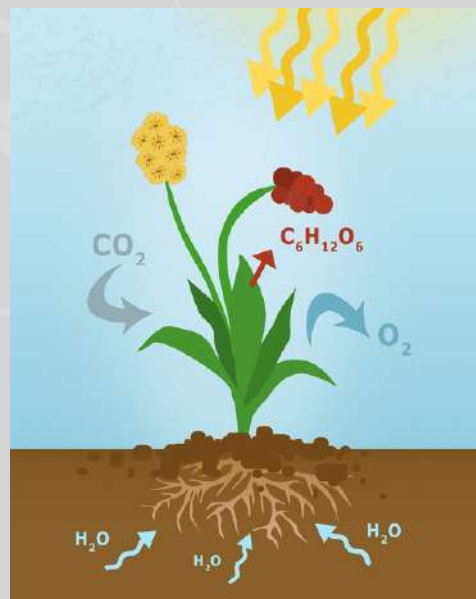


The main function of the digestive fire is to transform the natural resources from around us into nourishment and energy for every cellular action that keeps us alive. Just as our bodies are made up of the five elements, ether, air, fire, water and earth, so too is the food we eat. Like us, everything in the plant world ingests the five elements, transforms them and incorporates them into their very substance. Photosynthesis is a good example of this: the chlorophyll in green plants utilises sunlight to create chemical energy from carbon dioxide and water which is then stored in the form of carbohydrate, and this is used to fuel all the plant's activities.

While food conversion provides energy, it also requires energy to perform all the essential biochemical reactions involved in digestion. *Agni* is that biological energy or fire that cooks our food and it not only governs digestion and absorption, but also our metabolism and immunity.

### The Qualities of Agni

*Agni* has all the qualities of fire and in this way it is similar to, but not the same as, *pitta*. *Agni* is hot, dry, light, fragrant, subtle, mobile and penetrating, while the qualities of *pitta* are hot, sharp, mobile, penetrating, liquid, light and oily. The main difference is that *pitta* is oily and liquid, while *agni* is dry.



### **Agni is responsible for:**

- Appetite and taste
- Digestion, absorption and assimilation
- Tissue and cellular metabolism
- Energy and vitality
- Mental alertness
- Immunity and strength
- Colour, health and lustre of the skin
- Feelings of wellbeing
- Positive emotions
- Perception
- Longevity
- Elimination of toxins

The secretion of sufficient digestive enzymes is required to break down ingested foods into molecules that can be absorbed through the gut wall. If the digestive fire is low and there are not sufficient enzymes to do this adequately, partially digested foodstuffs sit around in the gut and ferment. This gives rise to a state of toxicity in the gut.



### **Signs of Low Agni**

Low digestive fire is known as *mandagni* and this is indicated by:

- A weak appetite
- Coating on the tongue
- Wind and bloating
- Physical and emotional dullness, lethargy
- Negative feelings such as low motivation, hopelessness, heaviness and stagnation
- Low vitality



According to Ayurveda, this accumulation of toxins is called *ama* and it is said to be the root cause of all disease. *Ama* comes from the Sanskrit root *am* which means to harm or weaken. It is sticky and heavy and it weakens digestion, blocks the secretion of enzymes, inhibits absorption, lowers immunity and as it moves from the gut into the bloodstream, it depletes our overall health. Antigens and toxins from bowel bacteria have been related to development of a whole host of diseases, including a wide range of autoimmune and skin problems.

The importance of our intestinal flora is being recognised as a prerequisite for good health. In a healthy gut, our beneficial bacteria, especially *Bifidobacteria* and *Lactobacilli* strains, perform a number of different functions. They synthesise vitamins and short chain fatty acids, and break down dietary toxins, making them less harmful. They check the overgrowth of pathogenic micro-organisms and stimulate local immunity, inhibiting infections like *Salmonella*, parasites such as pinworms, and decreasing the risk of food poisoning. They also enhance general immunity; in fact, four-fifths of the body's immune system is found in the gut lining.



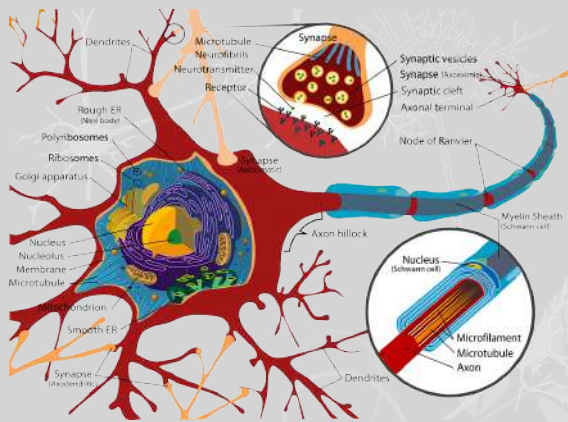
### **The Gut-Brain Axis**

The digestive tract is embedded with a system of neurons called the enteric nervous system. There is seamless communication between the brain and the digestive tract, making the process of digestion very susceptible to the effects of stress, emotion, and imbalances of the *doshas*. The enteric nervous system regulates blood flow to and from the digestive tract, as well as the secretion of digestive juices. Stress can reduce the flow of digestive enzymes and thereby inhibit absorption and this can affect the health and resilience of the skin. It may also cause the secretion of excess hydrochloric acid in the stomach, which can irritate and inflame the lining of the stomach or intestine, causing heartburn, indigestion and eventually gastritis or even a gastric ulcer. This heat can spread systemically and contribute to inflammatory skin problems.





Modern scientific research into the function of the beneficial gut flora has revealed that the gut flora secretes about 95% of the serotonin in the body. Serotonin is one of the main neurotransmitters formerly thought to be produced in the brain. This confirms the close relationship between the gut flora and the way we think and feel.



There are several factors that can adversely affect the balance of the beneficial bacteria in relation to the more pathogenic microorganisms in the gut. Poor digestion, constipation, stress, the wrong diet, and the use of drugs including antibiotics and steroids, lead to the proliferation of pathogenic yeasts, viruses and bacteria. These create toxins, destroy vitamins,

inactivate digestive enzymes and lead to formation of chemicals which are potentially carcinogenic.

This toxic state of the gut (*ama*) is known as dysbiosis. This can cause irritation and break down of the junctions between cells of the gut lining and lead to *leaky gut syndrome*. This allows large molecules of partially digested foods including whole proteins as well as toxins to be absorbed into the blood stream and predisposes to food intolerances and allergies, and it may be the underlying cause of symptoms including bloating, gas, heaviness after eating, abdominal discomfort, vaginal thrush, IBS, chronic diarrhoea or constipation, allergies such as asthma, hives, psoriasis, eczema and migraine; recurrent infections, cystitis, catarrh, skin problems, PMS, depression and lethargy.



The maintenance of the beneficial bacterial population of the gut is governed by *agni*. When the digestive fire is burning well, it does not provide a hospitable environment for bacteria, virus, fungi and other pathogenic microorganisms to thrive. It prevents the build-up of toxins not only in the gut but also generally in the body and mind; our senses are clear and acute and we have the energy to direct our lives in a positive way. Maintaining the balance of the digestive fire is the key to preventative health, as well as to the treatment of all skin problems.



### Types of Agni

There are many different types of *agni* in the body. The main form is the digestive fire, known as *jatharagni*. This is the digestive fire that comprises all the secretions and enzymes used in the process of digestion. It is found mainly in the lower stomach and small intestine and is responsible for digesting and absorbing nutrients from food and also for destroying pathogenic microorganisms in the gut.



*Jatharagni* is also called *kayagni* meaning bodily fire as it is the main source of heat for the body. It is increased by hot fragrant spices like ginger, black pepper and cayenne as these have a similar nature and spark the fire. *Jatharagni* works on the food mass that has been swallowed and liquefied. It separates the pure or nutritive part of the food (*sara*) from the indigestible part such as fibre, which then becomes waste materials, and breaks down complex food-stuffs into a homogenous mass of tiny molecules ready to be absorbed. These tiny molecules are called *ahara rasa* or nutrient chyle. The *ahara rasa* in turn is absorbed and transferred to the liver, where the five elemental *agnis* (*bhutagnis*) turn them into the respective elemental tissues (*dhatu*s) for the body.



### The Five Elemental Fires: Bhutagnis

Each of the five elements has its own digestive fire. These reside in the liver, manifested as liver enzymes, and are responsible for transforming the raw five elements from the food we eat into the biologically available forms of the elements. These five *bhutagnis* are necessary for creating the elemental precursors that will then go on to be further transformed by the *agni* of each tissue (*dhatu*). Each element governs the production of specific physiological tissues of the body.



- The ether element governs the mind and sense
- The air element generates bone and nerve tissue
- The fire element creates the enzymes and haemoglobin
- The water element builds the vital fluids, plasma, blood and fat
- The earth element that has been digested from food serves to create the basic bulk or protein of the body, like the muscles



The *bhutagnis* are also responsible for converting the five element portions of the *ahara rasa* into nutritive substances for the five sense organs. If their function is impaired, the respective element in the body will not be formed correctly and the creation of the seven tissues (*dhatu*s) will be impaired. Substances such as ghee or aloe vera gel help regulate elemental digestive fires.





## The Seven Tissue Fires: Dhatu Agnis

Ayurveda classifies human anatomy and physiology into seven tissues, called *dhatu*s. Each of the seven *dhatu*s, which has its own digestive fire or *agni*, is responsible for proper formation of that tissue. The *dhatu agnis* are dependent upon *jatharagni*, the digestive fire. When the *dhatu agni* is too low, an excess of poor quality tissue will be formed. When it is too high insufficient tissue will be formed.

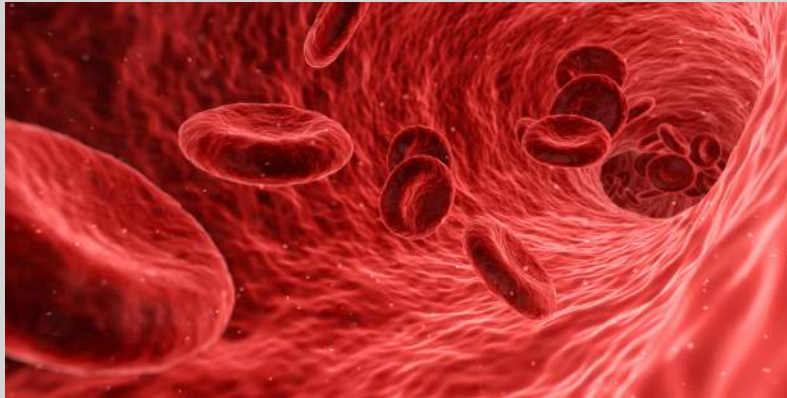
## Ways to Improve Agni

- Eat a healthy nutritious diet, and have regular meals taken according to your constitution and the season
- Favour foods that taste pungent, sour and salty and have a small amount of bitter taste
- Take regular exercise and incorporate *yoga*, *pranayama* and meditation into your daily routine
- First thing in the morning drink a cup of warm fresh ginger tea
- Add *agni*-stimulating herbs and spices to foods including cumin, fennel, turmeric, lemon grass, dill, thyme, oregano, rosemary, cardamom, cinnamon and coriander
- Eat warm foods and drinks which are easier to digest and help to promote good digestion, and reduce hard, raw foods such as salad which are more indigestible, especially in cold months
- Enjoy eating in a relaxed and calm environment
- Eat portions that are satisfying but do not overeat
- Eat your largest meal at midday when *agni* is strongest
- Avoid drinking cold or iced drinks especially with food
- Avoid refined carbohydrates, excess sugar, fizzy drinks, ice creams and fried foods, as well as indigestible foods such as bread, cheese and red meats



## Detoxification

Detoxification is not only recommended to treat skin problems but also to help prevent them. According to Ayurveda, the body is composed of innumerable channels called *srotas*, through which blood, lymph, nutrients and the waste products of metabolism flow. For normal, healthy functioning of the body, it is essential that these channels remain intact and do not get blocked by anything that causes stagnation of the *doshas* or wastes (*malas*) and precipitate disease. It is therefore important that these channels be kept clean and competent.



The presence of *ama* in the body's cells and channels of circulation disrupts the free flow of nourishment to the skin as well as movement of the wastes away from the skin and into the blood. The accumulation of *ama* can give rise to mental fatigue, general aches and pains, skin problems and malaise. The condition of the tongue reflects the presence of *ama* in the system when there is likely to be a white coating on the tongue, particularly noticeable in the morning.

The first stage of the healing process always involves detoxification. Most people suffer from some accumulation of toxins; since *ama* is usually associated with one of the 3 *doshas*, it is possible to have *vata*, *pitta* or *kapha* imbalances either with or without *ama*. If there is significant toxicity in the body, it is hard to balance the *doshas* until the impurities have been removed and eliminated from the system. Once the *ama* has been removed, more specific measures for repairing the *doshas* and rejuvenating the cells and tissues can be effective. Without first clearing toxins, the right foods and herbs cannot be properly utilised by the body.

Ayurveda delineates 2 levels of detoxification treatment. Firstly, preliminary detoxification, involving normalising digestion and elimination which is known as palliation therapy or *shamana*, and secondly and more deep, is the removal of excess *doshas* from the body, known as *panchakarma* or *shodhana*.



Palliation therapy is easier to do and does not require the preparation of *panchakarma* and the stronger, in-house purification therapy methods. It can be employed as part of a milder detox approach for those not needing or not being able to undergo deeper cleansing. Done every now and again or over a period of time, palliation can be as effective as deeper cleansing methods.

Gentle detox, like deeper cleansing, is best done in warm months, late spring, summer or early autumn but has more latitude than deeper cleansing as its methods are not so strong. May would be the best month in the UK and other temperate parts of the world. A spring detox could include eating plenty of fresh greens, lightly cooked foods and taking cooling herbs to cleanse the blood. With the rising heat and promotion of growth externally, internal toxins which have been accumulated through the winter begin to surface. It is important to eliminate them at this time to avoid aggravation of *pitta* through the summer season, which is one of the main factors contributing to skin disease, .

Traditionally a few days of cleansing are also recommended at the change of seasons. Since the transition from one season to another promotes accumulation of a specific *dosha*, cleansing yourself at these times can be very helpful for reducing or eliminating those accumulations. *Vata* accumulates at the junction of summer and autumn, *pitta* at the junction of spring and summer and *kapha* at the junction of winter and spring.







A healthy diet is one of the most important tools for reducing *ama* accumulation. If you feel that you have accumulated toxicity due to poor nutrition, or use of alcohol, drugs etc, follow an *ama*-reducing programme for a few days:

- Eat foods that are freshly prepared, nutritious and appetising. Minimise canned or stale foods
- Take foods that are lighter and easier to digest, such as rice, soups and lentils
- Favour freshly steamed or lightly sautéed vegetables and fresh, raw or freshly juiced fruits
- Sip ginger tea
- Avoid fried foods
- Avoid cold foods and drinks
- Temporarily reduce all dairy products
- Minimise fermented foods and drinks, including vinegar, pickled condiments, cheese and alcohol
- Favour lighter grains such as barley and basmati rice
- Reduce refined carbohydrates such as white flour and sugar
- Reduce oily, heavy, and salty foods and nuts. Seeds can be taken in small amounts
- If animal products cannot be avoided entirely, favour white meat, turkey or chicken and minimise red meats

### **Herbs for Detoxification**

The main way to clear *ama* with herbs is to burn it with herbs that increase digestive fire. *Ama* is opposite in properties to *agni* and acts to block its function. So herbs that stimulate digestive fire, that are fiery in nature are used. Of the 6 tastes, sweet, salty and sour increase *ama*. Astringent is neutral. Though it can dry up *ama*, it can hold it in the body by its contracting action. Pungent and bitter tastes are the best for combatting *ama*.



The best pungent herbs are cayenne, black pepper, dry ginger, long pepper, asafoetida, and mustard. Other helpful spices include cardamom, turmeric, cumin, coriander, basil and fennel. The best formulae are Trikatu and Hingwastaka. These are generally safe for *kapha* and *vata* and can be helpful for *pitta* conditions but care must be taken not to aggravate *pitta* by their hot nature, in which case they are best combined with bitter herbs.



Bitter tasting herbs scrape *ama* from the tissues and can be used to relieve fever or infections caused by it. They are excellent where there is heat, inflammation, fermentation and toxins in the blood. They are best for *pitta* and *kapha* skin conditions and can be used in small amounts for *vata* conditions when the problem has been long standing. They are good for any *ama* condition that has been caused by eating excess sweet or fatty food.

The best bitters include neem, aloe, turmeric, golden seal, gentian, barberry, guduchi, andrographis, burdock and dandelion. Ayurvedic formulae like Tikta and Sudarshan are excellent.

### **Fasting**

Fasting is an important part of any detox programme. It enkindles *agni* and clears toxins. It is important not to fast for too long as long term fasting can suppress digestive fire. *Kapha* people can fast once a week on liquids, *pitta* a few days a month on light vegetables, and *vata* at the junction of seasons on a *kichari* diet for a few days. After fasting you should have a clear tongue, pleasant body odour, normal appetite and digestion, and a feeling of energy and lightness. Fasting is best done in conjunction with taking pungent herbs to improve the digestive fire like Trikatu or spice teas such as ginger, cinnamon and fennel with bitters like aloe vera gel.



## Bowel Cleansers

Cleansing the bowels is another route of detoxification that can be combined with fasting or a detox diet. Gentle purgatives can be used for constipation or irregular bowel habits. If the stools sink rather than float, it indicates the presence of *ama* which purgatives would remove effectively. Herbal purgatives cleanse the small and large intestine and can be taken on the first day of a fast and once every 3-7 days if there is still evidence of *ama*. Purgation is contraindicated where there is diarrhoea, debility or emaciation even if the tongue is coated or there are other signs of *ama*. Bitter purgatives such as rhubarb and aloe are recommended along with warming spices such as ginger to protect the digestive fire and to burn up *ama*. Soothing bulk laxatives like flaxseed and psyllium are not recommended in *ama* conditions as they can further clog up the system.

By far the best Ayurvedic formula for cleansing the bowel is Triphala which not only clears *ama* but also raises digestive fire, improves metabolism and nourishes the deeper tissues. It is ideal for all *doshas*. Aloe vera gel is another excellent bowel cleanser and is best taken along with warming spices like ginger, black pepper and turmeric. It is particularly good for *pitta* and *kapha*.

### *Triphala*





### *The Seven Tissues*

According to Ayurveda the human body is composed of 7 *dhatu*s, (from the root *dha* meaning to support) or tissue layers. While the balance of the *doshas* can predispose to ill health, the *dhatu*s can become the sites of disease, in which case they are called *dushya*, meaning that which can be spoiled. For health and strength, the 7 *dhatu*s need to be functioning optimally.



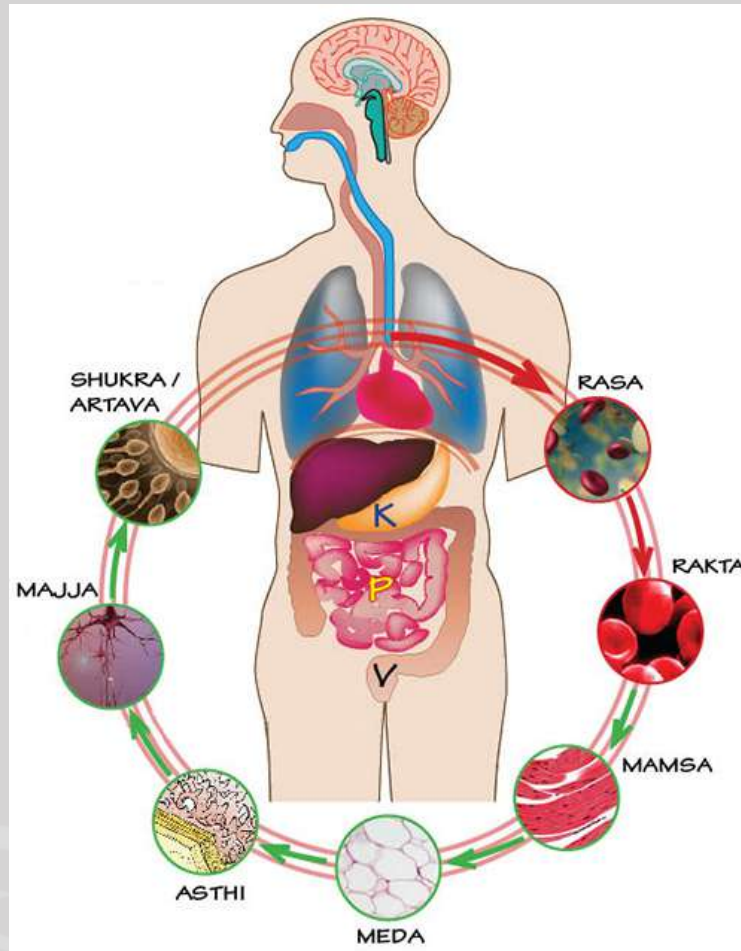
The *dhatu*s are formed from digested nutrients and the waste products are eliminated through faeces and urine. *Rasa* is the basic plasma of the body from which all other tissues are produced. Each is produced by digestion out of the other, so that each one becomes food for the next. This means there is only one tissue in the body which undergoes 7 levels of transformation, so problems in any one tissue can easily affect all the rest. Starting from the gross to the subtle the 7 *dhatu*s are:

1. ***Rasa*** / plasma, composed primarily of water
2. ***Rakta*** / blood, specifically haemoglobin, composed of fire and water
3. ***Mamsa*** / muscle, skeletal and visceral, composed primarily of earth and secondarily of water and fire
4. ***Medas*** / fat or adipose tissue, composed mainly of water
5. ***Asthi*** / bone, composed of earth and air
6. ***Majja*** / marrow and nerve tissue, composed of water and earth
7. ***Shukra*** / reproductive tissues, male and female, the essence derived from all tissues



As it is the basic substance of the body, *kapha* is responsible for all *dhatu*s generally, and specifically for 5: plasma, muscle, fat, marrow and reproductive tissues. *Pitta* governs blood and *vata* governs bone.

