

## Diet for Vata General Considerations

- As people with dominant Vata dosha have both unpredictable appetites and an inherent loathing of routine, eating quality food in sufficient quantity by eating more frequently is useful, as long as there is hunger.
- Key qualities of Vata diet are warm, heavy, moistening, nourishing, nurturing, soothing, satisfying, and grounding. Warm foods are best especially stews and simple one-dish meals. Avoid a great variety at one meal.
- Use mild spices and a little salt to help prime digestion.
- Eating at home is best. Eating fast food is the very worst choice.
- Be aware of allergies. Vata people may not tolerate nightshades (potatoes, tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant) and are often lactose intolerant.
- Avoid eating when nervous, anxious, afraid, deep in thought or worried or otherwise distracted.
- As Vata digestion is the least strong, pay attention to eating when eating; avoid working, watching TV, listening to the radio, reading, etc.
- Eat with people who take pleasure in eating in a calm, tidy, clean, and spacious feeling atmosphere.
- Skipping meals is not good, but overeating is worse. Avoid “pigging out” on anything. Excess is never good for Vata types.
- Vata is increased by age, autumn season, afternoon time, travel, loud noise, cold and wind. Be particularly careful with diet at these time or when in these situations.
- Qualities of food that balance Vata are: sweet, heavy, sour, salty, oily, warm. Take proportionately more of these.
- Qualities of food that unbalance Vata are: Pungent, bitter, astringent, light, dry, cold. Take less of these and less frequently.

## Shopping List for Vata

Grains: Brown rice, sweet brown rice, basmati rice, wild rice, oats (cooked), \*amaranth, whole-wheat cereals and pastas, udon noodles.

Legumes: split mung and red lentils, aduki, tofu, and soy beverage.

Animal Products: eggs, chicken, turkey, fresh and salt water fish, shrimp.

Vegetables: asparagus, acorn squash, artichokes, beets, butternut squash, carrots, cucumber, green beans, leeks, mustard greens, okra, onions, parsnips, pumpkins, radish, rutabaga, summer squash, sweet potato. (vegetables that are in season is the best choice).

Fruits: apricots, avocado, bananas (ripe), berries (sweet), cherries, coconut, dates, fresh figs, grapefruit, kiwi, lemon, limes, \*mangoes, melons, oranges, papayas, peaches, pineapple, plum, rhubarb, raisins (soaked).

Nuts and Seeds: Almonds, \*brazils, \*cashews, \*hazelnuts, \*pecans, \*pine nuts, \*pistachio, pumpkin, sesame, sunflower, \*walnuts.

Sweeteners: Barley malt, brown rice syrup, \*ghur, \*jaggery, fruit juice concentrates, honey, maple syrup, molasses, \*sucanat, \*sugar cane juice.

Condiments and Pickles and Extras : Lemon juice, lime juice, gomasio (sesame seed and sea salt mixture), Japanese ginger pickle, mayonnaise, miso, natural soy sauce, sweet pickles, sweet chutney, sea vegetables, sesame seeds, and umeboshi plums.

Oils and Spices: Asafoetida, ajwan, garlic, ginger, mustard oil, sesame oil (all spices are good if used moderately and cooked properly. Refer The Ayurvedic Cookbook, by Amadea Morningstar.)

Beverages: Aloe Vera juice, fruit and vegetable juices, smoothies, coffee substitutes (Cafix, Roma, Pero), herbal teas (chamomile, lavender, licorice, fennel, ginger, raspberry), vegetable broth.

\*This symbol is used for foods that should only be taken occasionally.

#### When Away or Dining Out...

- Avoid strong liquors and beer
- Warmed medicinal wine or diluted table wine is O.K.
- Eat soup instead of salad or use a creamy or oily dressing to make the salad more digestible and less rough for the system.
- Sip hot water with the meal, avoid ice water
- Go for a warm dessert or hot tea at the end of the meal
- If you MUST have ice cream, drink hot tea with clove and cardamom later.

