

Balancing excess Vata dosha with diet

The qualities of Vata include cold, dry, light and mobile. Balance excess Vata dosha with warm, sweet, nourishing food. Eat regular meals in a calm environment.

Dietary recommendations

Include foods that are liquid or oily in your daily diet to balance dryness, some "heavy" foods to offer substance and sustained nourishment, foods that are smooth in texture to offset roughness and foods that are warm or hot to balance the cool nature of Vata.

So what exactly does this mean in terms of foods you should choose and foods you should stay away from? Here are some specific dietary tips:

1. If you need to balance Vata, a fat-free diet is not for you. Cook foods with a little ghee (clarified butter) or include some olive oil in your diet everyday. Olive oil cannot be heated to high temperatures without destroying its healing value, so drizzle olive oil over fresh soft flatbreads, cooked grains, or warm vegetable dishes. Ghee can be heated to high temperatures without affecting its nourishing, healing qualities, so use ghee to sauté vegetables, spices or other foods. Avoid too many dry foods such as crackers, dry cold cereal and the like.
2. Cooked foods, served hot or warm, are ideal for balancing Vata. Pureed soups, hot cereal, rice pudding and hot nourishing beverages such as nut milks or warm milk are excellent "comfort" foods and help pacify aggravated Vata. Avoid or minimize raw foods such as salads and raw sprouts.
3. The three ayurvedic tastes that help balance Vata are sweet, sour and salty, so include more of these tastes in your daily diet.

Milk, citrus fruits, dried fruit or salted toasted sunflower or pumpkin seeds make good snack choices. Eat less of the bitter, pungent and astringent tastes.

4. Nuts are wonderful Vata-pacifiers. Soak ten almonds overnight. Blanch and eat in the early morning for a healthy burst of energy. Walnuts, hazelnuts and cashews make good Vata-pacifying snacks.

5. Carrots, asparagus, tender leafy greens, beets, sweet potatoes and summer squash such as zucchini and squash are the best vegetable choices. They become more digestible when chopped and cooked with Vata-pacifying spices. Vegetables can be combined with grains or mung beans for satisfying one-dish meals. Avoid and larger beans.

6. Basmati rice is ideal for balancing Vata. Cook it with a little salt and ghee for added flavor. Wheat is also good--fresh flatbreads made with whole wheat flour and drizzled with a little melted ghee combine well with cooked vegetables or Vata-balancing chutneys.

7. Most spices are warming and enhance digestion, so cook with a combination of spices that appeals to your taste buds and is appropriate for the dish you are making. Ayurvedic spices such as small quantities of turmeric, cumin, coriander, dried ginger, black pepper and saffron offer flavor, aroma and healing wisdom.

8. Drink lots of warm water or herbal tea throughout the day.

Suggested Food Choices for Vata dosha

Grains: Rice, wheat, quinoa, oats, amaranth, all cooked until tender

Vegetables: Asparagus, tender greens, carrots, peas, green beans, white daikon, zucchini, parsnips, sweet potatoes, all cooked

Fruits: Avocado, pineapple, papaya, peaches, plums,

grapes, mangoes, oranges, cherries, all kinds of berries, limes and lemons, apples if stewed, coconut, fresh figs, raisins (soaked)

Lentils: Mung beans, urad dhal, mung dhal, masoor dhal, toor dhal, red lentils, all cooked until butter-soft

Dairy: Whole milk, cream, butter, fresh yogurt (cooked into foods), lassi, cottage cheese, fresh paneer cheese

Oils: Ghee, olive oil, sesame oil, cold-pressed nut oils such as walnut

Herbs: Fresh ginger root, cilantro, curry leaves, parsley, fresh basil, fresh fennel, mint

Nuts and Seeds: Almonds (soaked and blanched), cashews, walnuts (soaked), pistachios, hazelnuts, pecans (soaked), pine nuts, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds

Spices: Ajwain, dried ginger, asafetida (hing) in small quantities, fenugreek, turmeric, cumin, clove, cardamom, coriander, fennel, black pepper, basil, Chinese cinnamon, nutmeg, mustard seed, mint, rosemary, thyme, lemon and orange zest, oregano, rock salt or sea salt, black salt, dried mango powder, pomegranate seeds or powder

Other: Rice milk, soy milk, poppy seeds, turbinado sugar, raw honey, and tofu in moderation (diced small and cooked with spices)