*Rasa* (plasma) is formed daily from our food, and from it the next tissue *rakta* (blood) is formed. The process takes 5 days. Each tissue is formed from the one that precedes it and so it takes 35 days to make reproductive tissue.



*Rasa* means both essence / sap and to circulate. It provides nutrition for the 5 elements in the body and nourishment to all the tissues. *Rasa* is responsible for tissue hydration including the hydration of the skin and for maintaining electrolyte balance. Psychologically, when *rasa* is sufficient we feel happy and content, with enthusiasm, vitality and compassion for others. Our complexion is good, our skin and hair soft and shiny. *Rasa* circulates around the whole body, but the main sites are heart, blood vessels, lymphatic system, skin and mucous membranes. Plasma and *kapha* are closely related, as *kapha* is contained in plasma.



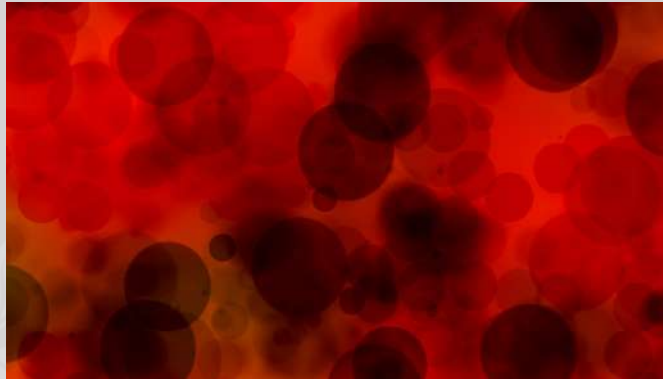
Excess *rasa* creates an increase of *kapha* and accumulation of saliva and mucus, which can block channels (*srotas*), and cause loss of appetite and nausea. Deficiency of *rasa* causes dry skin and lips, dehydration, tiredness after slight exertion, intolerance of noise, tremors, palpitations, aches and pain due to poor nourishment of all the *dhatu*s.

**Rakta / blood** is composed of fire and water, being both a fluid and a conveyor of heat because it contains haemoglobin, which carries oxygen for cell respiration.

*Rakta* means what is coloured or what is red. It gives us colour literally and

figuratively. When *rakta* is sufficient, our life energy is good, we have passion for life, faith and love. The skin is warm and radiant, the lips and tongue are a healthy pink and the conjunctiva of the eyes is clear.

*Rakta* corresponds to *pitta*, as *pitta* is carried in the blood.



Excess *rakta* causes skin problems, such as acne, boils and abscesses, enlargement of the liver and spleen, hypertension, jaundice, digestive problems, burning sensations, redness or bleeding in the skin, eyes and urine. Deficiency of *rakta* causes pallor, low blood pressure, desire for sour and cold food, dry and dull head and skin and capillary fragility.

**Mamsa/muscle** is composed primarily of earth, along with secondary water and fire. It is heavy and makes up much of the bulk of the body. *Mamsa* comes from the root *man* meaning to hold firm, as the muscles serve to hold the basic body frame together and give it strength.

When *mamsa* is deficient we lack the strength and cohesion that enables us to work hard and exercise. When *mamsa* is sufficient it gives us courage, confidence and endurance with the ability to be open, compassionate, forgiving and happy.



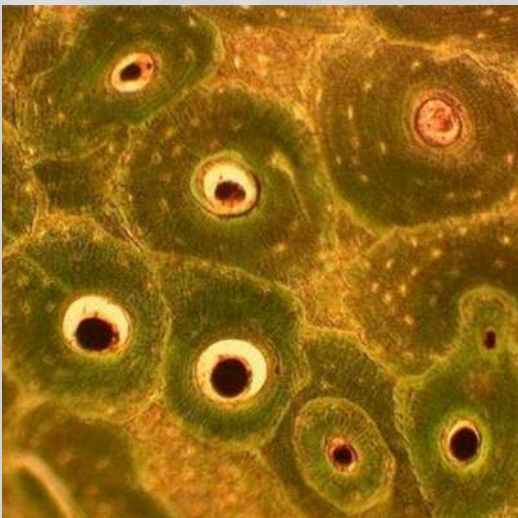


Excess *mamsa* creates swelling or tumours in the muscles, swollen glands, obesity, liver enlargement, irritability and aggression. In women it could lead to the development of fibroids, a tendency to miscarriage and low sexual energy. Deficiency of *mamsa* leads to weakness, poor muscle tone and wasting, particularly around the hips, abdomen and back of neck, lack of coordination fear, insecurity and anxiety.

*Medas/fat* is mainly composed of water. Its function is lubrication and protection throughout the body but mainly of the muscles and tendons. It helps lubricate the throat to enable a good singing voice, it oils the skin and the hair and the eyes. Fat tissue promotes feelings of ease, comfort, joy and a sense of well-being and protection. Those who don't feel loved or protected may surround themselves with a layer of fat and become obese.



Excess *medas* leads to obesity, heaviness, tiredness, poor mobility, asthma, low sexual energy, thirst, hypertension, diabetes, poor longevity, sagging of the thighs, breasts and belly. Emotionally it engenders insecurity, fear and possessiveness. Deficiency of *medas* causes fatigue, cracking joints, tired eyes, enlargement of the spleen, thin limbs, dry and brittle skin, hair, nails, teeth and bones.



*Asthi*/bone is composed of earth, which is the solid part of bone, and air, its porosity. The word *asthi* comes from the root *stha*, to stand or endure, as its function is to support the body and give it a strong foundation. When *asthi* is sufficient it promotes fortitude, stamina, stability, confidence and certainty. It gives strong bones and flexible movement of the joints as well as strong white teeth. *Asthi* is related to *vata* as *vata* is contained in the bone tissue.



*Majja* / marrow and nerve tissue is composed of a subtle form of water and some earth. *Majja* comes from the root *maj* meaning to sink, as the bone marrow and nerve tissue is found inside the spinal cord and bones. Its function is to fill the

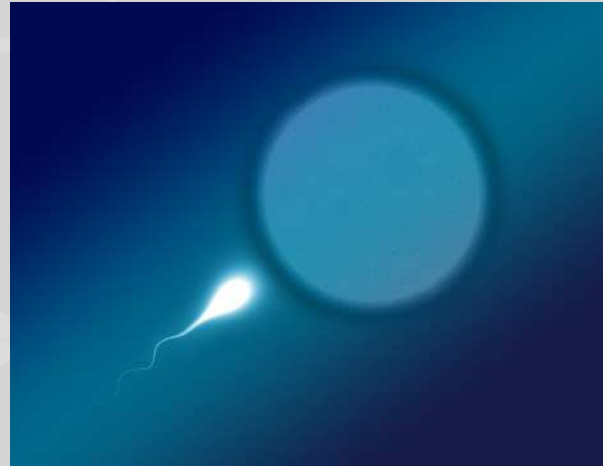


empty spaces in the body, including the nerve channels, bones and brain cavity. It also composes synovial fluid and aids in the lubrication of the the skin, eyes and faeces as well as the production of red blood cells. On a psychological level, *majja* affords adaptability, receptivity, affection and compassion. Healthy *majja* is

indicated by clear eyes, strong joints, good powers of speech and tolerance of pain. The mind is sharp and clear and the memory good.

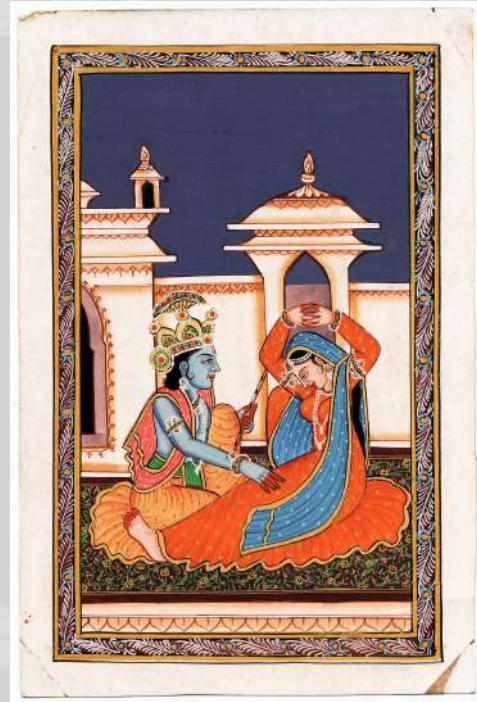
Excess *majja* creates heaviness of the eyes, limbs and joints, deep non-healing sores and infections in the eyes. Deficiency creates weak / porous bones, pain in small joints, dizziness, spots before the eyes, darkness around the eyes, sexual debility, feeling ungrounded, poor concentration and memory.

*Shukra* / reproductive tissue is the essential tissue form of water that has the power to create new life. *Shukra* means seed and luminous and is also the Sanskrit name for the planet Venus. It includes the ovum, sperm and reproductive fluids. When healthy, *shukra* provides strength, energy and vitality for the entire body. It provides resistance to infections and strong immunity, well formed secondary sex characteristics, and a loving and compassionate nature. The reproductive fluid gives light to the eyes and inspiration to the soul.



Excess *shukra* creates high sexual desire, often leading to frustration, excess semen, stones in the semen and enlargement of the prostate. Deficiency creates lack of creativity, low sexual energy, impotence or frigidity, infertility, insecurity and anxiety.

*Ojas* is often described as the 8th tissue. It is the subtle essence of all *kapha* or water in the body and particularly the essence of the reproductive fluid. It is the ultimate product of nutrition and digestion, as well as the prime energy reserve for the whole body. It gives us immunity, strength, resilience and fertility.





Each tissue is made up of two parts, one stable and the other in formation of the next *dhatu*. The adequate formation of a *dhatu* depends on the previous tissue being properly formed and the tissue *agni* must function normally. If the *dhatu agni* is too low, an excess of the tissue will be produced and its quality will be poor. If the tissue *agni* is too high a deficient of the *dhatu* will be produced as it is burnt up.

In this process of tissue formation, secondary tissues (*upadhatus*) are produced, like menstrual fluid from plasma. Waste materials are also produced, like *kapha* from plasma.

### **Upadhatus:**

Rasa/ plasma - breast milk and menstrual flow

Rakta/blood - blood vessels and tendons

Mamsa/ muscles - ligaments and skin

Medas/ fat - the omentum

Asthi/ bone - the teeth

Majja/ nerve tissue and bone marrow - the sclerotic fluid in the eyes

Shukra/ reproductive tissue - ojas

### **DHATU SARA**

*Dhatu sara* means the excellent health of the tissues when they are assessed at both physical and psychological levels.

**Rasa-sara** Soft warm skin, oily, uniform in colour, moderate hair and slightly shiny

**Rakta-sara** Red conjunctiva, ruddy cheeks, lips, hands, feet, hot skin, happy, fresh energy but does not tolerate heat

**Mamsa-sara** Well developed muscles, good strength, stamina, beautiful body shape and nice tone. Moderate to short

**Meda-sara** Big beautiful eyes, plenty of hair, melodious voice, bulky extremities

**Asthi-sara** Big bones, thick hair, nails, strong teeth, big joints, forgiving

**Majja-sara** Big attractive eyes, brilliant person, intelligent and knowledgeable

**Shukra-sara** Handsome, attractive, lustrous eyes and pearl teeth

The cycle is completed with the formation of *ojas*, a super fine essence of all *dhatu*s. It produces a pure electric field or halo around the body.



### Concept of Disease

When a *dosha* increases and enters into the respective *dhatu*, it creates disorders especially where there is a weakness of that *dhatu*. Weakness can be due to trauma or past injury / *karma* which is hereditary, so we carry the seed potential in the respective tissue.

Entry of VATA into the Dhatus	
Rasa	Dehydration, cold, dry skin, brownish-blackish discoloration of the skin, numbness, goose pimples, scleroderma
Rakta	Blood clots, poor circulation, cold hands and feet, anaemia, pulsation, varicose veins, gout
Mamsa	Muscle spasm, tremors, pain and stiffness, loss of coordination, wasting, paralysis
Medas	Lack of fat, enlarged spleen, dry skin and joints, loose joints, predisposing to dislocation, lower backache, wasting
Asthi	Painful bones, joints, cavities in teeth, cracking joints, osteoporosis, brittle/broken hair, nails, degenerative arthritis
Majja	Bone marrow depression, anaemia, leukaemia, neurological and muscular problems, paralysis, dizziness, psychological problems, eg. anxiety
Shukra	Low libido, infertility, lack of creativity and energy, low spirits, wasting, TB
Ojas	Low immunity (repeated infections), profuse weakness, low spirits

Entry of PITTA into the Dhatus	
Rasa	Fever, hives, rashes, acne, dermatitis, eczema, bleeding through skin, easy bruising
Rakta	Jaundice, liver problems, cholecystitis, psoriasis, bleeding tendency, chronic eczema / dermatitis, enlarged liver and spleen
Mamsa	Chronic fevers, bursitis, ulcers, infections of muscle tissue
Medas	Big boils, abscesses, urinary tract infections
Asthi	Pitta arthritis, rheumatism, bone abscesses
Majja	Leukaemia, microcytic anaemia
Shukra	Prostatitis, orchitis, pelvic inflammatory disease, sterility
Ojas	Hyperpyrexia, low immunity



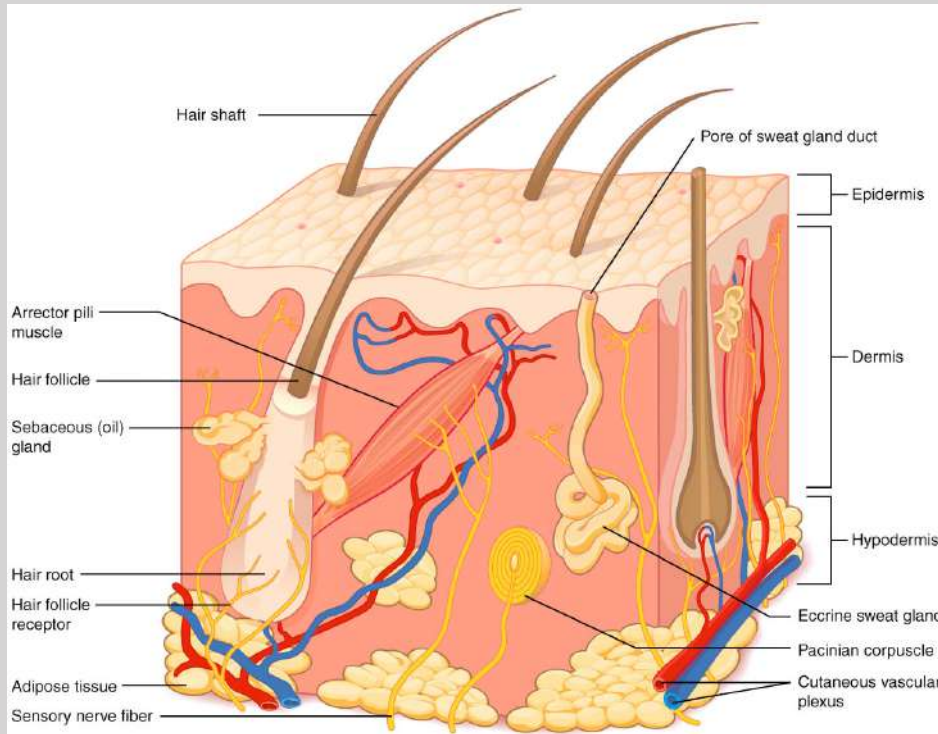
Entry of KAPHA into the Dhatus	
Rasa	Lymphatic congestion, oedema, pale, cold clammy skin, mild fevers, sinus conditions
Rakta	Thickening of blood, increased cholesterol, megaloblastic anaemia, clotting, embolism, hypertension
Mamsa	Myomas, cystic swelling on muscle tendons, muscular hypertrophy
Medas	Obesity, diabetes, lipomas, enlarged liver, fatty degeneration
Asthi	Effusion in the joints, swollen joints, kapha type arthritis, osteoma
Majja	Neurofibromatosis, anaemia, brain tumours
Shukra	Tumours of testicles, enlarged prostate, diabetes, prostatic calculi
Ojas	Low immunity, repeated pneumonia





## The Skin

The skin is known as *twach* in Ayurveda. If you become familiar with the structure (*sharirrachana*) and function (*sharirkriya*) of the skin, it will help you to understand how skin disease (*twacharogas*) develops and that will help to provide answers as to the best form of treatment for them.



According to the Western medical model, we have three main layers of skin, the epidermis, the dermis and the hypodermis. Within the first two layers we have other layers, amounting to seven in total.

The epidermis consists of:

1. Stratum corneum
2. Stratum lucidum (only in thick areas of the skin like the palms of the hands and soles of the feet)
3. Stratum granulosum
4. Stratum spinosum
5. Stratum germinativum

The dermis consists of:

6. Dermal papillary layer
7. Dermal reticular layer with hair follicles and blood vessels

The hypodermis is mostly subcutaneous fat.



According to Ayurveda also, we have seven different layers of the skin, each providing support to the layer above. For the skin to be healthy, we need all seven layers to be functioning optimally.

1. *Aavabhasini* is the outermost layer of the skin, our complexion, reflecting the health and quality of *rasa dhatu*, the first of the seven *dhatu*s, which governs our state of hydration. Since it is affected by the layers of skin below, it is a good indicator of our general health, physically and emotionally. This layer is prone to problems like pimples, acne and dandruff when it becomes disturbed by the *doshas*. As we age and *vata* predominates, this layer can dry out and become flaky.
2. *Lohita* is the next layer down that supports the top layer. It indicates the state of *rakta dhatu* which is blood tissue and coloured red. If there are toxins in the blood, it affects this layer and makes us more sensitive to heat and sunlight. Moles, dark circles, freckles and other disturbances of pigmentation arise here when it is disturbed by the *doshas*.
3. *Shwete* is the third layer. It is white and balances the general hue of the skin. When disrupted by the *doshas*, it can cause rashes and allergic reactions like eczema.
4. *Tamra* nurtures the upper layers of the skin and supports the immune system in creating a protective barrier to heat, toxins, infection etc. When this copper coloured layer is not functioning well, it lowers the immunity of the skin and predisposes us to skin infections and allergies.
5. *Vedini* is the fifth layer and this provides sensations of heat and cold, touch, pain, etc from the skin to the rest of the body. When disturbed by the *doshas*, it can cause numbness, tingling and make us more susceptible to *Herpes* infections.
6. *Rohini* is the sixth layer and this promotes healing and regeneration of the skin after trauma. If this layer is not healthy, supported by a healthy diet, healing will be slow and scars will persist. Disturbance of the *doshas* can make us more susceptible to skin tumours.
7. *Mamsadhara* is the innermost layer of the skin providing firmness and suppleness. When in balance, this layer keeps the skin youthful and helps to slow the effects of aging. When disturbed by the *doshas* it can cause abscesses and fistulas.