#### Preparation Tips for Vata Diet

Grains: Most grains are useful, as they are warming and grounding. Some are too drying for regular use. Yeast breads and pastries are best avoided as they cause gas and disturb the digestive system. Use a variety of whole grains to avoid developing allergies. Cook grains with a little more water than the regular 1 cup grain to 2 cups water ratio, adding a little salt, clarified butter or oil, slices of ginger, and a pinch of ghur (Indian raw sugar).

Legumes: Beans are an excellent source of protein, but can be a challenge to digest. Processing by splitting the beans and removing the hull makes them easier to digest which is why split mung and red lentils are so popular in Indian cuisine. If beans cause gas formation, they are increasing Vata dosha. This problem can be helped by soaking whole beans overnight and changing the water before cooking (adding kombu seaweed for overnight cooking will also help).

Cooking for long periods of time with the lid off so Vata causing products can 'bubble' off. All day, on an open fire, (Navajo style) is best. A crockpot for beans is better than a pressure cooker in the modern kitchen. Use turmeric, cumin, coriander, ginger, garlic, and asafoetida as standard spices when cooking beans. Eat beans in small quantities (10-20% of meal, proportionately), chewing very well.

Vegetables: Cooking vegetables is the best way to improve their digestibility for Vata people; stir fry, stew, or bake and serve with sauce. Raw vegetables and salads can be made more digestible by quick pickling, pressed with a little salt, or serving them with an oily or creamy dressing.

Meats: As beans are difficult for Vata to digest and dairy products often cause allergenic reactions, meat and eggs, correctly prepared, provide a vital source of protein.

Meats are best prepared with ginger, garlic, turmeric, and black pepper, cooked thoroughly and seared in stews or with sauce or gravy. White meats, fresh fish, or wild game are best. Lamb or beef is used if real grounding is needed.

Dairy: If well tolerated, milk and milk products are a strengthening, body-building food. Milk itself, is most easily digested by Vata people when it is heated and mixed with spice. Other examples are...

Lassi—yogurt mixed 1:3 with water and a little lemon juiced, pinch of salt, slice of fresh ginger, powdered cumin and coriander—taken after meals; or Hot milk toddy with ghee, ginger, and a little honey; or Cheese fondue; or spicy cheese sauce with chili.

Fruit: Fruits that are sweet, moist, and well ripened are suitable. Dried fruit is too dry unless soaked and cooked in a compote, preferably with ginger and cinnamon. Cooked fruit is best eaten as dessert approximately twenty minutes after the rest of the meal. Raw fruits can disturb digestion unless they are eaten alone as a snack or before a meal as a light appetizer or chutney. This applies especially to fruits in the melon family.

Nuts and Seeds: Nut are best soaked and cooked into dishes or blended into nut butters or the Vata digestive system. Smoothies with nut milk are a great snack for Vatas on the go. Also, 10 almonds that have been soaked and skinned provide all the nutrients a body needs for one day—a popular Ayurvedic snack.

Sweeteners: Honey in moderation and never cooked into things is best; just add to foods for sweetness. Vatas most easily suffer from fluctuating blood sugar levels, thus should totally avoid white sugar.

Condiments help provide variety, excitement and interest to the simple meals that are best for Vatas, but are against their tendencies to want excessive stimulation. Sea vegetables are particularly useful as they are very high in minerals which help build rich skin, hair, and strong nails—often what Vatas need.

Spice: Most spices are good unless in excess or extremely strong in taste. Too much hot spice can dry Vata people too much or cause sweat that dispels body heat.

Drinks: Drinks are best warm or at room temperature. Coffee and tea are too stimulating, as is alcohol. Fizzy drinks can be too gassy. Fruit and vegetable juices are O.K. but in excess are too sweet and do not provide enough fiber for good digestion. They are good alternatives to total fasting if there is a lot of toxic build-up. Herbal teas made of the herbs and spices that benefit Vata are good to warm the body, help digestion, and calm the nerves.

{Inspired by Melanie Sachs' book Ayurvedic Beauty Care}