Herbs can be used both internally and topically to balance the different layers of the skin, depending on what is required. Turmeric is an excellent herb for the skin and is used in many Ayurvedic formulae. It works on several different layers of the skin simultaneously. As a complexion enhancer it works on *avabhasini*, by purifying the blood it helps the *lohita* layer, as an immune enhancer it supports the *tamra* layer and as an anti-inflammatory, it helps the *rohini* layer.





## *The Doshas and the Skin*

According to our *prakruti*, the constitution we were born with, we can be born with a certain skin type, but over time it may change as a result of the effect of external factors such as climate, diet and lifestyle, or environmental pollution. These need to be taken into account when devising a skin care programme.

- *Vata* skin tends to be dry, thin, and cool to the touch. It can easily get dehydrated, as it is affected by dry, windy weather. Since it tends to be dry and thin, it can be particularly prone to wrinkles and other effects of aging.
- *Pitta* skin tends to be warm to the touch and more prone to redness, flushing and inflammation as well as freckles and moles than the other skin types. It can have a tendency to break out in spots, boils and acne, and to be sensitive to the sun and burn easily. It can react to hot food, and emotionally fiery outbursts.
- *Kapha* skin tends to have all the qualities of water and earth; it is cool and damp, thick, strong and more resilient to changes of wind and temperature than the other *doshas*. It can become greasy and a bit sweaty, but remains youthful into our later years!

### **Taking Care of Vata Skin**

For *vata* skin to stay vibrant and youthful, skin care needs to be nourishing and rehydrating. Essential oils or herbs can be incorporated into skin care products with oils such as sesame, castor and coconut oil.

A *vata*-pacifying lifestyle, with a regular routine, getting up and going to bed at the same time and eating three meals a day, with warm, easy-to-digest foods with mild spices, will help to keep *vata* balanced and the effect of this will extend to the skin.



Other suggestions for caring for *vata* skin:

- Drink plenty of luke warm water daily to keep hydrated
- Reduce pungent, bitter and astringent foods and drinks, and increase nourishing, grounding foods and drinks that taste sweet, sour and salty to balance *vata*
- Make sure your food is as fresh and organic as you can so that it contains plenty of life force (*prana*)
- Include a little healthy fat such as ghee (clarified butter), coconut or olive oil in your diet
- A warm oil self-massage (*abhyanga*) with sesame or coconut oil followed by a warm bath or shower is excellent for keeping your skin lubricated
- Avoid stress as much as you can and get plenty of rest and relaxation so your mind and body have a chance to replenish and recharge
- Herbs for internal use include ashwagandha, licorice, marshmallow, wild oats, shatavari, bacopa, gotu kola, bala, gokshura and guduchi
- Culinary herbs and spices particularly aimed at balancing *apana vata* such as cardamom, ginger, caraway, clove, garlic and nutmeg can be included in your meals regularly



*Shatavari root.*



## Taking Care of *Pitta* Skin

*Pitta* type skin tends to be sensitive to heat and prone to inflammation, so it needs cooling, cleansing and nurturing. Use skin care products that protect against the burning and damaging effects of the sun. Avoid excess exposure to the sun, tanning treatments and being in saunas and steam rooms for extended periods of time, as they can overheat your system.

Other suggestions for caring for *pitta* skin:

- Avoid using harsh, synthetic cosmetics that can damage sensitive skin and predispose to rashes and spots
- Use pure rose water or luke-warm chamomile tea to cleanse your skin.
- Reduce pungent, sour and salty foods and drinks and increase sweet bitter and astringents tastes to reduce *pitta*
- Avoid hot, spicy foods and deep-fried foods; they are heating to an already fiery constitution
- Gentle laxatives such as dandelion root or triphala help to reduce excess *pitta* and clear toxins from the system
- Oleation/ massage oils can be used externally, particularly sunflower, coconut, aloe vera, bhringaraj and brahmi oil
- Meditation is recommended to release suppressed emotions/ anger.
- Counselling, talking, relaxing in cool areas and by water can be helpful
- Medicines prepared in ghee are good for *pitta*, as ghee nourishes the nerves as well as the skin
- Useful herbs for internal use include rose, chamomile, coriander, cumin, sandalwood, aloe vera, amalaki, turmeric, shatavari, guduchi, punarnava, manjishta, neem, burdock and chicory root
- Cook with cooling spices such as fennel, cumin and coriander





## Taking Care of *Kapha* Skin

*Kapha* skin tends to be thick and oily, and is prone to accumulating fluid and *ama* (toxins) under the skin. It is helpful to regularly undergo periods of detoxification to flush toxins from the system and keep the skin clear.



Using bentonite clay as a facial scrub is a good way to stimulate the circulation in the skin and aid cleansing. Inhalation of oils in steam and steaming the face can also be useful to remove toxins.

Other suggestions for caring for *kapha* skin

- Take plenty of exercise on a regular basis to improve the circulation
- Avoid having too much sleep, sleeping in the daytime or late in the morning, as it increases the accumulation of fluid and toxins in the body
- Eat plenty of organic vegetables and fruits
- Eat less sweet, sour and salty foods and drinks, and increase bitter, pungent and astringent herbs and foods
- Have your drinks and foods warm or hot and avoid cold foods, drinks and ice
- Avoid too many sweet foods or deep-fried foods, as they are too heavy and increase oiliness
- Add plenty of warming spices such as ginger and black pepper to your cooking to stoke the digestive fire and inhibit the accumulation of *ama* (toxins) in the body
- Useful herbs for internal use include thyme, hyssop, rosemary, ginger, elecampane, punarnava, turmeric, gotu kola, pippali, asafoetida, haritaki and guduchi
- The best tonic (*rasayana*) for the digestion is Trikatu, which is composed of ginger, black pepper and long pepper
- A daily warm oil massage using sesame oil can also aid the circulation



## Treatment of Skin Disease

If one can broadly categorise skin problems into 3 types, *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*, then the treatment is fairly straight forward and generally works well. It is not hard to see how most skin problems fall easily into these categories:

- *Vata* skin problems tend to be dry, itchy and scaly. They are aggravated by cold and stress, and often associated with distension, gas or constipation. They are also aggravated by wind and dryness and can be relieved by the application of oils, especially sesame
- *Pitta* skin conditions are hot, inflammatory or infected, aggravated by heat, exposure to the sun and heating foods. They reflect a state of heat and toxicity in the body and are often accompanied by indigestion and irritability. They are aggravated by application of most oils
- *Kapha* skin conditions tend to be cool, clammy and oozing, and are often accompanied by mucous congestion, lethargy and sluggish metabolism. They are aggravated by cold and damp weather, dairy products and sugar and application of oils

Skin diseases are more common in *pitta* types as *pitta* governs most of the functions of the skin. Also *pitta* can overheat the blood and predispose to toxic conditions which are expressed through the skin.

Factors underlying skin problems include incorrect diet, overuse of sour, salty, or pungent tastes, too much heavy, sweet or oily food, over-exposure to the elements and overuse of cosmetics, perfumes and synthetic creams.



### ***General Treatment of Skin Problems***

The skin mainly relates to plasma (*rasa dhatu*), and to blood (*rakta dhatu*). Skin diseases, therefore, relate to the lungs and the liver. The use of expectorants and diaphoretics to cleanse the lungs, and blood cleansers and bitter tonics to cleanse the liver, are important in the treatment of skin conditions.



Useful herbs include turmeric, dandelion, barberry root bark, sandalwood and guggul for acute cases. For chronic cases, tonic herbs such as bala, licorice root, shatavari and gokshura are recommended, once diet and gentle detoxifying herbs have been used and the tongue is clean.

Turmeric, with its anti-inflammatory action, is one of the best herbs for all skin problems. A key constituent, curcumin, has been shown to have anti-inflammatory, antibacterial and antioxidant effects in vitro (*Araujo CC et al 2001*) whilst combined curcuminoids appear to help protect epidermal skin cells from free radical stress (*Bonte F et al 1997*). Being a polyphenol, the compound curcumin stabilises collagen (*Landis & Khalsa 1998*). It is in fact good for all connective tissue.





Turmeric can be used both orally and topically. It is used to enhance healing after surgery, it reduces adhesions and minimises scar formation, possibly by reducing over-proliferation of fibroblasts (*Phan TT et al 2003*). It is particularly applicable to the treatment of inflammatory skin problems such as eczema and *Herpes*, since it reduces heat and cleanses the liver. It also has healing properties and acts as a good insecticidal remedy (see scabies P 86).

One of the first signs of a skin problem is dryness and lack of lustre which reflects an impairment of skin function. I have found that regular massage using oils as in the Ayurvedic tradition, helps to keep the skin in good condition. Sesame oil is particularly indicated in dry skin and coconut oil for a tendency to heat and inflammation.

Ghee is considered excellent for external use in skin problems such as rashes and burns. In India it is prepared by placing ghee in a copper vessel with half the amount of water to ghee. It is kept for a month and stirred occasionally with a copper spoon. Ghee prepared in this way is considered much more absorbable by the skin.

Aloe vera gel is another beneficial application for most skin problems, as is the juice of coriander leaves. Saffron is a specific herb for nourishing the skin and is taken internally as a milk decoction,  $\frac{1}{4}$  gm per cup, and also used in external skin preparations.



### ***Treatment of Vata Skin Problems***

- Follow an anti *vata* diet, increasing sweet, sour and salty foods and reducing pungent, bitter and astringent foods
- Laxative herbs such as psyllium and flax seeds, and oil enema therapy are generally used, followed by *vata*-soothing herbs such as gokshura and bala
- Triphala powder mixed in warm water or triphala guggul capsules can be given before bed
- Soothing oils such as sesame can be applied to the skin



*Gokshura*

### ***Treatment of Pitta Skin Problems***

- Follow an anti-*pitta* diet, increasing sweet, bitter and astringent foods and reducing pungent, sour and salty foods
- Avoid possible allergens such as dairy produce, vegetables from the nightshade family, as well as oranges, peaches and strawberries
- Coconut water and coriander leaf juice are helpful
- Exposure to sun and heat is best avoided
- Bitter cleansing herbs such as burdock root, red clover, gotu kola, guduchi, manjishta and laxative herbs such as dandelion root and triphala can be helpful
- Bitter and astringent herbs such as kutki, musta, neem and sandalwood are particularly indicated, as is the renowned formula Sudarshan. These bitter herbs can be mixed with ghee to be taken as medicated ghee paste
- Sandalwood and barley decoction also cool *pitta*



### *Externally*

Helpful therapies for external application include:

- Sandalwood and bakuchi (*Psoralea corylifolia*) in oils, creams, or the powder made into a paste, has a cooling anti-inflammatory effect
- I use a cream that contains sandalwood, neem and turmeric which is effective
- Baths with herbs of musta, bakuchi and triphala can be useful
- For inflamed or hot, burning skin problems, try applying a traditional formula composed of triphala decoction mixed with sandalwood, pippali, turmeric, musta, red sandalwood, licorice root, vasaka and ghee
- Other useful oils for external application include coconut, gotu kola and bhringaraj
- Aloe vera gel and rosewater applied to the skin will cool heat



*Gotu Kola*



*Bakuchi*





### ***Treatment of Kapha Skin Problems***

- Follow an anti-*kapha* diet, increasing pungent, bitter and astringent foods and reducing sweet, sour and salty foods
- Avoid all heavy, greasy and oily food, particularly cheese and yogurt.
- Oils are best avoided both internally and externally
- Diuretic herbs such as dandelion leaf or root, punarnava and gokshura are useful
- Triphala guggul capsules can be given before bed
- A formula called Gokshuradi guggulu is also used with warm water or ginger tea
- Neem oil used on the skin is often effective



*Guggul*

### **Eczema**

Eczema or *vicharchika*, is a form of *kushta*. It is primarily caused by aggravation of *kapha* and secondary involvement of *vata* and *pitta*. In fact, simultaneous excesses of all 3 *doshas* are involved in all forms of skin disease, but some *doshas* are predominant for each variety. The *dosha* that is predominant is balanced first and then the other *doshas* are treated afterwards.

***Vata type:*** The skin tends to be rough, dry, hard, itchy and scaly. There may be associated constipation, wind and distension. The skin is aggravated by cold, wind, dryness and stress.

***Pitta type:*** There tends to be burning, redness, oozing, swelling and infection which can be associated with fever, irritability and a feeling of heat. The skin is aggravated by heat and oil.

***Kapha type:*** The skin tends to be cold, raised, sticky, oozing, swollen and itchy with a pale complexion and aggravated by cold, damp and oil.



### **General Treatment of Eczema:**

- Tepid decoctions of sariva, turmeric, manjishta, gokshura, triphala, bhringaraj, gotu kola and sandalwood are recommended for internal use
- Useful formulae include: Kaishore guggulu, Nimbadi churna, Manjishtarishta and Sarivadiarishta
- Tea or juice of tulsi leaves can be taken internally and used externally to bathe the skin
- If constipated, use ½ tsp of triphala powder in ½ cup warm water at night

### **Externally**

Topical preparations can be applied to help resolve inflammation and infection and to restore normal skin function. To moisten dry skin, use sesame oil or almond oil with a few drops of essential oil of chamomile or neem oil. Add two drops of oil to 5 mls of base oil. This can also be used as a bath oil.

### **Other local applications:**

- Aloe vera gel
- Evening primrose oil
- Karanja oil (from the seeds of *Pongamia pinnata*)
- The affected area can be cleaned daily with warm water boiled with neem bark. After this a paste of neem bark should be applied over it and allowed to dry, or neem oil can be used
- Turmeric is excellent remedy, either used externally on affected areas mixed with aloe vera gel and internally ½ tsp of turmeric powder twice daily in milk

### **Diet:**

Avoid sour and salty foods as well as pickles, chilli, dairy products especially cheese and yoghurt. Bitter foods like bitter gourds and drumstick, dandelion coffee and chicory are useful. Drinking plenty of chamomile tea can help



### *Treating Vata Type Eczema*

A *vata*-reducing diet and lifestyle is recommended as well as sesame oil massage and castor oil laxatives or enemas. Nourishing and cleansing herbs including triphala, guggulu, shatavari and cardamom can be taken internally. A combination of chitrak, guduchi, cardamom and punarnava can be helpful.



*Punarnava*

### *Externally*

Medicated ghee can be used internally and externally. Useful herbs for medicating the ghee include triphala, musta, manjishta, gokshura, chitrak, neem, guduchi, cardamom, punarnava and calamus root. Decoctions of these herbs can also be mixed with sesame oil and applied topically.

### *Treating Pitta Type Eczema*

A *pitta*-reducing diet and lifestyle is recommended as well as cleansing the bowels using triphala powder. Nightshade foods, oranges, peaches and strawberries, sour and hot spicy foods are best avoided.



Recommended herbs for internal use include gotu kola, chirata, aloe vera juice, manjishta and amalaki. Gotu kola is a herb I use frequently in the treatment of a range of different skin problems. By increasing the micro-circulation to the skin it brings nutrients and carries away toxins and wastes, and in this way helps resolve inflammation and improve skin function.





### *Treating Kapha Type Eczema*

A *kapha* reducing diet and lifestyle is recommended. In India emetic therapy with kutja, neem and honey is used as the first line of treatment. In the West expectorant herbs such as thyme, elecampane or hyssop may be used instead of emetics.

Heavy, greasy and oily foods including cheese, yogurt and oil massage should be avoided.



*Elecampane*

Useful herbs for internal use include gokshura, guggulu, triphala, manjishta, ginger, chitrak, guduchi, cardamom, kushta, gotu kola and punarnava.

Siddhartha (mustard) is said to be effective used externally for weeping eczema. It is often combined with snuhi (*Euphorbia nerifolia*) in the form of a paste along with internal administration of khadir (*Acacia catechu*).



*Khadir*



## *Urticaria*

Urticaria is known as *sheeta pitta* (cold bile disease) in Ayurveda. It is said that disturbance of *agni* and either or all of the *doshas* can be behind this problem. It is aggravated by drinking cold water after taking exercise, exposing the body to cold when it is hot, exposure to cold wind or mental excitement. The most probable cause is when *pitta* is disturbed and either *kapha* or *vata* are aggravated. Another possible cause is said to be intestinal worms.



*Pitta*-aggravating foods such as citrus fruit, cheese, yoghurt, strawberries, chocolate, tomatoes, fish (especially shell fish), foods high in salicylates, nuts, and artificial colourings can spark off the condition, as can certain drugs including aspirin and penicillin. It can sometimes be brought on by contact with substances such as animal dander, pollen, make-up, creams, insect stings and even strong sunlight.



Urticaria, also known as hives, causes a rash similar to a nettle sting. The eruptions have a red base and white lumps on top, which can be itchy. The rash can affect any area of the body, but if it affects the mouth or lips, it can lead to swelling of the tongue or throat (angio-neurotic oedema), which can cause serious breathing or swallowing problems. Sometimes the skin rash can be accompanied by joint pains.





Very often hives occur and disappear again within a few hours of exposure to exciting causes such as allergens, and it is quite clear which substance you are allergic to; too many strawberries for example. However, some people have frequent bouts of hives, which can last for weeks. It is important to identify the exciting cause / allergen and remove it, but if the bout is long lasting there may be more than one substance involved or it may be related to a systemic fungal infection (*Candida*), and it will require more thorough treatment of the gut and the immune system.



#### ***To Treat Urticaria***

- A teaspoon of turmeric, mixed in a glass of milk or water, can be given to clear heat and toxins 2-3 times per day. Turmeric has long been praised in India as the best remedy for urticaria and regular use of turmeric in cooking is said to prevent attacks
- Another famous herb for skin problems such as urticaria is khadir (*Acacia catechu*)
- Other remedies used include Kaishore guggulu, Nimbadi churna (contains neem and other spices). Also Manjishtarishtha (containing manjishta) or Sarivadasava (containing sariva)
- A tea made from tulsi leaves or the juice of the fresh leaves is given to purify the blood





- Avoiding sour and salty foods and a *pitta*-reducing diet is recommended. Bitter foods and herbs are particularly useful, including drumsticks, karela (bitter gourds) and aloe vera juice
- Mint tea taken internally will help relieve the itching
- If there is constipation, ½ tsp of triphala or haritaki is given in lukewarm water at night
- 5 drops of castor oil taken on an empty stomach (in ½ cup of any vegetable or fruit juice, or in plain water) is considered beneficial for allergies affecting the gut, skin and nasal passages and for treatment of worms

### *Externally*

- Turmeric powder can be mixed with sesame oil and massaged over the affected area once or twice a day
- You can also rub the affected parts with mustard oil mixed with powdered rock salt
- In India daily application of crushed fresh tulsi leaves mixed with black clay is used, or tulsi juice is applied over affected areas
- Neem oil or the juice of the leaves mixed with ghee applied to the skin can also be effective



*Peppermint tea*



### *Prickly Heat*

Prickly heat is an itchy and irritating skin condition that affects some people at the onset of hot weather, particularly when lying out in the hot sun. It develops as a rash of little red or pink spots, which are raised resembling urticaria, and can develop small blisters.

Prickly heat occurs on exposed parts of the body, particularly the trunk, shoulders, neck and arms. The rash is made worse by sweating, and possibly by the interaction between sun creams and sunlight. If you are prone to this, it is better to keep covered up and in the shade rather than out in the hot sun and to avoid non-organic sun blocks which could be potentially toxic.

In Ayurveda, prickly heat is known as a type of *pidaka*. People with a *pitta* type constitution are most likely to get this problem; they have an inability to cope with extra heat because of excess internal heat. This can, in some cases, be related to excess heating foods in the diet, poor bowel function or a congested, toxic system. The removal of heating foods, such as garlic, onions and spices, citrus fruits and milk produce from the diet can often bring speedy relief.



### ***Treatment of Prickly Heat***

Treatment relies on instigating a *pitta*-reducing diet, avoidance of heat and humidity, and keeping out of the sun. Herbs to reduce *pitta* and clear heat and toxins include turmeric, mint, chamomile, gotu kola, guduchi, manjishta, neem and sariva.



*Chamomile tea*

### ***Externally***

- Bathing the skin with an infusion of tulsi or neem leaves or a decoction of sandalwood can be helpful.
- A traditional recipe for prickly heat is made from equal parts of sandalwood, coriander seeds, musta (*Cyprus rotundus*) root and khus-khus grass root. These powdered herbs can be mixed together with rosewater or cold water and rubbed on the body.
- The juice of purslane (*Portulaca oleracea*) is cooling and soothing and can be applied externally.
- Lavender oil is a wonderful remedy for burning and can be mixed with aloe vera gel and applied regularly to ease discomfort.

### ***Sunburn***

Over-exposure of the skin to ultraviolet radiation can cause an acute inflammatory reaction. In addition, the use of chemical products in sun creams on the skin may contribute to weakening of the cells in the skin and predispose to burning. According to Ayurveda, those with a *pitta* predominant constitution have the most sensitive skins and are more prone to sunburn.





Generally, sunburn involves first-degree burning of the skin, and this can be helped considerably by herbs and natural medicines. When burning is more severe there may be symptoms such as dizziness, nausea, blisters, oversensitivity to light and peeling of the skin. Repeated burning of the skin can prematurely age the skin, cause wrinkles and predispose to skin cancer.

To avoid burning the skin, neem oil can be applied. Neem is reported to have the ability to act as a sun block and thereby help to protect the skin (*Lad V, 1999*). It can be applied to the skin before and after showering or bathing. To make neem oil use 2-3 drops of pure neem oil in a tsp of sesame oil.

In India they recommend children drink coconut water or coconut milk and follow a *pitta*-reducing regime to clear heat in summer. Coconut oil can also be used for daily massage, before and after bathing.

### ***To Treat Sunburn***

First, the affected skin needs to be bathed with cold or tepid water to reduce the heat and inflammation. Then any of the following applied:

- Aloe vera gel
- Coconut oil
- Ghee
- Cool cow's or goat's milk
- Calendula ointment
- Chickweed ointment
- The pulp of pulverised lettuce leaves
- Comfrey juice or ointment
- Cucumber juice
- Lavender oil
- Plain, natural yoghurt.
- A cooling paste of equal parts of sandalwood and turmeric powder mixed with a little water is very effective but note that it will stain the skin for a couple of days and it can also stain clothes.

To aid cooling the body, certain herbs can be taken internally including coriander leaf gotu kola, chamomile, manjishta, sariva and karela.





*Chamomile*



*Neem*

### ***Skin Infections***

When the defence mechanisms in the skin are impaired for any reason, the skin may become infected by bacterial, fungal or viral organisms. Bacterial infections include abscesses, boils and impetigo. Viral infections include warts and verrucae and *Herpes*. Fungal infections include athlete's foot (ringworm) and *Monilia* (thrush).

While it is important to distinguish one condition from another and to treat it accordingly, it is also necessary to treat the skin constitutionally, for only a poor skin is prone to infection. The skin reflects internal health and one should look into not only one's nutritional status, but also to the general level of health and emotional tendencies especially where there are recurrent skin infections or slow healing infections.

### ***Abscesses***

An abscess is a collection of pus, made up of white blood cells which have attacked bacteria invading the body, and the ensuing debris. These cells collect together, forming a boundary to block off a diseased area from the rest of the body to prevent the infection from spreading. The abscess can be small and superficial as at a fingertip, or can develop more deeply in the body, in an internal organ. The body needs to cleanse itself of the pus, so it discharges itself by bursting spontaneously through the surface nearest to it. The area around an abscess may be hot, swollen, red, inflamed and tender. In deep abscesses there may be fever and general malaise.



## **Boils**

An abscess in the skin is a boil. A pimple is a small boil. Boils are tender, red, inflamed areas, which develop from *Staphylococcal* infection of hair follicles or sebaceous glands. As the lump filled with pus comes to the surface of the skin, it comes to a head, which usually bursts after a few days or spontaneously resolves itself. Boils often come in crops, as bacteria can infect several surrounding hair follicles, and they tend to occur in areas of pressure (on the buttocks, armpits, the back or around the neck where a collar rubs the skin, for instance) where they can be very uncomfortable and often quite painful. A carbuncle is a larger abscess, which results from the infection spreading from several boils joined together.

Abscesses, boils and pimples should never be squeezed as this may push the infection further into the skin and introduce new infection. They should be allowed to come to a head on their own, and you can encourage them to do this naturally in several different ways. Consult your practitioner if a boil does not come to a head within a few days, or if red streaks spreading outwards from it appear, as this means the infection is spreading.



Generally, spots, boils and abscesses are caused by *ama* (toxins) and tend to be associated with high *pitta*. This can be brought about by eating excess *pitta*-increasing foods, particularly fatty, fried, salty or sweet foods. Over-exposure to heat as in very hot baths, showers, saunas and hot sun can also contribute. *Pitta* emotions of anger, resentment, jealousy, over-competitiveness or suppression of emotions will raise internal heat.

Other *doshas* can be involved however. To differentiate, *pitta* type boils are characterised by heat, redness and swelling associated with thirst and other signs of high *pitta* such as intolerance of heat, anger and irritability.





*Kapha* type boils tend to be large with much pus, and associated with feelings of heaviness, dullness, laziness and a tendency to phlegm. *Vata* type boils are smaller, hard, dry and more painful. They take some time to come to a head and may migrate to other areas in the body. They are caused by windy, dry, cold weather, constipation, stress and other *vata*-aggravating factors.

Repeat attacks of boils demand particular attention. They indicate impaired resistance to infection and a generally run-down, congested and toxic state. This may be related to a poor diet, a sedentary life-style, excessive fatty foods and poor fat metabolism. In some cases, they can be a sign of more serious illness, such as diabetes. If they do not clear with treatment, consult your practitioner.



### ***Treatment of Abscesses and Boils***

A detoxifying diet is recommended with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables. Avoid all dairy produce, bread, sweets, fried and oily foods, stale and junk food and refined carbohydrates. Hot spices should be avoided, but mild spices such as turmeric, black cumin, cumin and coriander are recommended.

For *pitta*-type boils, cooling herbs can be given to clear heat and toxins including rose, turmeric, guduchi, manjishta, kutki, barberry, neem, bhringaraj, gotu kola and sariva. Aloe vera juice is recommended, mixed with a little turmeric powder. Lemon grass and chamomile tea taste pleasant and help to clear inflammation. Coriander leaf and seed can be regularly added to food.



For *vata*-type boils, a *vata*-reducing diet is advised as well as laxatives to clear toxins from the bowel. Triphala (½ teaspoon full in warm water at night) is recommended. Triphala guggulu combines myrrh with triphala and is particularly cleansing. Guggul is said to scrape *ama* out of the tissues.

For *kapha*-type boils, warming spices to rekindle the digestive fire and expectorant herbs to clear phlegm from the system are advised. Herbs such as long pepper, black pepper, ginger, cinnamon, black cumin, angelica and cardamom can be combined with bitter herbs to clear *ama* such as neem, turmeric, katuka and guduchi. Triphala is also recommended.



*Black Cumin*

### ***Externally***

Any treatment of boils needs to consist of external treatment to draw out the pus, combined with internal remedies to clear the hot, congested state of the tissue.

Hot poultices can be applied to the area three times daily to bring the boil to a head. They can be left in place for an hour or so. Poultices can be prepared using either fresh, dried or powdered herbs mixed with warm water to make a paste. Neem, turmeric, red sandalwood, burdock (leaves or root), plantain, slippery elm, cumin seeds, cooked onion or garlic can all be useful.



Moisten the dried herbs and mash them in hot water (or mash and heat the fresh herbs). Add a few drops of essential oil of eucalyptus, black cumin or thyme. Place the herb on a gauze pad and apply. Cover with a clean firm bandage or dressing. Remove between applications to allow air to the area, and to stop the skin becoming too moist.



Continue to apply whichever remedy you choose daily until the boil or abscess has discharged, the pain has resolved and the boil has cleared. If the boil is particularly stubborn, it may require lancing by the doctor.

The affected area can also be washed with triphala tea. Boil 1 teaspoon of triphala in 1 cup of water. Allow it to cool, wash the affected area and let it dry on the skin. Sandalwood oil can also be applied to the forehead to cool *pitta*.



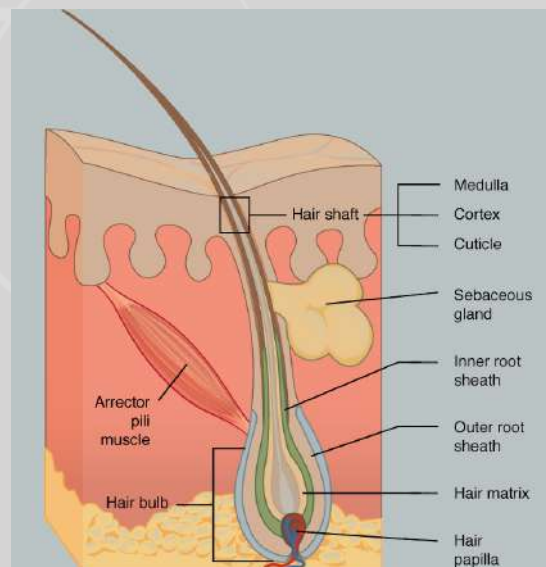


## *Acne*

Acne vulgaris is a skin condition characterised by the eruption of blackheads and red pimples on the face and sometimes on the neck and upper back. According to Ayurveda, it occurs due to the accumulation of *ama* (toxins) and high *pitta* moving under the skin. The possible *pitta*-inducing causes include hormonal changes typical in pubescent youth, pre-menstrual hormonal surges, exposure to harmful chemicals, *pitta*-aggravating diet, and emotional stress. Bacterial infection of the skin may also be a factor. Identifying the underlying causes is important for treatment to be effective.



With the change of hormones at puberty, the glands in the skin increase and become more active, producing more sebum from the sebaceous glands and more sweat from the sweat glands. Over-active sebaceous glands in a high *pitta* teenager or young person make the skin oily, particularly on the face, back and chest. Usually the sebum passes through the glandular canals to the skin's surface but during adolescence, an overload of hormones and the increased production of oily sebum can cause the canals to become clogged and form a dark plug known as a blackhead.



Increased hormone production at this time can also cause an increase in bacteria that live in the glandular canals, specifically *Propionibacterium acnes*. This can cause blackheads to become infected and inflamed, forming raised red spots or pus filled pimples. In severe cases the inflammation in the sebaceous gland follicle can be so extensive as to cause a cyst, which is more likely than a spot to leave a scar.



Acne vulgaris is common between the ages of 12 and 20, after which time the hormones should have settled down. However, it is even possible for a baby to have acne; when withdrawing from the mother's hormones, the baby's oil glands

can become enlarged and spots can develop on the face, back and chest. They can last for a few weeks and then disappear spontaneously with no treatment.

Poor digestion associated with eating the wrong foods causes the accumulation of *ama* in the digestive tract, and this contributes to disturbance of the gut flora and leaky gut syndrome. This can cause leakage of toxins from the bowels into the system which are then excreted via the skin. This underlies the food intolerances which are often associated with the development of acne. Sluggish bowels and constipation will only aggravate the tendency to accumulation of toxins in the system.



Over-hot baths and showers can upset the function of the skin by aggravating *pitta*. Excess heat causes dilation of the blood vessels and congestion of circulation in the skin. Washing the face in tepid or cool water is better. Rose water is ideal.

The mistake that many teenagers make is that acne is related to uncleanliness and if they wash their faces more it will help clear the skin. It could in fact make things worse, for the body may respond to constant washing away of natural sebum on the skin by producing more!

Acne can be aggravated by many commonly used cosmetics, cleansers and moisturisers that contain mineral oils, artificial colours and fragrances, alcohol and nitrates that further block the oil glands. Taking certain drugs including steroids, the contraceptive pill and anticonvulsants can aggravate acne, as can excess iodine, as in iodised salt.



### *Treatment of Acne*

Although acne manifests itself on the skin, it is caused by internal imbalance rather than anything external. Healing also needs to come from within.

It is best to follow a *pitta*-pacifying diet: increase foods with sweet (not sugar), bitter and astringent tastes and avoid foods that taste pungent, sour and salty. Avoid spicy, fermented foods and salty, fried foods, all dairy products and citrus fruits. Choose foods such as oatmeal, rice and sweet vegetables cooked with mild spices to ease digestion and clear toxins from the gut.





A diet high in vegetable fibre and a little fermented food, such as coconut kefir and miso, will help to keep the bowels moving and support the beneficial bacteria in the gut.

Acne sufferers need to be encouraged to take regular exercise in the fresh air as the skin needs to sweat to excrete toxins. Lack of exercise makes the circulation sluggish. By increasing the circulation through exercise and sweating, toxins will be excreted more quickly from the body.



One of the major contributing factors of acne is emotional stress, particularly fiery emotions such as anger and frustration which can disrupt hormone balance. Stress allows toxins to gather in the system and creates an increased need for nutrients, which the diet may not meet. Rest and relaxation, as well as yoga and meditation are recommended. It is also good to avoid frequent trips to the mirror when the skin is inflamed as this may increase the negative feelings about yourself which may make the condition worse. Fresh air, sunshine and sea bathing will help remedy acne and should also help to alleviate stress.



Breathing exercises can be cooling and help reduce *pitta*, particularly the moon breath which involves breathing through the left nostril for 5-10 minutes. Cover the right nostril with thumb or forefinger and breath through the left.

### *Useful Herbs*

By enhancing the function of the liver, the major detoxifying organ of the body, bitter herbs such as bhringaraj, neem, kutki and guduchi help clear wastes and toxins from the blood that might otherwise be excreted via the skin. The liver also plays a significant role in the maintenance of hormone balance.



*Bhringaraj*

Other herbs to pacify *pitta* include gotu kola, sariva, sandalwood, amalaki, chamomile and shatavari. These can be used singly or in combinations of your choice. Mix ½ tsp of the powder with a little warm water and take 2-3 times a day after meals.

To remove toxins from the body and keep your colon clear, take amalaki (one of the herbs in triphala), ½ - 1 tsp with warm water before bed. You can also drink aloe vera juice, ½ cup twice a day.



Chaste tree (*Vitex agnus castus*) is an excellent remedy to help balance hormones. It works primarily on the pituitary gland and has a predominantly progesteronic effect. In my experience, it needs to be taken daily over a period of about 3-6 months for lasting results. I normally prescribe ½ tsp of tincture in the morning half an hour before breakfast.

Diuretic herbs such as gokshura and punarnava aid elimination of toxins via the kidneys. Tea made with cumin, coriander and fennel is a good diuretic and tastes pleasant. Simmer 1 tsp of each of the seeds in 600 mls of water for 10 minutes on a low heat, strain and drink a cupful 3 times a day. Relaxants could be considered where stress is involved. Chamomile, vervain, gotu kola, bacopa, shankapushpi and rose are all worthy of consideration.





### *Externally*

To reduce excess oiliness and infection in the skin, use tepid or cold infusions of neem, triphala, plantain, calendula, elderflower, chamomile, rose water or distilled witch hazel.

A masque made with green or bentonite clay mixed with a little water or rose water to make a paste can be applied to the face for 10-15 minutes and then rinsed off. Repeat once a week.

Alternatively, you could make a healing paste for the skin using equal parts of sandalwood powder, turmeric powder and ground almonds with either goat's milk or rose water. Once mixed, apply to the skin and leave it for 20 minutes or until it dries out, then wash it off.





## *Psoriasis*

Psoriasis is chronic skin problem characterized by rather unsightly, red / pink, dry raised areas (plaques or papules) of various sizes covered with silvery scales. The extent of it can vary from a few tiny areas to covering the entire body. It may be associated with a form of inflammatory polyarthritis. Psoriasis can attack fingernails, leaving them discoloured, pitted, cracked or split. It is generally an intermittent condition, following a pattern of relapses and remission and can flare up at times of physical illness or emotional stress.

Ayurvedic practitioners classify psoriasis as a *kushtha* health condition. This means the condition is a chronic one, which is also *krucchasadhya* (intractable) and *asadhya* (incurable).



From a Western perspective, psoriasis is a complex auto-immune skin problem that has at its origin a disturbance of the gut flora and the immune system, in which normal skin cell growth is accelerated so that cells build up on the skin in raised clumps.

Psoriasis can be hereditary, and may be initially the result of depletion from stress or shock. It can also be triggered by excess alcohol, sunburn, skin injury, a *Streptococcal* throat infection, sluggish liver function and prescribed drugs.

According to Ayurvedic texts, psoriasis results from disturbance of *vata* and *kapha*. *Vata* causes the dryness and skin scaling, while *kapha* is responsible for the itching and rapid skin cell turnover that psoriasis is known for. It is related to a background of low *agni* (digestive fire) and chronic *ama* causing gut toxicity, dysbiosis (disturbance of the gut flora) and leaky gut syndrome. This gives rise to a state of generalised toxicity in the body and predisposes to food intolerances and allergies. Poor digestion, irregular food habits, food combinations that are incompatible (such as dairy products with fish), eating too much yoghurt, seafood, sour and salty foods, as well as stress can set it off.

Low digestive fire not only contributes to the accumulation of *ama* but also causes poor absorption which can lead to nutritional deficiencies and these can also play a part in psoriasis. There may be incomplete assimilation of proteins in the diet and poor liver function may be involved.





### ***Treatment of Psoriasis***

Ayurveda generally recommends avoiding meat when treating psoriasis. It is also best to eliminate alcohol, refined sugars and carbohydrates, and avoid any foods likely to trigger allergies (citrus, dairy, corn, gluten and eggs). Eat as many fresh vegetables as possible. Increase your intake of essential fatty acids, particularly omega 3 from oily fish. In addition, avoid foods that are too salty, sour, or acidic.

Black cumin possesses antibacterial and antifungal properties, which may be helpful with gut dysbiosis associated with psoriasis. The seeds can be added regularly to your diet and the oil can be taken as capsules.

Practice relaxation, breathing exercises or meditation to help manage stress levels; gentle exercise like yoga or Tai chi is also helpful. Counselling might be indicated.



### *Useful Herbs*

Herbs containing psoralens such as angelica, bakuchi, wild carrot, celery seed and fennel can help clear the skin, especially in combination with sun bathing.



*Angelica*



*Wild carrot*



*Fennel*

Kutki (*Picrorhiza kurroa*), guduchi, neem and turmeric are bitter and cooling herbs that help to support the liver in its detoxifying work. Neem is one the best blood purifiers and detoxifying herbs. It enhances the immune system and has anti-microbial properties. Leaf extracts are used in antiseptics and can be effectively used in treating psoriasis.



Turmeric relieves the irritation, swelling and inflammation associated with psoriasis. It is also a great remedy for the gut and helps to remedy dysbiosis. Gokshura and licorice root are also useful for itchy, scaly skin.

Formulae such as Kaishor guggulu are often used for cleansing in the treatment of psoriasis. Guggul has an anti-inflammatory actions; it helps remove excess fluids and toxins from the body and penetrates deep into the tissues. It is an effective *kapha* and *vata* pacifying formula.





Deep tissue cleansing known as *panchakarma*, which involves in-house treatment over a few weeks, is recommended. This includes the use of internal and external medications appropriate to the *dosha* involved, including medicated ghee for 5 to 7 days, and cleansing methods such as laxatives or enemas.

Where stress is a factor, herbs can be taken to relax and support the nervous system: including bacopa, California poppy, chamomile, vervain, wild oats, chamomile, licorice, ashwagandha and gotu kola.



### ***Externally***

Jasmine flowers (*Jasminum polyanthum*) can be helpful. The flowers are crushed, made into a paste and applied directly to the inflamed parts to reduce pain and itching.

Other possible topical applications that may relieve inflammation, dryness and discomfort include:

- Apple cider vinegar
- Aloe vera gel
- Evening primrose oil (*Oenothera biennis*)
- Oats or oatmeal baths
- Tea tree oil (*Melaleuca alternifolia*)
- Boswellia (frankincense) cream
- Turmeric paste
- Neem oil or cream
- Soothing oils, such as coconut, almond or olive oil may help to soften the skin and relieve itching and discomfort associated with psoriasis
- A few drops of lavender oil can also be helpful.
- Turmeric can be stirred into the oil and applied. I make a cream with neem oil, turmeric and lavender which I use with success
- Marshmallow or chickweed ointment



### *Warts and Verrucae*

The wart virus produces small hard growths made up of dead cells on the skin. They may disappear spontaneously after weeks, months or even years but their departure can be hastened considerably by using herbs. Warts are particularly contagious where there is moisture, such as in bathrooms and around swimming pools. Those infected are best advised to dry their feet well after bathing and not to walk around barefoot in such places to avoid infecting others.

According to Ayurveda, warts appear when *vata* and *kapha* disturbances combine on the skin. When *vata* predominates, pain and roughness develop. When *pitta* predominates, they look blackish-red. When *kapha* predominates, they are greasy, knotty, and the same colour as the skin.



Several remedies can be applied directly to the wart including:

- Neat lemon juice
- Raw garlic juice
- Yellow juice from the fresh greater celandine plant
- White juice from dandelion stalks or unripe figs
- Tincture of thuja
- Inner sides of broad bean pods
- Oil of tea tree
- Fresh elderberry juice
- Turmeric powder in aloe vera juice can also be applied

The chosen remedy should be applied once or twice daily until the wart disappears. My favourite remedy is greater celandine which I grow in the garden especially for this purpose as it is the fresh juice that works so well, better than an infusion or tincture of the plant. In general, it takes three weeks of once daily applications for the wart to disappear.



Where there are crops of warts or you have a history of reoccurring warts, constitutional treatment may be necessary. Internal treatment needs to include herbs to enhance resistance to infection as well as herbs for the digestion and liver and general cleansing of the system. Burdock, Echinacea, dandelion root, red clover, neem, turmeric, bhringaraj, guduchi and peppermint can be given three times daily as teas or tinctures. Half a teaspoonful of triphala taken three times a day will help clear toxins. Garlic and vitamin C supplements will boost immunity.



### *Herpes and Cold Sores*

Cold sores are tiny fluid filled blisters caused by the *Herpes* virus which lies dormant in the nerve endings after an initial infection. *Herpes* can be caught through oral contact, such as kissing, sharing cooking utensils, drinking cups or cutlery. It can be reactivated when you are run down from physical or emotional stress, infection such as a cold or flu, a fever, pneumonia or due to an unhealthy diet, poor digestion or nutritional deficiencies. Cold sores can also be activated by changes in skin temperature, exposure to hot sun, sun burn or extremes of cold.

If you have a cold sore you need to avoid close contact with others, especially those with other skin problems such as eczema or babies with nappy rash as these can be further complicated by secondary *Herpes* infections. It is also important not to scratch cold sores that irritate or itch as this can introduce a secondary bacterial infection such as impetigo. If this occurs, the cold sores will not clear as they should and could instead become red and inflamed with pus-filled centres.





The initial infection gives rise to blisters around the mouth, followed by painful ulcers inside the mouth and inflamed gums. This can make it difficult to eat and drink, and there may also be fever, malaise, and swollen lymph glands in the neck. A tingling, burning or persistent itch, followed by spots over reddened skin is also a sign that painful blisters will soon appear. Cold sores usually heal within a couple of weeks without leaving a scar.

According to Ayurveda, *Herpes* is a *pitta* disorder arising from disturbance of *rakta dhatu*. Internal treatment is aimed at reducing excess *pitta*, clearing inflammation and toxicity. A *pitta*-reducing diet is advised as well as plenty of cooling foods and drinks such as chamomile tea, fresh coriander, dandelion coffee and aloe vera juice. Decrease foods and drinks tasting pungent, sour and salty and increase those with sweet, bitter and astringent tastes.

### **Useful herbs**

Herbs to clear excess *pitta* and help resolve the viral infection and inflammation include neem, andrographis, guduchi, amalaki, manjishta, licorice, sariva,



shatavari and bhringaraj. Sudarshan is an excellent formula to clear heat and infection and ½ tsp can be mixed with rose water and taken three times daily. Triphala powder is also recommended; ½ tsp in a little warm water before bed.

Licorice has been shown to be active against the *Herpes* virus (*Pompei R et al 1979*) and can be added to chosen herbs to take internally. Licorice cream or paste can also be applied topically to *Herpes* sores. Other useful antiviral herbs include lemon balm, St. John's wort, golden seal, Oregon grape, and pau d'arco.

Aloe vera gel and turmeric can be taken as well as ghee medicated with neem or other *pitta*-reducing herbs such as amalaki, haritaki and pomegranate.



Gotu cola (*Centella asiatica*) has been shown, in an alcoholic extract, to be effective against *Herpes simplex* (Zheng MS 1989). Tannins from the pericarp of pomegranates have been found to be effective against genital herpes (HSV-2) and to have a strong virucidal effect (Zhang *et al*, 1995) and the fruit extract of haritaki has been shown to be effective against *Herpes I* (Kurokawa *et al*, 1995).



### *Externally*

To relieve soreness, itching and burning you can apply:

- A cold compress of cold water or a tea bag
- Aloe vera gel with a little turmeric powder mixed into it
- Fresh bruised leaves of lemon balm or used in infusion
- Melissa or lavender oil
- Calendula, myrrh and golden seal tinctures
- Self heal, gotu kola, manjishta and licorice

Recipe for cold sore cream:

10 drops turmeric oil

10 drops neem oil

10 drops lavender oil

10 drops lemongrass oil

10 mls rose water

Mix into 30g unperfumed ointment or cream base.



### ***Tinea/Athlete's foot***

Tinea or ringworm is a fungal infection that can affect any area of the skin, the hair and the nails, but most commonly it affects the scalp, between the toes and the groin, causing inflammation and intense itching. *Tinea* is highly contagious and can be quite resistant to treatment. Warm, moist conditions are ideal for the growth and spread of the infection, such as in and around swimming pools, changing rooms and bathrooms, or when sweating.



In Ayurveda, ringworm is called *dadru* and those with *kapha-pitta* constitutions who tend to sweat a lot are more prone to it, especially to athlete's foot. When it appears on the skin, it is very often a reflection of a toxic state of the body, particularly a disturbance of the gut flora allowing opportunist fungal infections to flourish. Systemic treatment as well as topical applications are necessary to clear it effectively as it can be stubborn.

### ***Useful Herbs***

Herbs can be given internally to boost immunity, enhance digestion and clear systemic toxins and infection. Turmeric, neem, chitrak (*Plumbago zeylanica*), ginger and triphala can be taken to clear toxins. Add bitter *pitta*-reducing herbs to clear heat including guduchi, aloe vera juice, gotu kola, manjishta and sariva. The formula Sudarshan, whose main ingredient is *swertia chiretta*, is also recommended. At night, ½ teaspoon of triphala in warm water can be taken.







### *Externally*

There is quite a bit of choice when it comes to topical applications. You can use:

- Antimicrobial herbs either in the form of dilute tinctures or in a cream base; neem, black cumin, turmeric and myrrh are all suitable
- Bathing with hot water boiled with neem leaves or applying a paste of neem over the affected areas are popular treatments in India
- Sandalwood powder can also be dusted on to the area
- Garlic, cinnamon, clove and tulsi (Holy basil) also have antifungal properties and can be used in creams and washes
- A plaster of powdered mustard seed, turmeric, trikatu, with yogurt and warm water is a traditional formula
- In India a plaster made from neem, haritaki, sesame and kantkari (*Solanum xanthocarpum*) is used
- You can also use a mixture of aloe vera gel and turmeric powder (1 tsp gel to ½ tsp powder). Apply it morning and night (it is advisable to wear socks in bed to avoid staining bed clothes)

Dry your feet thoroughly after soaking them in your chosen remedy for at least 5 minutes, especially between and underneath the toes. Soaps containing neem and sandalwood can back up your herbal treatment.

I use a cream containing neem, sandalwood and turmeric which I generally find effective, but I always give internal treatments at the same time, particularly addressing low digestive fire and *ama*. Treatment of chronic intestinal *Candida* may be related to stubborn fungal infections on the skin and I find treatment of the digestion to be the best approach. Sugar and yeast-containing foods are best avoided.



## ***Parasitic Infections of the Skin***

### ***Scabies***

Scabies is a contagious skin disease involving a burrowing mite, *Sarcoptes scabiei*. In Ayurveda, scabies is known as *kachchhu* or *pama* and is linked to excess *kapha* and indigestion with high *pitta*. The tiny female mite burrows into the skin and lays eggs, causing intense itching and a rash. Lesions tend to occur most between the finger, in the armpits, genital area, soles of the feet, and on the elbow and knee joints. Some people can get an allergy to the mites and develop urticaria. Itching is aggravated by warmth and so tends to be worse when you get hot, especially in bed.



Scabies is highly contagious and can be hard to eradicate, especially since it takes 6-8 weeks for the symptoms of intense itching to appear. It can occur in epidemics in public places such as university campuses. When the eggs hatch they are passed from person to person by direct skin contact, such as sharing the same bed or even hugging. To discourage the spread of the infection, clothing, bedding and towels need to be kept separate and pets may need to be treated. It is best not to scratch the itchy skin as this may introduce secondary infection.

### ***Treatment of Scabies***

To help reduce inflammation, avoid sugar and sweet foods as much as possible, reduce foods and drinks tasting pungent, sour and salty and increase those tasting bitter and astringent.



Herbs can be taken internally to support the skin and reduce inflammation as well as balance *kapha* and *pitta*. Useful herbs include gotu kola, manjishta, neem, turmeric, bhringaraj, amalaki, manjishta, kutki and chitrak. Jasmine flowers, dried and powdered, are popular in

India for cooling heat and soothing itching. Saffron (*Crocus sativus*) is the herb of choice in India for scabies. The petals of the flowers are used. They have a pungent and bitter taste. They can be applied in an oil and used internally as a powder (1-2 gm mixed in honey) twice daily.







### *Externally*

- The parts of the body affected by scabies can be washed daily with water boiled with neem leaves. Neem oil and soap can also be used. Neem oil can kill the scabies mite and prevent their ability to breed. Its cooling effect eases itching and reduces inflammation.
- Aloe vera gel can help soothe the itching.
- A long hot bath at night followed by brisk drying will open up the pores and burrows. Essential oils (lavender, neem, rosemary or turmeric) can be applied immediately in a base of sesame oil. Put on clean nightclothes and get into bed with clean sheets.
- Alternatively, a paste made from neem and turmeric powder can be applied and left to dry and then washed off later.

Other topical treatments used in India include:

- Sandalwood oil
- Safflower seed oil
- Mustard or coconut oil boiled with garlic
- Sesame oil mixed with amalaki powder
- Ghee medicated with chitrak (*Plumbago zeylanica*)
- Finely powdered turmeric mixed with onion juice and a little water

*Safflower*



These treatments need to be done for at least 4-5 consecutive days. All clothing, towels and bed linen need to be washed thoroughly on a hot wash, ironed afterwards when dry, and left for 3 weeks before using again.

In a study of herbal treatment of scabies, a combination of turmeric and neem applied topically eradicated scabies with 3-15 days in 97% of the subjects treated. (Charles V et al 1992) This formula is also a traditional remedy for ringworm.





### *Head Lice*

Head lice are tiny parasitic insects that feed on blood sucked from the scalp and breed in the hair causing intense itching. They are highly contagious and have become epidemic in school-age children and are fast becoming super lice, resistant to common over-the-counter products. They spread by head to head contact, sharing personal items such as hair brushes, towels and beds.



Nits are the tiny white eggs of lice which can be seen on the shaft of the hair near the scalp where it is warm enough for the lice to breed. A nit takes about 7-10 days to hatch and then the louse can live for about a month.

### *Treating Head Lice*

Each time the hair is washed, plenty of conditioner should be applied and the hair combed through thoroughly with a nit comb to prevent re-infestation. Hairbrushes, combs and towels should be kept separately from other members of the family.

Head lice can be treated affectively in a number of different ways:

- You can dab the scalp with a solution made from 2 tsp cider vinegar mixed with 6 tsp of waster; cover your hair with a towel or cloth, leave over night, and wash out in the morning
- There is an old fashioned but effective remedy made with mint and vinegar to discourage head lice. Add 1 cup of vinegar just off the boil to 2 tsp dried mint leaves, cover and leave to cool. Strain and store in a well sealed bottle. It can be used as a scalp rub /rinse for head lice, dry flaky skin and dandruff



- You can make an oil by diluting essential oils in a base of olive oil or coconut oil and massaging it into the hair and scalp at night, leave on till morning and wash out thoroughly. A number of essential oils including thyme, tea tree, peppermint and rosemary have been shown to be effective *in vitro* against *Pediculus humanus* (Veal L 1996). When the hair is covered with oil, you can use a nit comb to comb through the hair thoroughly and remove the nits
- Dipping the comb in hot vinegar will help to loosen the nits that tend to stick stubbornly to the hair
- I have used a mixture of lavender, geranium, rosemary, eucalyptus and neem oil, 100 drops per 100 mls sesame oil
- You can also use camphor oil
- In India they prepare an oil by infusing neem leaves, holy basil leaves, amalaki berries and a few cloves in coconut oil
- The oil needs to be applied each night for 5 nights, repeated after a week for 2 nights and then the problem should be solved
- Alternatively, you can simply use a nit comb every time you wash and condition your hair and then rinse with holy basil and neem tea
- Massaging your scalp with fresh lemon juice half an hour before washing the hair can also be helpful



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## *Ayurvedic Herbs for Treating the Skin*

**Aloe Vera • Kumari • Indian Aloe**

**Family:** Liliaceae

**Parts used:** Leaves (juice, gel or powder)

**Quality/Guna:** Oily / unctuous, sticky, heavy

**Taste/Rasa:** Bitter, sweet, astringent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha: Gel/Juice:** P- VK= Powder: V+

**Tissue/Dhatu:** All

**Constituents:** Polysaccharides (acemannan and glucomannans), enzymes, vitamins (A, B1, B2, B6, C, E, choline, folic acid), essential amino acids, minerals (calcium, sodium, chlorine, magnesium, zinc), saponins, sterols, salicylic acid, aloinosides (barbaloin, aloins A and B), chrysophanol, aloe-emodin.

**Actions:** Alterative, anti-inflammatory, anthelmintic, digestive, probiotic, laxative, bitter tonic, cholagogue, rejuvenative, immune enhancing, antiviral, antitumour, emmenagogue, diuretic, demulcent, vulnerary.

**Indications:** Worms, dysbiosis, *Candida*, diabetes, fevers, constipation, peptic ulcers, hyperacidity, IBS, inflammatory bowel problems (eg. Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis), hepatitis, dysentery, amenorrhoea, arthritis, menopausal symptoms (eg. hot flushes, mood swings), eye problems, haemorrhoids, coughs, colds, inflammatory skin problems (eczema, urticaria, acne).



### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Amavataghna* – relieves arthritis

*Artavashamana* – regulates menstruation

*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*

*Jwaraghna* – relieves fevers

*Raktapitta* – curbs bleeding from excess *pitta*

*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

The clear mucilaginous gel from inside the leaves has a cooling and soothing action in the body. When mixed with water the gel makes the juice, which is taken for problems associated with heat and inflammation including a range of skin problems, and is an excellent rejuvenative. It is particularly good for excess *pitta* in the blood and for hot fiery people, who are prone to inflammatory problems and tend to feel angry, irritable and self-critical.

Aloe vera is a good bitter tonic for the liver and digestive tract. The juice enhances the secretion of digestive enzymes, balances stomach acid, aids digestion and regulates sugar and fat metabolism. It clears toxins, soothes and protects the gut lining, reduces pain and inflammation and has a mildly antibiotic effect. It supports the gut flora and helps to combat harmful micro-organisms in the gut and to resolve bowel infections and dysbiosis. It can be used for colitis, peptic ulcers, constipation, diarrhoea, IBS and inflammatory bowel problems including ulcerative colitis.





As a reproductive tonic, aloe juice helps regulate periods and relieves *pitta* problems of heavy bleeding, clots, PMS and heat, both physically in the form of hot flushes and emotionally during menopause.

**Externally:** Apply the gel to cuts, abrasions, allergic and inflammatory skin conditions. The gel can also be used to heal burns including sunburn and after radiation therapy. It is used in lotions to rejuvenate the skin and reduce wrinkles, and to soothe pain and speed healing of haemorrhoids. It also soothes inflammatory eye problems.

**Cautions:** The bitter, yellow juice from the rind of the leaves is a powerful laxative; avoid in pregnancy, uterine bleeding and appendicitis. Occasionally the gel causes contact dermatitis. It may interact when taken internally with cardiac glycosides.

**Dosage:** Juice 30-60 mls daily





**Asparagus racemosus • Shatavari • Wild Asparagus**

**Family:** Liliaceae

**Parts Used:** Root

**Quality/Guna:** Heavy, oily / unctuous

**Taste/Rasa:** Sweet, bitter

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** VP– K+

**Tissue/Dhatu:** All tissues

**Constituents:** Saponins, steroidal glycosides (shatavarin I-IV, sarsasapogenin, diosgenin), aglycones, flavonoids (quercetin, rutin, hyperoside), alkaloids (asparagamine), mucilage.

**Actions:** Nutritive tonic, rejuvenative, reproductive tonic, galactagogue, nervine, adaptogenic, antispasmodic, anti-inflammatory, demulcent, refrigerant, diuretic, aphrodisiac, expectorant, antibacterial, alterative, anti-tumour, antacid.

**Indications:** Dysmenorrhoea, menorrhagia, threatened miscarriage, hormonal imbalances, poor milk supply, low libido, low sperm count, infertility, impotence, menopause, nausea of pregnancy, preparation for childbirth, cystitis, dysuria, haematuria, oedema, uterine prolapse, convalescence, underweight, debility, colic, hyperacidity, heartburn, gastritis, diarrhoea, dysentery, dyspepsia, peptic ulcers, colitis, inflammatory gut problems, Crohn's disease, IBS, bacterial infections (*E. Coli*, *Shigella spp.*, *Salmonella spp.*, *Pseudomonas*, *Entamoebae*), joint pains, fevers, sore throats, dry coughs, lowered immunity, fungal infections (eg. *Candida*), *Herpes*, anxiety, insomnia, osteoporosis, broken bones, haemorrhoids, dehydration, neurasthenia, glaucoma, gallstones, iritis, detached retina, conjunctivitis, adhesions in granulation tissue, bulimia.





### **Ayurvedic Actions:**

*Anulomana* – directs the flow of *apana vata* downwards

*Arshoghna* – useful in management of haemorrhoids

*Artavajanana* – promotes menstrual flow

*Atisarajit* – useful in management of diarrhoea

*Badana* – heals broken bones and fractures

*Balya* – increases strength

*Brmhana* – nourishing tonic, anabolic

*Caksusya* – benefits and rejuvenates the eyes

*Hrdaya* – cardiac tonic

*Kshyapaha* – useful in emaciation and under nutrition

*Medhya* – brain tonic, nervine

*Mutrala* – diuretic

*Ojas vardhana* – increases *ojas*

*Prajasthapana* – prevents miscarriage

*Raktapitta* – curbs bleeding from excess *pitta*

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

*Shothahara* – reduces oedema and swelling

*Shukrala* – rejuvenates reproductive system, enhances fertility

*Stanya* – increases breast milk


*Sulaprasamana* – relieves pain and spasm in the gut

*Vajikaranana* – aphrodisiac

*Vayah sthapana* – promotes longevity







An excellent nourishing tonic and the most important *sattvic* rejuvenative for women, shatavari translates “she who possesses a hundred husbands.” It is cooling and moistening, restoring balance when body and mind are overheated and depleted. It soothes dry and inflamed mucous membranes in the respiratory tract, kidneys, stomach, and sexual organs. Shatavari is excellent for balancing female hormones. It increases fertility, relieves PMS, menstrual and menopausal problems including acne, and can be used for low libido and to increase milk supply during lactation.

Shatavari is a great remedy for *pitta* disturbance of the digestive tract. It is used for acid indigestion, gastritis, peptic ulcers, and inflammatory bowel problems. With its thirst-relieving and fluid-protecting powers, it is good for chronic diarrhoea and dysentery. Soothing and cooling for cystitis, it dissolves stones and gravel and reduces fluid retention.

With its adaptogenic properties, shatavari enhances immunity and growth and development in babies and children. It stimulates white blood cells, helping to fight infections, and is a good antifungal, antibacterial and antiviral against *Herpes* and other skin infections. It protects the blood-producing cells in the bone marrow, aiding recovery after exposure to toxic chemicals. It is a good remedy for convalescence and anti-inflammatory for gout and arthritis.

Shatavari has an affinity with the mind and is used to promote memory and mental clarity and for ADHD in children. It is often combined with brain tonics such as gotu kola. It is calming, reduces anxiety and increases resilience to stress.

**Externally:** Shatavari is an ingredient of mahanaryan oil, used to reduce development of scar tissue after surgery, To soothe the skin and ease *vata* problems including stiff and painful joints, stiff neck and muscle spasm.

**Cautions:** High *kapha*, low *agni*, *ama* and excess mucus

**Dosage:** Powder: 3-5 g. twice daily





**Azadirachta indica • Nimba • Neem**

**Family:** Meliaceae

**Parts Used:** Flowers, seeds, leaves, bark, resin

**Quality/Guna:** Light, dry

**Taste/Rasa:** Bitter, astringent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Pungent

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** KP- V+

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rasa / plasma, rakta / blood, medas / fat, shukra / reproductive

**Constituents:** Volatile oil, sitosterol, diterpenoids (margolone, nimbogone, nimbonolone, mimbolinin), gum, bitter principles, polysaccharides (fruit pulp), nimbin, nimbinene, desacetylnimbinene, nimbandiol, nimbolide, quercetin.

**Resin:** margosin, terpenes. **Seed:** 40% stable oil, sulphur.

**Actions:** Febrifuge, antiseptic, vulnerary, anthelmintic, insecticidal, alterative, anti-inflammatory, expectorant, bitter tonic, hepatoprotective, hypoglycaemic, antimalarial, antibacterial, antifungal, antiviral, astringent, anti-fertility, emmenagogue.

**Indications:** Liver damage (from toxins, drugs, viruses), peptic ulcers, acidity, heartburn, gastritis, indigestion, nausea, vomiting, inflammatory gut problems, dysbiosis, *Candida*, worms, diarrhoea, anxiety, stress, irritability, anaemia (helps generate B12 in liver), diabetes, obesity, respiratory infections, mucous congestion, coughs, bronchitis, tuberculosis, infections (chronic/acute), ear infections, fevers, malaria, lymphadenitis, fatty accumulations, inflammatory arthritis, skin disorders (eczema, acne, leucoderma, boils, psoriasis, abscesses), haemorrhoids, fissures, fistulas, inflammatory gynaecological problems, high cholesterol, hypertension, arrhythmias.





### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Amlapittahara* – relieves hyperacidity

*Caksusya* – benefits and rejuvenates the eyes

*Dahaprasamana* – relieves burning

*Grahi* – reabsorbs fluid from the bowel, curbs diarrhoea

*Jwaraghna* – reduces fevers

*Krimipranut* – combats infections

*Krimighna* – eliminates worms and parasites

*Kusthaghna* – alleviates skin problems

*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood

*Raktapitta* – curbs bleeding from excess *pitta*


*Ropana* – heals wounds

Neem is one of the best antiseptic and detoxifying herbs of Ayurveda, excellent for combating infections and symptoms characterised by heat and inflammation. Its bitter taste stimulates appetite and digestion and increases bile flow from liver. It enhances liver function and protects it from injury caused by toxins, drugs, chemotherapy and viruses. It is excellent for acidity, heartburn, indigestion, peptic ulcers, nausea and vomiting, bowel infections, dysbiosis and worms. It regulates metabolism aiding weight loss, and lowers blood sugar.

Neem's cooling effect reduces heat in the mind, relieving anxiety and stress, irritability, anger and depression. It lowers cholesterol and blood pressure and helps regulate the heart. It is used for inflammatory arthritis and for clearing skin problems including eczema, acne, psoriasis, boils and abscesses.







Neem helps clear infection and phlegm in coughs and chest infections and is used to reduce fevers. It is excellent for the prevention and treatment of malaria. A decoction of the seeds is used in India for delayed and painful childbirth as it stimulates uterine contractions and is given as a tonic after childbirth.

**Externally:** The oil is excellent for skin problems and widely used in non-toxic insecticides and in liniments for inflammatory joint and muscle pain.

**Cautions:** Avoid in pregnancy. May reduce fertility and cause nausea and hypersensitivity reactions. Care in diabetic patients on insulin.

**Dosage:** 10–20 ml daily tincture of the leaves. 2 – 4 grams (½ tsp) powdered bark. 5–10 drops oil in a base oil for external use.







**Boerhavia diffusa: Punarnava • Indian hogweed**

**Family:** Nyctaginaceae

**Parts Used:** Root, whole herb

**Quality/Guna:** Dry, light

**Taste/Rasa:** Bitter, sweet, astringent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Pungent

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** VPK= (V+ in excess)

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rasa / plasma, rakta / blood, medas / fat, majja / nerve, shukra / reproductive

**Constituents:** Cellulose, flavonoids (quercetrin, rutin), phytosterols (betasitosterol), alkaloids (punarnavine), acids (arachidic, stearic, palmitic, urosilic), lignans, xanthones, potassium nitrate, punarnavoside, lignans, rotenoid boeravinones.

**Actions:** Alterative, blood tonic, diuretic, rejuvenative, kidney tonic, digestive, carminative, hypoglycaemic, anthelmintic, astringent, anti-haemorrhagic.

**Indications:** Obesity, oedema, congestive heart problems, cardiac asthma, pericardial effusion, pulmonary congestion, adrenal stress, liver enlargement, gout, arthritis, anaemia, urinary tract infections, kidney stones and gravel, diarrhoea, cellulite, colic, worms, hyperglycaemia, haemorrhoids, menorrhagia.





### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Arshoghna* – relieves haemorrhoids

*Asmarighna* – relieves urinary stones and calculi

*Bradhan pranut* – prevents hernias

*Caksusya* – benefits eyes

*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*

*Grahi* – absorbs fluid from the bowel, curbs diarrhoea

*Hrdaya* – heart tonic

*Kasasvasahara* – relieves coughs and breathing problems

*Mutrala* – diuretic

*Pandughni* – useful in anaemia

*Rasayana* – rejuvenating to the urinary system

*Shothahara* – reduces oedema and swelling

*Svedana* – increases sweating

*Vaya sthapana* – promotes longevity

A famous rejuvenative, punarnava increases *ojas*, strengthens the kidneys and increases energy and vitality. It is good for fluid retention associated with excess *kapha*, for bladder infections, kidney stones, oedema from poor cardiac function, and breathlessness. It stimulates the digestion and relieves colic and wind as well as diarrhoea. It helps reduce heavy menstrual bleeding. By reducing *medas dhatu*, it can be used for diabetes and obesity.

Punarnava is used for swollen watery joints, arthritis and gout as well as inflamed and congested skin conditions, as it moves toxins from the joints and tissues and aids their elimination via the kidneys.

**Dosage:** Powder 250-500 mgs twice daily. 3-5 mls tincture 3 times daily.

**Cautions:** Avoid in dehydration, and with sedative, anti-depressive and







**Centella/Hydrocotyle asiatica • Mandukaparni • Brahmi • Gotu kola**

**Family:** Umbelliferae/ Apiaceae

**Parts Used:** Aerial parts

**Quality/Guna:** Light, dry, subtle, sharp, liquid/ spreading

**Taste/Rasa:** Sweet, bitter, astringent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** VPK=

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rasa/ plasma, rakta/ blood, medas/ fat, mamsa/ muscle, asthi/ bone, majja/ nerve

**Constituents:** Essential oil, fatty oil, sitosterol, tannins, resin, gum, tannins, alkaloid (hydrocotyline), bitter principle (vellarine), pectic acid, polyphenols, saponins (braminoside, brahmoside), flavonoids.

**Actions:** Nerve tonic, anticonvulsant, analgesic, sedative, brain tonic, cardiogenic, immuno stimulant, febrifuge, alterative, diuretic, anthelmintic, vulnerary, rejuvenative, hair tonic.

**Indications:** Skin problems (eczema, psoriasis, boils, abscesses, cuts, wounds, post-operative healing, scars, radiation burns, acne, urticaria, ulcers, sclerodema), oedema, cellulite, venous insufficiency, varicose veins, haemorrhoids, anaemia, chronic coughs, catarrh, bacterial infections (*Pseudomonas and Streptococcus spp.*), viral infections (*Herpes simplex*), enlarged lymph glands, fevers, arthritis, gout, childhood infections, urinary problems, emaciation, amenorrhoea, blood toxicity, indigestion, acidity, peptic ulcers, anxiety, mental fatigue, poor memory and concentration, neuropathy, Alzheimer's, stroke, learning problems (ADHD, autism, Asperger's), stress, insomnia, depression, epilepsy, restless legs, cramps, diabetes.





### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Hridaya* – heart tonic

*Krimipranut* – combats infections

*Kusthaghna* – alleviates skin problems

*Medhya* – brain tonic, nervine

*Mutrala* – diuretic

*Nidrajanana* – induces sleep

*Praja sthapana* – improves quality of male and female reproductive tissue

*Raktapitta* – curbs bleeding from excess *pitta*

*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

*Vayah sthapana* – promotes longevity

Another plant named after *Brahma* (see *Bacopa*) because of its *sattvic* and rejuvenative effect on the brain. It enhances memory and concentration and protects against the ageing process and Alzheimer's. It is excellent for high *sadhaka pitta* and children with learning difficulties, eg. ADHD, autism and Asperger's. It relieves stress and anxiety, insomnia and depression, and calms mental turbulence. It supports the adrenals and helps rebuild energy reserves.

Gotu kola strengthens immunity and helps fight off infections including *Pseudomonas*, *Streptococcus* and *Herpes*. Its detoxifying and anti-inflammatory properties are excellent for arthritis, gout and skin problems such as eczema, psoriasis, *Herpes*, boils and acne. It relieves nervous indigestion, acidity and ulcers.





Gotu kola is an important herb for the circulation. After trauma such as surgery it stimulates the microcirculation to the area and speeds healing. It stimulates hair and nail growth, increases tensile integrity of the skin, reduces cellulite and protects skin against radiation. It prevents bleeding, and can be helpful in anaemia. It is used for fluid retention, venous insufficiency, varicose veins and anal fissures.

**Externally:** The fresh juice, a poultice or a decoction of the dried leaves speeds healing of wounds, burns, keloid scars, cervicitis, vaginitis, varicose veins and ulcers, and haemorrhoids. Prepared in coconut oil and applied to the head, it is used to calm the mind, promote sleep, relieve headaches and prevent hair loss; it is applied to the skin in eczema and *Herpes*.

**Cautions:** Can potentiate action of anxiolytics

**Dosage:** Infusion: 2-4 oz. twice daily. Powder: 1-3 g. twice daily







**Commiphora mukul • Guggulu • Indian Myrrh**

**Family:** Burseraceae

**Parts Used:** Gum resin

**Taste/Rasa:** Bitter, pungent, sweet, astringent

**Quality/Guna:** Light, sharp/penetrating, dry, clear, mobile

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Pungent

**Potency/Virya:** Heating

**Dosha:** VPK= (P+ in excess)

**Tissue/Dhatu:** All tissues

**Constituents:** Lipid steroids, lignans, terpenes, sterols (guggulsterone, guggulsterol, beta-sitosterol), essential oil (myrcene, eugenol), gum, calcium, iron, magnesium, zinc.

**Actions:** Anti-inflammatory, alterative, nervine, antispasmodic, analgesic, expectorant, astringent, cardiac tonic, lowers cholesterol, antioxidant, diaphoretic, antimicrobial, immune stimulant, rejuvenative, vulnerary, thyroid stimulant, emmenagogue, metabolic regulator.

**Indications:** Obesity, high cholesterol, atherosclerosis, low thyroid function, diabetes, angina, heart failure, gout, sciatica, lumbago, arthritis, fractures, lowered immunity, deep seated wounds, tumours, toxicity, cysts, lipomas, inflammatory problems, coughs, bronchitis, whooping cough, infections, sore throats, inflammatory skin problems, nodulocystic acne, vitiligo, to prevent stroke/pulmonary embolism, fibroids, endometriosis, PCOS, irregular, painful and heavy periods, clots, indigestion, flatulence, oedema, haemorrhoids, fistula, debility.







**Ayurvedic Actions:**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Amavataghna* – relieves gout and arthritis

*Artavashamana* – regulates menstruation

*Badana* – heals broken bones and fractures

*Balya* – increases strength

*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*

*Lekhana* – scrapes toxins and accumulations from *srotas*

*Medohara* – regulates fat metabolism

*Prameha* – useful in diabetes

*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

*Vajikarana* – aphrodisiac

*Vedanasthapana* – relieves pain

An honoured Ayurvedic remedy for scraping toxins out of the body and lowering harmful cholesterol, guggulu is a wonderful rejuvenative, particularly for *vata* and *kapha*. It inhibits the formation of clots, reduces atherosclerosis and helps to prevent heart disease including angina. It also reduces the risk of stroke and pulmonary embolism.

Guggulu is an excellent remedy for boosting immunity. It increases white blood cell count helping to combat infections, and disinfects secretions including sweat, mucus and urine. Its antimicrobial and antispasmodic properties are helpful in the treatment of coughs, chest infections and whooping cough.





Guggulu is a good anti-inflammatory and cleansing remedy for gout and arthritis, lumbago and sciatica. It is traditionally used for healing fractures and deep-seated wounds, as well as for regenerating nerve tissue. It reduces inflammation in acute and chronic skin disease including nodulocystic acne, and enhances healing.

Guggulu is an excellent herb for the reproductive system. It has the ability to break down growths and tumours such as lipomas, and has an affinity for the lower abdomen, reducing fibroids and cysts, and helpful in the treatment of endometriosis and polycystic ovarian syndrome. It helps regulate the cycle and prevent clotting.


Guggulu is one of the best herbs for digestion and metabolism, especially fat metabolism, and helps to reduce overweight and obesity by regulating the thyroid. It can reduce blood sugar in diabetes.

**Externally:** Guggulu can be used in gargles for tonsillitis and mouth ulcers and in lotions/creams for eczema and acne.

**Cautions:** Can reduce effect of anti-hypertensives eg. Propranolol and Diltiazem; Caution with hypoglycaemic medication. Avoid in acute kidney infections, excessive uterine bleeding, thyrotoxicosis, pregnancy and breast feeding.







**Coriandrum sativum • Dhanya • Coriander**

**Family:** Umbelliferae/ Apiaceae

**Parts Used:** Seeds, leaves

**Quality/Guna:** Light, oily

**Taste/Rasa:** Sweet, bitter, astringent, pungent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling (leaves), warming (seed)

**Dosha:** VPK= especially P-

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rasa/ plasma, rakta/ blood, mamsa/ muscle

**Constituents:** Volatile oil (coriandrol, geraniol, borneol, camphor, limonene, carvone, anethole), resin, malic acid, flavonoids (rutin, quercetin), coumarins (psoralen, angelicin, umbelliferone), alkaloids, phthalides.

**Actions:** Carminative, digestive, antimicrobial, diuretic, decongestant, antispasmodic, antioxidant, alterative, nervine, rejuvenative, aphrodisiac, analgesic, diaphoretic.

**Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Anulomana* – redirects the flow of *apana vata* downwards

*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*

*Hridaya* – heart tonic

*Jwaraghna* – reduces fevers

*Kasasvasahara* – relieves coughs and breathing problems

*Krimighna* – combats worms and parasites

*Kusthaghna* – alleviates skin problems

*Mutrala* – diuretic

*Prameha* – useful in diabetes

*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood

*Sulaprasamana* – relieves pain and spasm in the gut

*Udaraprasamana* – relieves allergies







Coriander is a good remedy for cooling hot, inflammatory *pitta* conditions, including headaches, migraine, muscle pain and neuralgia. It clears heat and *ama* from *rasa* and *rakta dhatus*. In warm tea, the seeds help relieve eruptive infections, fevers, colds, flu, coughs and catarrh, as well as allergies, including eczema and hay fever.

With its affinity with *manovaha srotas*, the nervous system, coriander promotes mental clarity, improves mood and memory and relieves lethargy and anxiety.

The seeds taken in warm food and herbal teas regulate *apana vata*, and can help ease abdominal pain and dysmenorrhoea. They can also be taken to relieve PMS and when taken in cool decoction, for hot flushes. Coriander also clears *ama* and excess *doshas* from *mutravaha srotas*, the urinary system, and can be used to relieve urinary disorders with burning and heat.

Coriander stimulates *agni*, but cools heat. It enhances digestion and absorption, and can be used to relieve a range of digestive disorders including griping, flatulence, heartburn, nervous indigestion, diarrhoea and dysentery. The fresh leaves (cilantro) are rich in antioxidant vitamins and minerals and are excellent for drawing out toxins and clearing inflammatory skin problems.





**Externally:** The juice or cool tea made from the leaves can be used to soothe inflammatory skin conditions and allergic rashes; a gargle can be made from a decoction of the seeds or dilute tincture for sore throats and thrush, and lotions can be made similarly for conjunctivitis.

**Dosage:** The seeds and leaves can be added to food and used in herbal teas in the standard way. A cool decoction can be made by soaking 3 tablespoons of the seeds in a cup of cool water and leaving to stand overnight. Strain and drink first thing in the morning for hot flushes. A cool decoction of the seeds taken three times daily is also best for urinary and a cool infusion of the leaves is best for skin problems.

**Cautions:** Safe when used appropriately. May cause allergic reactions and contact dermatitis. Caution with insulin/hypoglycaemic, sedatives and other CNS depressants.





**Curcuma longa • Haldi • Turmeric**

**Family:** Zingiberaceae

**Parts Used:** Rhizomes

**Quality/Guna:** Dry, light

**Taste/Rasa:** Pungent, bitter, astringent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Pungent

**Potency/Virya:** Heating

**Dosha:** VPK= (PV+ in excess)

**Tissue/Dhatu:** All

**Constituents:** Curcuminoids (curcumin, cyclocurcumin), sesquiterpenes (tumerone, germacrone), bisabolene, curcumene, carotene, zingiberone, stigmasterol, sitosterol, cholesterol, anthraquinone.

**Actions:** Antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, alterative, digestive, analgesic, stimulant, carminative, vulnerary, antibacterial, lowers cholesterol, prevents clotting.

**Indications:** IBS, indigestion, peptic ulcers, poor digestion and absorption, obesity, diabetes, liver problems, gallstones, toxicity, gut infections, dysbiosis, skin problems (eczema, urticaria, psoriasis, acne), fibroids, cysts, endometriosis, dysmenorrhoea, amenorrhoea, leucorrhoea, poor milk supply, inflammatory problems (eg. rheumatoid arthritis, gout), broken bones, poor circulation, high cholesterol, atherosclerosis, infections, fevers, coughs, colds, catarrh, constipation, anaemia.





### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut  
*Artavajanana* – promotes menstrual flow  
*Badana* – heals broken bones and fractures  
*Brmhana* – nourishing tonic, anabolic  
*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*  
*Kandughna* – relieves itchy skin conditions  
*Krimighna* – eliminates worms and parasites  
*Kusthaghna* – alleviates skin problems  
*Lekhana* – scrapes toxins and accumulations from the *srotas*  
*Pandughni* – useful in anaemia  
*Peenasa nashini* – useful in colds and rhinitis  
*Prameha* – useful in diabetes  
*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood  
*Rasayana* – rejuvenative  
*Rochni* – stimulates appetite  
*Ropana* – heals wounds  
*Shirovirechana* – clears congestion in the head  
*Stanyasodhana* – purifies breast milk  
*Varnya* – improves the complexion  
*Vedanasthapana* – relieves pain  
*Vishghna* – alleviates toxic conditions  
*Vishodhani* – purifies all systems of the body

A great aid to digestion, particularly of protein and fats, turmeric promotes absorption and metabolism and helps weight loss. It enhances liver function, aids detoxification and protects the liver against damage from toxins. As a probiotic, it regulates the intestinal flora and can be used after antibiotics and for dysbiosis, worms, indigestion, heartburn, wind, bloating, colic and diarrhoea. It soothes the gut lining, protects it against the effects of stress, excess acid, drugs and other irritants, reducing the risk of gastritis and ulcers. It lowers blood sugar in diabetics.





Turmeric is excellent for the immune system, helping to ward off infections such as colds, sore throats, coughs, flu and fevers. It is good for skin problems including acne and psoriasis, and for kidney and bladder problems. As a powerful antioxidant, it protects against free radical damage and cancer, especially of the colon and breast. It enhances the production of cancer-fighting cells and helps to protect against environmental toxins and the toxic effects of cigarettes.

Turmeric lowers cholesterol levels and inhibits blood clotting, helping to prevent heart and arterial disease. It is a powerful anti-inflammatory, excellent for arthritis. It is valued by those who practice yoga for its beneficial effect on ligaments.

**Externally:** The powder mixed with water or aloe vera gel can be applied to insect bites, inflamed and infected skin problems and wounds. It reduces itching, relieves pain and promotes healing in skin cancer. It also helps to slow the effects of ageing on the skin. It can be used in mouthwashes for inflamed gums and toothache.

**Cautions:** Avoid large doses in pregnancy, peptic ulcers and gall stones. Caution with anticoagulants and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatories.

**Dosage:** 1 – 10 grams powder / 5-15 mls tincture daily







**Eclipta Alba • Bhringaraj • False Daisy**

**Family:** Asteraceae / Compositae

**Parts Used:** Whole plant

**Quality/Guna:** Light, dry, sharp / penetrating, subtle

**Taste/Rasa:** Bitter, pungent, sweet

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Pungent

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** VPK=(mainly VP-)

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rasa / plasma, rakta / blood, asthi / bone, medas / fat, majja / nerve, shukra / reproductive

**Constituents:** Saponins, alkaloids (ecliptine, nicotine), wedelic acid, luteolin, triterpene glycosides (oleanane glycosides, eclalbasaponin, amyirin), flavonoids (luteolin, apigenin, wedelolactone), isoflavonoids, ascorbic acid.

**Actions:** Liver tonic and protective, hypotensive, alterative, purgative, antioxidant, antimicrobial, rejuvenative, febrifuge, anti-inflammatory, haemostatic, anthelmintic.

**Indications:** Liver problems (cirrhosis, toxicity, viral enlargement, hepatitis), skin problems (urticaria, eczema, psoriasis, vitiligo, itching), poor appetite, indigestion, worms, anaemia, eye problems (styes, conjunctivitis, glaucoma), insomnia, stress, mental agitation, poor memory, Alzheimer's, vertigo, dizziness, hearing problems, hypertension, high cholesterol, bronchial congestion, asthma, bronchitis, catarrh, low sperm count, menorrhagia, sexual debility, kidney stones, gallstones, fibrocystic breast disease, poor hair growth, loss / premature greying of hair, scalp irritation, epilepsy, fevers, loose teeth.





### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Caksusya* – benefits the eyes

*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*

*Keshay* – promotes healthy hair

*Krimighna* – eliminates worms and parasites

*Kusthaghna* – alleviates skin problems

*Medhya* – brain tonic, nervine

*Pandughni* – useful in anaemia

*Raktapitta* – curbs bleeding from excess *pitta*

*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

*Shothahara* – reduces oedema and swelling

*Visahara* – clears toxicity

A superb rejuvenative, bhringaraj has antioxidant properties, protecting against the ageing process and increasing longevity. It improves brain function, memory and concentration and helps to prevent age-related mental decline and Alzheimer's. It is also good for premature greying of the hair and balding. It is traditionally used for vertigo, declining eyesight and hearing problems.

Excellent for disturbance of *sadhaka pitta*, bhringaraj reduces blood pressure and eases nervous palpitations. It calms nervous tension and anxiety and is helpful in irritability and anger, insomnia and mental agitation from high *pitta* or *vata*. It is also used for anaemia. Bhringaraj has cooling and anti-inflammatory properties and benefits many *pitta* symptoms characterised by heat. Its antimicrobial and decongestant properties help combat respiratory infections and excess mucus.





Bhringaraj improves digestion and absorption and aids elimination of toxins by stimulating the bowels. It enhances the flow of bile from the liver and is excellent for liver problems, including cirrhosis and hepatitis. It protects the liver against damage from infection, drugs, chemicals and alcohol and aids the liver in its cleansing work.

It is beneficial for skin problems, particularly those related to excess *vata* and *pitta*, including urticaria, eczema, psoriasis and vitiligo, reducing itching and inflammation. With its antioxidant properties, it helps to protect against the ageing process and is said to promote a lustrous complexion. It strengthens bone tissue and helps prevent tooth loss.

**Externally:** Oil prepared from boiling fresh leaves with coconut or sesame oil can be massaged into the scalp. It promotes healthy hair, helps prevent baldness and greying and soothes inflammatory skin conditions. The leaf juice is applied to minor cuts, abrasions and burns.

**Dosage:** Fresh juice: 5-10 ml Powder: 3-5 grams







**Emblica officinalis/Phyllanthus emblica • Amalaki • Indian Gooseberry**

**Family:** Euphorbiaceae

**Part Used:** Dried fruit, seed, leaves, root, bark, flowers

**Quality/Guna:** Light, dry, spreading

**Taste/Rasa:** All except salty, mostly sour

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** VPK= (primarily P-)

**Tissue/Dhatu:** All tissues

**Constituents:** Ascorbic acid, fatty acids, bioflavonoids (kaempferol), polyphenols, cytokinins, vitamins (B, C), minerals (calcium, potassium, iron, chromium, zinc, copper), pectin, amino acids (glutamic acid, proline, aspartic acid, alanine, lysine), gallic acid, ellegitannins (emblicanin, pedunculadin, punigluconin), punicafolin, sugar, gum, albumin, phyllembin, curcuminoides.

**Actions:** Antimicrobial, cooling, rejuvenative, antioxidant, hepatoprotective, lowers cholesterol, anti-inflammatory, laxative, hypoglycaemic, tonic, carminative, digestive, nutritive, diuretic.

**Indications:** Gastritis, dyspepsia, acidity, peptic ulcers, constipation, diarrhoea, hepatitis, hypercholesterolaemia, fevers, urinary problems, headaches, chest infections, asthma, bleeding haemorrhoids, debility, anaemia, diabetes, neuropathy, gout, obesity, skin problems (eczema, psoriasis), sore throat, arthritis, hiccups, urethritis, infertility, glaucoma, fistula, hair loss, inflammatory lung and eye problems. *Seeds:* asthma, bronchitis, biliousness, dysentery, bleeding, jaundice.







### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Anulomana* – redirects the flow of *apana vata* downwards

*Badana* – heals broken bones and fractures

*Brmhana* – nourishing tonic, anabolic

*Caksusya* – benefits and rejuvenates the eyes

*Dahaprasamana* – alleviates burning

*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*

*Hridaya* – heart tonic

*Jivaniya* – increases energy and vitality

*Kesya* – rejuvenates the hair

*Medhya* – brain tonic, nervine

*Medohara* – regulates fat metabolism

*Ojas vardhana* – increases *ojas*

*Prameha* – useful in diabetes

*Raktapitta* – curbs bleeding from high *pitta*

*Raktadhara* – enhances circulation

*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

*Shukrala* – rejuvenates reproductive system, enhances fertility

*Svedana* – increases sweating

*Udaraprasamana* – relieves allergies

*Vajikanana* – aphrodisiac


*Virechana* – laxative



An excellent antioxidant, amalaki is one of the richest sources of vitamin C, which may explain its traditional use as a *sattvic* rejuvenative. The vitamin C helps to protect the collagen of the skin against the ravages of the ageing process and delay fine lines, wrinkles and dark spots.

A wonderful tonic particularly for *pitta*, amalaki relieves heat, inflammation and burning throughout the body. Its cleansing and nourishing properties help purify the blood, rebuild tissues after injury or illness, improve eyesight and relieve allergies. It strengthens the teeth and bones and promotes the growth of hair and nails. It is good for anaemia as it stops bleeding and increases red blood cell count.





Amalaki enhances digestion and absorption and is a good digestive remedy for treating peptic ulcers, acidity, anorexia, nausea, vomiting, gastritis, colitis and haemorrhoids. It is an ingredient of the famous bowel cleanser triphala and can be used for constipation and IBS. Its antioxidant properties protect the liver from damage from toxins and drugs; it also regulates blood sugar. It is used with lemon juice in acute dysentery and with fenugreek seeds in chronic diarrhoea.

Amalaki is excellent for preventing and treating a wide range of skin problems, especially inflammatory conditions related to excess *pitta*. It is useful for eczema, psoriasis, vitiligo, urticaria and prickly heat. With its blood purifying and antimicrobial properties, it can be used for treating acne and pimples and other skin infections.

Famous for treating debility following illness, stress or in old age, amalaki is the main ingredient of the rejuvenative formula Chayawan prash. It is a good brain tonic, improving memory and concentration and helping to calm anger and irritability. It reduces cholesterol and atherosclerosis and helps prevent clotting, thereby protecting the cardiovascular system.

Amalaki strengthens the immune system. It has antimicrobial activity against a wide range of viruses, bacteria and fungi and is used to combat dysbiosis, coughs, colds, flu, chest infections, asthma and urinary tract infections. It may slow the growth of cancer cells.

**Externally:** Amalaki is used in hair oils/soaps to prevent hair loss and in lotions for inflammatory eye problems. It is a useful skin care ingredient helping to protect against oxidative damage.

**Dosage:** 5-30g powder, 5-15 mls tincture.





**Glycyrrhiza glabra • Yastimadhu • Licorice**

**Family:** Fabaceae / Leguminose

**Parts Used:** Peeled roots, runners

**Quality/Guna:** Heavy, oily

**Taste/Rasa:** Sweet, bitter

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** VPK= (K+ in excess)

**Tissue/Dhatu:** All tissues

**Constituents:** Glycyrrhizin (calcium and potassium salts of glycyrrhizic acid), triterpenoid saponins, flavonoids, bitter principle (glycymarin), oestrogenic substances, asparagine, volatile oil, tannins, sugars (glucose, sucrose, mannite, starch), mucilage, phosphoric, sulphuric and malic acids, calcium, magnesium.

**Actions:** Demulcent, expectorant, tonic, laxative, emetic, anti-inflammatory, febrifuge, diuretic, adaptogen, adrenal tonic, rejuvenative, sedative, antacid, hepato-protective.

**Indications:** Inflammatory problems, allergies, menstrual / menopausal problems, acidity, peptic ulcers, gastritis, heartburn, nausea, vomiting, food poisoning, indigestion, ulcerative colitis, constipation, hiccups, sea sickness, liver problems including chronic hepatitis, high cholesterol, stress, nervous exhaustion, adrenal fatigue, ME, fibromyalgia, laryngitis, tonsillitis, bronchitis, respiratory infections, coughs, asthma, viral infections (*Cytomegalovirus* and *Herpes simplex*), rhinitis, conjunctivitis, headaches, fevers, jet lag, diabetic ulcers, bleeding disorders, eczema, psoriasis, dermatitis, endometriosis, PCOS, prostate problems, arthritis, broken bones, diabetes, sexual debility, infertility, glaucoma, pregnancy, lactation, urinary tract infections.







### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Anulomana* – redirects the flow of *apana vata* downwards

*Balya* – strengthening

*Brmhana* – nourishing tonic, anabolic

*Caksusya* – benefits and rejuvenates the eyes

*Chardihara* – relieves nausea

*Jivaniya* – increases energy and vitality

*Jwaraghna* – reduces fevers

*Kasasvasahara* – relieves coughs and breathing problems

*Kesya* – rejuvenates the hair

*Medhya* – brain tonic, nervine

*Mutrala* – diuretic

*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

*Shukrala* – rejuvenates the reproductive system, enhances fertility

*Vajikarana* – aphrodisiac

*Vamana* – for therapeutic vomiting

*Vedanastapana* – relieves pain

*Virechana* – laxative


*Vranahara* – heals ulcers

*Yogavahi* – acts as a catalyst to enhance the action of herbs combined with it

Licorice is a remarkable restorative and rejuvenative herb and has an affinity with the digestive and endocrine systems. It helps harmonise the qualities of other herbs, and reduces heat, dryness and toxicity.

With its cooling and soothing qualities, it is used for treating acidity, heartburn and indigestion, colic, inflammatory problems and peptic ulcers. A mild laxative, it eases constipation. It increases the flow of bile from the liver and helps lower cholesterol. It protects the liver from damage from toxins and infection.





Licorice is an adaptogenic, strengthening tonic through its action on the adrenal glands. It improves resilience to physical as well as mental stress. *Sattvic* in nature, it nourishes the brain, promotes good vision and memory, healthy hair and skin. It has anti-allergic effects similar (but without the side effects) to cortisone; it is useful when coming off orthodox steroids and for relieving hay fever, eczema, urticaria, conjunctivitis and asthma.

A soothing expectorant, licorice relieves irritation and inflammation in the chest, sore throats and dry coughs, bronchial congestion, asthma and chest infections. It enhances immunity and helps combat viruses including *Cytomegalovirus* and *Herpes simplex*. It is a good remedy during convalescence and is used as an anti-inflammatory for arthritis and skin problems including eczema and psoriasis. It has a cleansing effect; it binds to toxic chemicals and carcinogens and helps draw them from the body. Its mild oestrogenic properties help relieve menstrual and menopausal problems.

**Externally:** The powder mixed with ghee can be applied to wounds and skin problems including *Herpes*, eczema and psoriasis. A decoction mixed with turmeric or triphala can be used as a douche for thrush.

**Cautions:** Avoid prolonged use and large doses. It may increase fluid retention and blood pressure. Avoid during pregnancy. It can cause potassium loss if combined with diuretics/laxatives and may potentiate Prednisolone.

**Dosage:** 3 – 5 grams dried herb/powder





**Hemidesmus indicus • Sariva • Indian Sarsparilla**

**Family:** Asclepiadaceae

**Parts Used:** Bark of the root

**Quality/Guna:** Light, oily /unctuous

**Taste/Rasa:** Bitter, sweet, astringent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** VPK=

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rasa / plasma, rakta / blood, mamsa / muscle, medas / fat, shukra / reproductive

**Constituents:** Volatile oils, saponins, sitosterol, methoxybenzaldehyde, amyirin, hexatriacontane, lupeol octacosonoate, coumarins, lupeol.

**Actions:** Digestive, laxative, depurative, anti-inflammatory, expectorant, antispasmodic, diuretic, febrifuge, fertility tonic, antihemorrhagic, astringent, refrigerant, antimicrobial, diaphoretic, demulcent, antioxidant, aphrodisiac.

**Indications:** Poor appetite and digestion, inflammatory gut problems, diarrhoea, dysentery, blood disorders, blood in stools, gout, rheumatoid arthritis, autoimmune disease, cervical lymphadenitis, anaemia, catarrhal coughs, asthma, threatened or recurrent miscarriage, disorders of lactation, heavy periods, leucorrhoea, spermatorrhoea, low libido, infertility, urinary tract infections, prostatitis, urethritis, cystitis, oedema, fevers, skin problems (acne, eczema, psoriasis, urticaria, erysipelas, impetigo, itching), stress, anger, irritability.





### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Amavataghna* – relieves gout and arthritis

*Amavisanasana* – destroys toxins

*Dahaprasamana* – alleviates burning on the skin

*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*

*Grahi* – reabsorbs fluid from the bowel, curbs diarrhoea

*Jwaraghna* – reduces fevers

*Kasasvasahara* – relieves coughs and breathing problems

*Kusthaghna* – alleviates skin problems

*Pandughni* – useful in anaemia

*Prameha* – useful in urinary problems

*Raktapitta* – curbs bleeding from excess *pitta*

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

*Shukrala* – rejuvenates reproductive system, enhances fertility

*Vajikaranana* – aphrodisiac

*Vairnya* – improves complexion

Sariva is a great cooling and cleansing remedy for excess *pitta*. It is *rasayana* (rejuvenating) as it has anabolic and strengthening properties. It increases appetite and digestion and is used for anorexia, indigestion, flatulence, bloating and diarrhoea. It clears *ama* and dysbiosis and makes a good cleansing remedy for blood disorders, skin problems, gout, arthritis and swollen glands.



Sariva stimulates the flow of bile from the liver and supports the liver in its cleansing work. It enhances immunity and can be helpful in the treatment of auto-immune disease such as rheumatoid arthritis, inflammatory gut problems, psoriasis and lupus. It soothes inflammatory skin problems, including eczema, psoriasis, impetigo, scabies, *Herpes*, ringworm and urticaria.





Sariva reduces *pitta* type fevers including malarial fever. In hot water or mixed with honey, it reduces *kapha* in the respiratory system, and helps clear colds, mucous congestion, coughs, bronchitis and asthma.

With its calming properties, sariva relaxes tense muscles and soothes emotions. It balances all three *doshas* in the mind, particularly disturbance of *sadhaka pitta* causing irritability, intolerance, anger, criticism, self-criticism, PMS and depression.


Sariva balances hormones, reduces heavy periods, improves fertility and helps prevent miscarriage. As an aphrodisiac, it can improve sexual performance and sperm mobility. It also helps to prevent and treat anaemia. It purifies and increases breast milk, helping to clear excess *pitta* in lactating women that could give rise to skin problems in breast fed babies. It is good for *pitta* type cystitis with burning and for urinary stones and gravel.

**Externally:** A paste can be applied to skin to reduce *pitta*-type inflammation, swelling and burning. It can be used in preparations for vaginal thrush. The fresh juice is used for conjunctivitis.

**Dosage:** Hot infusion 50-100 mls. Powder: 3-6 gms daily







**Rosa damascena • Gulab • Rose**

**Family:** Rosaceae

**Parts Used:** Hips, leaves and flowers

**Quality/Guna:** Dry, light

**Taste/Rasa:** Bitter, sweet, astringent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** VPK=

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rasa/plasma, rakta/blood, majja/nerve, shukra/reproductive

**Constituents:** Tannins, pectin, carotene, fruit acids, flavonoids, fatty oil, nicotinamide, vitamins (A, C, B, E, K, folic acid), minerals (calcium, potassium, sodium, sulphur, iron), saponins, rutin, quercetin.

**Actions:** Diaphoretic, carminative, expectorant, probiotic, hepatoprotective, emmenagogue, reproductive tonic, aphrodisiac, aperient, decongestant, febrifuge, nervine, anxiolytic, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, astringent, haemostatic, antimicrobial, antidepressant, analgesic, vulnerary, deodorant.

**Indications:** Headaches, excess mucus, GI tract infection, dysbiosis, acidity, gastritis, enteritis, diarrhoea, dysentery, heartburn, peptic ulcers, obesity, stress related disorders, insomnia, anxiety, depression, agitation, irritability, heartache, respiratory infections, dysmenorrhoea, menorrhagia, hormonal problems, endometriosis, fibroids, PMS, menopausal flushes, inflammatory problems, vaginal infections, infertility, low libido, impotency, eczema, psoriasis, urticaria, itching, fevers, arthritis.







### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Amlapittahara* – relieves hyperacidity

*Anulomana* – redirects flow of *apana vata* downwards

*Atisarajit* – relieves diarrhoea

*Caksusya* – benefits the eyes

*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*

*Hridaya* – heart tonic

*Medhya* – brain tonic, nervine

*Raktapitta* – curbs bleeding from excess *pitta*

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

*Shukrala* – rejuvenates reproductive system, enhances fertility

*Vajikaranana* – aphrodisiac

*Varnya* – improves the complexion

This exquisitely beautiful, heavenly perfumed flower, the most sensuous and romantic of flowers, not only inspires love but also enhances well-being and longevity. Clearly the rose is best known for its ability to heal in the realms of the heart. When we want to express love and affection and cannot find words to convey the depth of our feelings, the rose will do it for us, and this has been the case for hundreds of years, for the rose has long been to artists, poets and lovers alike, the symbol of love, beauty and perfection.

Today rose leaves and petals are used for their cooling properties. They clear excess *pitta* and *ama* from *rakta dhatu* and are good for bleeding problems as well as inflammatory skin problems (*Herpes*, measles and chicken pox). Taken as a tea they help to bring down fevers and clear heat and toxins from the body that give rise to skin rashes and other inflammatory problems.

Rose enhances the efforts of the immune system and with its affinity with *pranavahasrotas*, it helps clear cold and flu symptoms, mucous congestion, bronchitis and other respiratory problems. Roses are rich in tannins which have an astringent action, stemming bleeding (as in heavy periods), drying phlegm and clearing discharges.





In the digestive system, the tannins help to curb diarrhoea and protect the gut lining from irritation, inflammation and infection. Rose can be used in gut problems including gastritis, peptic ulcers, enteritis, diarrhoea and dysentery. It clears *ama*, regulates metabolism and balances weight. It also helps re-establish the normal bacterial population after it has been disrupted by antibiotics or eating poor quality foods.

The hip syrup or a decoction of the empty seed cases can be used for diarrhoea, colic, constipation, nausea and indigestion. It is also used as a laxative, for kidney problems and as a detoxifying agent. It is anti-inflammatory, it reduces pain, and increases flexibility in osteoarthritis.

Rose is a wonderful *rasayana* and *medhya* for all three *doshas*. Rose hips, petals and oil all have a restoring effect on the nervous system, lifting the spirits and calming anxiety. They decrease signs of ageing, improve memory and eyesight and are excellent for reducing excess *sadhaka pitta*, causing irritability, anger, low self esteem and low spirits.







Rose has an affinity with the female reproductive system, and makes a good remedy for menstrual and menopausal symptoms. It eases uterine spasm and congestion and relieves painful and irregular periods and stems heavy periods. Rose makes an excellent cooling and calming remedy for all menopausal symptoms including hot flushes, night sweats and mood swings. With its ability to enhance sexual desire, rose is a lovely remedy for low libido. Roses truly are the food of love!

**Externally :** Rose water cleanses and tones the skin, excellent for treating *pitta* type acne, spots, boils and abscesses. It can be used as an eyewash for tired or inflamed eyes. You can apply it to minor cuts, wounds, bruises and sprains. Rose can be used as a mouthwash for mouth ulcers and bleeding gums, a gargle for sore throats, a vaginal douche for irritation, inflammation and infection, such as thrush.

**Cautions:** Caution during pregnancy, breastfeeding and kidney disease.

**Dosage:** Use standard dose. Rose water: 5-50ml per day.





**Rubia cordifolia • Manjistha • Indian madder**

**Family:** Rubiaceae

**Parts Used:** Root

**Quality/Guna:** Heavy, dry, dull/slow

**Taste/Rasa:** Sweet, bitter, astringent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Pungent

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** VPK=

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rasa / plasma, rakta / blood, mamsa / muscle, asthi / bone, majja / nerve

**Constituents:** Iridoid glucoside (manjistin, purpurin, purpuroxanthin), triterpenes, anthraquinone glycosides (lucidin, alizarin, rubiadin), sitosterol, resin, gum.

**Actions:** Alterative, diuretic, emmenagogue, astringent, febrifuge, antitumour, haemostatic, rejuvenative, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, hepato-protective, digestive.

**Indications:** Skin problems (urticaria, itching, eczema, psoriasis, *Herpes*, scabies, *Tinea pedis*, vitiligo), bleeding problems, toxicity, stress (anger, irritability, agitation), urinary problems (haematuria, urinary stones, infections, oedema), diabetes, eye conditions, poor appetite, diarrhoea with bleeding, Crohn's disease, dysentery, amoebae, bleeding ulcers and haemorrhoids, obesity, worms, epilepsy, respiratory infections, nosebleeds, allergic asthma, TB, menstrual disorders (endometriosis, painful, heavy and irregular periods, clots), threatened miscarriage, puerperal fever, poor milk supply, inflammatory arthritis, auto-immune problems, gout, liver problems, acute / chronic hepatitis, fevers, bone fractures.



### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Asmarighna* – relieves kidney stones and calculi

*Badana* – heals broken bones and fractures

*Jwaraghna* – relieves fevers

*Kandughna* – relieves itchy skin conditions

*Kushtaghna* – alleviates skin diseases

*Lekhana* – scrapes toxins and accumulations from *srotas*

*Mutrala* – diuretic

*Purishavirajaniya* – stool forming

*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood

*Raktapitta* – curbs bleeding from high *pitta*

*Vedanasthapana* – relieves pain

*Varnya* – improves the complexion

*Visahara* – clears toxicity

One of the best *pitta*-reducing, detoxifying herbs, manjishta clears heat and *ama* from the blood and is a good remedy for fevers and inflammatory conditions. It is excellent for stubborn skin problems, reducing heat and itching in eczema, psoriasis, *Herpes*, acne, scabies and athlete's foot. When taken with honey it is used for vitiligo. It is also one of the main herbs for stopping bleeding as in heavy periods, nose bleeds, bleeding ulcers and inflammatory gut problems.



Manjishta enhances immunity and has been used to relieve inflammatory chest problems and infections including TB, allergic asthma, arthritis and auto-immune problems. Greatly beneficial to the liver, it protects it against damage from infections and toxins and is used for hepatitis. With its antioxidant properties it has a reputation as a rejuvenative.







Manjishta improves appetite, clears toxins from the gut and is good for diarrhoea with bleeding, Crohn's disease, worms and dysentery. It eases nervous disorders associated with excess *pitta* such as irritability, intolerance, anger, depression and low self-esteem.

Manjishta has the ability to break up accumulations of *kapha* in the bladder, liver and kidneys including urinary stones and gravel. It also helps resolve urinary tract infections and blood in the urine. It clears excess *pitta* and *kapha* in the reproductive tract and is useful for painful and irregular periods, fibroids, cysts and endometriosis. It is used to prevent miscarriage and purifies breast milk.

**Externally:** Manjishta stops bleeding and speeds healing of cuts and wounds. It can be used in lotions to ease inflammatory eye problems. A paste mixed with honey is used for inflammatory skin problems and ulcers.

**Cautions:** High *vata*.

**Dosage:** Powder 1-3 grams daily. Decoction 60-120 mls daily.







**Terminalia chebula • Haritaki • Indian gall nut**

**Family:** Combretaceae

**Parts Used:** Fruit, galls, leaves, bark

**Quality/Guna:** Light, dry

**Taste/Rasa:** All tastes except salty but predominantly astringent and bitter

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Heating

**Dosha:** VPK=

**Tissue/Dhatu:** All

**Constituents:** Anthraquinones, tannins (chebulagic, chebulic acid), corilagin, resin, fixed oil.

**Actions:** Tonic, anti-inflammatory, laxative, astringent, antiseptic, diuretic, alterative, carminative, demulcent, febrifuge, bronchodilator, anthelmintic, cardiotonic, vulnerary, hypotensive, antioxidant, adaptogen, rejuvenative.

**Indications:** Inflammatory eye problems, poor eyesight, debility, acid indigestion, heartburn, vomiting, hiccups, peptic ulcers, poor appetite, bloating, constipation, chronic diarrhoea, malabsorption, haemorrhoids, dysentery, flatulence, vomiting, colic, enlarged liver, hepatitis, worms, parasites (*Shigella spp.*, *Entamoebae histolytica*), yeast infections, dysbiosis, leaky gut syndrome, coughs, bronchitis, catarrh, asthma, laryngitis, rhinitis, dyspnoea, leucorrhoea, menorrhagia, spermatorrhoea, prolapse, typhoid fever, urinary problems (dysuria, cystitis, retention, oedema, calculus), heart problems, diabetes, skin conditions (eczema, eruptive infections, *Herpes*), high cholesterol, chronic fevers, anaemia.





### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Anulomana* – redirects the flow of *apana vata* downwards.

*Arshoghna* – relieves haemorrhoids

*Balya* – strengthening

*Brmhana* – nourishing tonic, anabolic

*Caksusya* – benefits and rejuvenates the eyes

*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*

*Hridaya* – cardiac tonic

*Lekhana* – scrapes toxins and accumulations from *srotas*

*Medhya* – good nervine tonic

*Mutrala* – diuretic

*Paushtiki* – nourishes the body up to the tissue level

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

*Shothahara* – reduces swellings and oedema

*Stanya* – increases breast milk

*Vajikarana* – aphrodisiac

*Yogavahi* – acts as a catalyst to enhance the action of herbs combined with it

An excellent antioxidant, nerve and brain tonic, haritaki enhances resilience to stress, promotes the intellect and enhances eyesight, helping to slow the ageing process and living up to its reputation as a rejuvenative (*rasayana*). It is recommended for all *vata* disorders. It helps to maintain the cellular integrity of the skin and helps to protect it from the ageing effects of pollutants and the elements. It protects the heart and arteries from damage from free radicals, reduces blood pressure and lowers harmful cholesterol.







By increasing *agni*, haritaki promotes appetite, digestion and absorption. It balances the flow of *apana vata* and regulates the bowels, resolving either constipation or diarrhoea according to the dosage used. It is excellent for all *vata* digestive problems and helps alleviate indigestion, colic, wind, bloating, constipation, haemorrhoids, IBS, nausea and vomiting. It can be used for infections such as *Shigella spp*, *Salmonella typhi*, and for parasites including amoebae, and it can be used to treat inflammation of the gut mucosa and ulcers. The unripe fruits are more laxative than the ripe ones, which are more astringent.

Haritaki enhances immunity and helps combat bacterial and viral infections. It can be used for urinary tract infections and cystitis, *Candida* and *Cytomegaloviruses* and may have anti-tumour activity. It relieves fevers, asthma, excessive discharges including mucus, and *kapha*-type coughs. It also reduces sweating and clears skin problems. It can be used when breastfeeding to purify breast milk. It reduces prolapse and stems excess bleeding in menorrhagia.

**Externally:** Haritaki is an excellent astringent for the skin helping to shrink large pores and reduce wrinkles. It can be used as a lotion for acne and in creams to protect the skin from free radical damage from exposure to the sun. It can be used as a gargle and mouthwash for mouth ulcers, bleeding/infected gums and sore throats.

**Cautions:** Avoid in pregnancy, dehydration, emaciation and high *pitta*

**Dosage:** 3-6g powder daily as a laxative; 1grm daily as a *rasayana*; 56 – 112 mls of decoction daily. For a laxative effect use with warm water; for a more astringent effect for treating diarrhoea, use with cold water.







**Tinospora cordifolia • Guduchi • Amrit**

**Family:** Menispermaceae

**Parts Used:** Stem, leaves, bark, root

**Quality/Guna:** Light, oily

**Taste/Rasa:** Bitter, astringent, sweet, pungent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Heating

**Dosha:** VPK= (primarily P- with ghee V-)

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rasa / plasma, rakta / blood, mamsa / muscle, medas / fat, majja / nerve, shukra / reproductive

**Constituents:** Alkaloids (berberine, tinosporin), sitosterol, bitters, glycosides, diterpenes (tinosporide, tinosporaside, cordifolide, cordifol, heptacosanol, columbin), glucosidal bitter principles, polysaccharides.

**Actions:** Digestive, astringent, rejuvenative, nervine, tonic, alterative, antimicrobial, febrifuge, diuretic, antioxidant, adaptogen, hepatoprotective, cholagogue, anti-inflammatory, probiotic.

**Indications:** Poor appetite and digestion, acidity, gastritis, peptic ulcers, nausea, vomiting, dyspepsia, worms, chronic fatigue, gallstones, food poisoning, diarrhoea, dysentery, intestinal bleeding, inflammatory gut problems, bloating, *Candida*, dysbiosis, liver disease (chronic hepatitis, toxic liver damage), constipation (with ghee), urinary problems, cystitis, arthritis, bursitis, gout, sciatica, tendonitis, menstrual disorders, menorrhagia, inflammatory skin problems (eczema, psoriasis), cholecystitis, angina pectoris, spermatorrhea, impotence, low libido, stress (emotional / physical), fatigue, tension, anaemia, high cholesterol, diabetes, respiratory infections (coughs, bronchitis, colds, sinusitis, flu), fevers, allergies (hay fever, asthma), to protect against radio / chemotherapy side-effects, toxicity, immune deficiency, auto-immune disease (eg. lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, MS), infections (fungal, bacterial and parasitic), malaria, prior to surgery.



### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Ama pachana* – clears toxins from the gut

*Amavataghna* – relieves gout and arthritis

*Balya* – increases strength

*Dahaprasamana* – alleviates burning sensations

*Dipana* – enkindles *agni*

*Grahi* – reabsorbs fluid from the bowel, curbs diarrhoea

*Jwaraghna* – reduces fevers

*Kusthaghna* – useful in skin disorders

*Medhya* – brain tonic, nervine

*Medohara* – regulates fat metabolism

*Prameha* – useful in diabetes

*Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative

*Rochni* – stimulates appetite

*Shukrala* – rejuvenates reproductive system, enhances fertility

*Stanyashodhana* – purifies breast milk

*Vajikarana* – aphrodisiac

*Vaya sthapana* – promotes longevity

*Yakruduttejaka* – liver remedy


An excellent *rasayana* especially for *pitta*, guduchi enhances immunity and promotes longevity, energy and vitality. It helps fight off infection, improves resilience to emotional and physical stress, increases brain function and eases tension.



By enhancing immunity, guduchi relieves acute respiratory infections, fevers, coughs, colds, flu, sinusitis and allergies including hay fever, eczema, urticaria and asthma. Taken prior to surgery, it helps prevent post-operative complications including infections. It has antioxidant and anti-tumour activity and protects against the toxic effects of chemo and radiotherapy.







Guduchi improves digestion, absorption and liver function, promotes a healthy gut flora and clears *ama* from the gut and *srotas*, particularly the brain/mind (*manovaha srotas*). It promotes the metabolism of all tissues, especially fat, helping to regulate weight.

By reducing heat and inflammation, guduchi can be used to resolve digestive problems associated with excess *pitta*; it soothes acidity and relieves gastritis, peptic ulcers, diarrhoea, gut infections, nausea and vomiting. It is used with ghee for constipation. Its antioxidant action protects the liver against damage from toxins, drugs and alcohol, aids liver regeneration and is used for chronic hepatitis.

Guduchi clears heat, toxins and uric acid by increasing urination and helps relieve inflammatory and autoimmune disease including rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis and lupus. It eases gout (in castor oil) and arthritis (with ginger).

Guduchi is also good for *pitta* circulatory problems including anaemia and bleeding as in bleeding gums and haemorrhoids. It reduces cholesterol and helps to stabilise blood sugar levels. It is used for obstinate inflammatory skin problems such as eczema and psoriasis, and as a reproductive tonic for impotence and sexual debility.

**Externally:** Powder mixed with water or aloe vera gel is applied to inflammatory skin problems

**Cautions:** Pregnancy

**Dosage:** 3–5g powder bid







**Tribulus terrestris • Gokshura • Caltrops**

**Family:** Zygophyllaceae

**Parts Used:** Fruit, root

**Quality/Guna:** Heavy, oily

**Taste/Rasa:** Sweet, bitter

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Potency/Virya:** Cooling

**Dosha:** VPK= Rejuvenating for vata

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rasa / plasma, rakta / blood, mamsa / muscle, medas / fat, majja / nerve, shukra / reproductive

**Constituents:** Tribuloside, saponins (protodioscin, stigmasterol, terretonins), alkaloids (harmala, harmine), potassium nitrate, flavonoids (kaempferol, quercetin), aspartic acid, glutamic acids.

**Actions:** Diuretic, lithotriptic, digestive, astringent, anthelmintic, laxative, demulcent, cardiogenic, rejuvenative, aphrodisiac, nervine, analgesic.

**Indications:** Renal calculi and colic, urinary retention, nephritis, haematuria, oedema, dysuria, cystitis, urinary tract infections, urethritis, acute / chronic prostatitis, prostatic cancer, debility, pain, gout, arthritis, lumbago, sciatica, poor appetite, haemorrhoids, worms, diabetes, haemorrhagic disorders, heart disease, infertility, low libido, erectile dysfunction, impotence, low sperm count, post-partum, vaginal disorders / discharges, to prevent miscarriage, uterine disorders after parturition, poor milk supply, bronchial congestion, asthma, coughs, bronchitis, anxiety, tension, psychological problems, headaches, skin problems, inflammatory eye problems.



### **Ayurvedic Actions**

- Amavataghna* – relieves gout and arthritis
- Anulomana* – redirects the flow of *apana vata* downwards
- Arshoghna* – useful in management of haemorrhoids
- Asmarighna* – relieves kidney stones and calculi
- Balya* – increases strength
- Bhedana* – removes accumulations
- Brmhana* – nourishing tonic, anabolic
- Dipana* – enkindles *agni*
- Grahi* – absorbs fluid from the bowel, curbs diarrhoea
- Hridaya* – heart tonic
- Kasasvasahara* – relieves coughs and breathing problems
- Mutrala* – diuretic
- Prameha* – useful in diabetes
- Raktashodhana* – purifies the blood
- Rasayana* – rejuvenative
- Shothahara* – reduces oedema and swelling
- Shukrashodana* – purifies sperm
- Vajikanana* – aphrodisiac
- Vasti shodhana* – cleanses the urinary system



An excellent *rasayana* for *pitta* and *vata*, gokshura increases *sattva*, promotes clarity, calms the nerves and relieves pain. It is an excellent tonic, particularly when combined with *ashwagandha*; together they enhance resilience to stress and improve energy and sports performance.

Gokshura has an affinity with *shukra dhatu* and as a reproductive tonic, it is used for infertility, low libido, impotency and prostate problems. It helps prevent miscarriage and speeds recovery after childbirth.

A rejuvenating kidney tonic and soothing diuretic, gokshura can be used for treating oedema, cystitis, haematuria, urinary tract infections and incontinence. It enhances elimination of toxins, stones and gravel via the urinary tract and helps relieve gout, arthritis and sciatica. It improves cardiac circulation, reduces blood pressure and is a good expectorant for coughs and asthma.

**Externally:** The oil is used for alopecia and premature balding.

**Dosage:** Powder 2-5g daily, milk or water decoction 60-100ml daily.

**Cautions:** Avoid during pregnancy





**Withania somniferum • Ashwagandha • Winter Cherry**

**Family:** Solanaceae

**Parts Used:** Root

**Quality/Guna:** Light, oily

**Taste/Rasa:** Sweet, bitter, astringent

**Post Digestive/Vipak:** Sweet

**Action/Potency/Virya:** Heating

**Dosha:** VK- P= (P+, ama+ in excess)

**Tissue/Dhatu:** Rakta / blood, mamsa / muscle, medas / fat, asthi / bone, majja / nerve, shukra / reproductive

**Constituents:** Around 13 alkaloids (including ashwagandhine, withanine, isopelletierine, anaferine, anahygrine, cuscohygrine, tropine, pseudotropine, somniferin), iron, steroidal lactones (withanolides, withaferins, withanone, withasomniferin-A), saponins, phytosterols (sitoinosides VII-X, sitosterol), tryptophan.

**Actions:** Sedative, nervine, nutritive, rejuvenative, anti-inflammatory, adaptogen, antioxidant, tonic, aphrodisiac, astringent, antispasmodic, anticonvulsant, diuretic, cardioprotective, hypotensive, thyroid stimulant, immunomodulatory.

**Indications:** Debility, low body weight, anaemia, old age, muscle weakness, overexertion, heart problems, autoimmune conditions, hypothyroidism, adjunct to cancer treatment, tics, spasms, fatigue, tremors, Parkinson's, MS, phobias, brain fog, poor memory, neutropenia, rheumatoid / osteoarthritis, sciatica, cancer, chronic connective tissue disorders, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome / ME, immune deficiency, asthma, cough, fevers, allergies (hay fever, rhinitis), insomnia, anxiety, ADHD, stress, nervous exhaustion, female infertility, low sperm count, low libido, poor sexual performance, impotence, acne, menstrual irregularities (dysmenorrhoea, amenorrhoea), endometriosis, prostate problems, miscarriage, leucorrhoea, oedema, skin disease, vitiligo.





### **Ayurvedic Actions**

*Balya* – increases strength

*Brmhana* – nourishing tonic, anabolic

*Hridaya* – heart tonic

*Kasasvasahara* – relieves coughs and breathing problems

*Majjadhātu rasayana* – rejuvenates nervous tissue

*Medhya* – brain tonic, nervine

*Nidrajanana* – induces sleep

*Ojas vardhana* – increases *ojas*

*Rasayana* – rejuvenative to the body

*Shothahara* – reduces oedema and swelling


*Shukrala* – rejuvenates reproductive system, enhances fertility

*Vedanasthapana* – relieves pain

Ashwagandha is an exceptional nourishing nerve tonic and *rasayana*, especially for *vata*. It promotes energy, strength and vitality and is recommended during convalescence, for weakness, emaciation and for problems of old age including poor memory, weak eyes, arthritis and insomnia. Its antioxidant properties limit damage from free radicals and reduce ageing.

Ashwagandha improves resilience to physical and emotional stress and is excellent when run down by chronic illness, stress, anxiety and overwork. It makes a good remedy for panic attacks, nervous exhaustion and insomnia. It is *sattvic*, engendering calmness, wisdom and clarity, and can be helpful for children with behavioural problems and ADHD.





Ashwagandha enhances immunity and may help prevent and treat cancer. It increases the sensitivity of cancer cells to radiation therapy, thereby making it more effective. Ashwagandha is a good painkiller and anti-inflammatory for joint problems; it can be used to treat auto-immune problems including MS, psoriasis, ankylosing spondylitis and rheumatoid arthritis. It also increases resistance to respiratory infections and is used for allergies, rhinitis, eczema, urticaria and asthma caused by aggravated *vata*.

Ashwagandha is the best regulator of *apana vata*, which governs the lower abdomen. It is excellent for urinary problems, painful periods and menstrual problems associated with excess *vata*, including irregular and scanty periods and endometriosis. It is famous for infertility and as a male reproductive tonic.

**Externally:** Ashwagandha oil can be massaged into painful joints and frozen shoulders, and used for nerve pain such as sciatica, numbness, muscle spasm and back pain. It can be used to heal wounds and sores and for dry, itchy skin conditions, such as eczema and psoriasis.

**Cautions:** Avoid during pregnancy, and in excess *pitta*.

**Dosage:** Powder: 5 gms in warm water or milk, twice daily.



