The Ayurvedic Wellness Counselor Program

KAA 107: Yoga Therapy (Yoga Vigyan)
Yoga: An Introduction

- Yoga is a comprehensive system of healing that dates back to the Vedas (6000 BC) showing its origins in the most ancient of the Vedas, the Rig Veda.

- Yoga should not be confused with the commercial yoga approach stereotyped as fitness. It is a vast system for raising consciousness and connecting us to the highest qualities inherent in nature.

- The system of yoga itself evolved from the Vedas as one of the six Darshanas (philosophies); practical methods for acquiring the highest healing centered upon God realization.

- Along with the Vedanta and Samkhya philosophies, Yoga has become the most popular system as it emphasizes a practical methodology for healing the body, mind and soul.
Yoga: An Introduction

- No other system in the world moves beyond cultural barriers, caste and creed to show the scientific way of realizing the highest truth, the quest for perfect health and happiness.
- In about 200 BC, the sage Patanjali compiled the vast yoga system into a more concise system of aphorisms and outlined eight steps titled the *Ashtanga Yoga Sūtras*. As a treatise on Yoga, the *Ashtanga Sūtras* build on the Samkhya school and the epic Hindu scripture the *Bhagavad Gita*.
- Yoga as a science of uniting one’s consciousness is also found in the Puranas and the Upanishads.
Yoga: An Introduction

The Main Branches or Types of Yoga

1. **Karma Yoga** is the path of service in accordance with the law of cause and effect. Karma yogi’s are naturally drawn towards humanitarian causes and serve as an excellent example of reflecting the ideals of truthfulness and non-violence.

2. **Bhakti Yoga** is the practice of cultivating devotion and love for all. Bhakti yogi’s understand that by giving love to God and others is the greatest medicine for healing.

3. **Jnana Yoga** is the path of acquiring knowledge, which is often confused with intellect. This type of knowledge is purely acquired through a deeper understanding of the highest truths that uphold our planet and the vast universe.

4. **Raja Yoga** is the royal path of practicing yoga as an integral system of balancing activity with meditation.

5. **Hatha Yoga** is a smaller division of the Tantra tradition, which emphasizes the balance of the sun and moon energies. Hatha yoga includes the use of asana (postures), Pranayama (breathing techniques), Bandhas (energy locks) and Mudras (gestures).
Yoga: An Introduction

The Main Texts of the Yoga Tradition

The Vedas
The Vedas are comprised of four main teachings that were originally passed down by word owing to a highly advanced technique of memorization known as Smarna. The Vedas are Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva. The knowledge in the Vedas is derived from the intelligence of the cosmos.

The Upanishads
The Upanishads are composed of 108 poetic statements that are considered themes of Vedantic teachings. The Upanishads have been very influential on the spiritual traditions of India. One of the best commentaries on the Upanishads was written by a highly regarded spiritual figure named Adi Shankara; who gave birth to the non-dualistic (Advaita Vedanta) view of existence. In the Upanishads originates one of the Mahavakyas, (Grand statements) Tat Tvam Asi, which translates into “Thou art that” as one of the defining statements of Vedantic literature.
The Bhagavad Gita

Authored by Veda Vyasa the Bhagavad Gita is part of the epic Mahabharata and is considered the greatest of yogic scriptures as it thoroughly explains the main branches of yoga and provides the basis for psychological healing. Its main characters are Bhagavan Krishna as the guru and Arjuna as his disciple.

Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras

A compilation of the vast yoga teaching; the sutras represent the teachings of yoga as a systematic integral approach to healing the body, mind and soul. They explain the social and personal principles of conduct that integrate with the Ayurvedic principles of lifestyle.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika

This text is the main teaching of the postures and breathing exercises used as a way to balance the doshas and purify the body and mind of impurities. It presents the use of various physical and esoteric techniques as preparations for the higher inner practices of mantra and meditation.
The two most prominent viewpoints of the Yoga tradition are presented in the Sankhya and Vedantic philosophies, particularly the branch of Advaita. Both present different ways of understanding the same truth and these are best explained in the Bhagavad Gita. The 24 principles of Sankhya provides structured explanations of how the human being comes into existence. Sankhya also becomes a useful model for diagnosis and healing in Ayurvedic medicine. In Advaita Vedanta no concept of the individualized self exist and it essentially professes that all that exist is the true self and the idea that life and the universe are one, there is no separation between the two. The Sankhya teaching allows us to view the body and mind as instruments for healing consciousness and Advaita aligns us with consciousness to understand that we are not the body or the mind. The various tools and techniques of the Yoga system are practical ways of uniting two paths into one truth.
Yoga: An Introduction

The Basis for Raising Consciousness

The healing of the mind in Ayurveda is the basis for raising consciousness in Yoga and these principles are derived from the treatise known as Manastha Shastra. In order to heal the body we must work with its counterpart, the mind, and see the correlation between the two entities to truly address the causes of disease. As we heal ourselves we equally raise our capacity for raising consciousness, as the body and mind are instruments that hold a certain level of life force energy. All real healing is really based on prana, life force energy and the amount we are able to maintain active.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Commonality

Main Practices (1 – 4)

1. **Asana**: Postures and sequences that improve spinal strength, function and flexibility.

2. **Pranayama**: Various forms of breathing applied therapeutically to heal the body and mind.

3. **Pratyahara**: Relaxation techniques to balance the doshas and increase immunity (Ojas) through interiorization of the mind. This is achieved during the restful periods of an asana practice.

4. **Dharana**: Practical techniques of concentration that balance the Vayus (Five Pranas) in order for deeper healing to occur. A healthy mind is a present one. Concentration is developed in postures, breathing techniques, chanting mantras, visualizations and meditation.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Commonality

Main Practices (5 – 7)

5. Mantra: A very special form of sound therapy to heal the mind and balance the emotions.

6. Marmas: These powerful energy points throughout the body bring flow, balance and vitality to the various systems, tissues, chakras and doshas.

7. Dhyana: The art of stilling the body, mind and breath. The majority of the yoga teachings are designed with the intention of practicing meditation. The asanas are essentially preparations towards meditation.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Commonality

Unified Purpose

Both Ayurveda and yoga share the same purpose of life in realizing the self. The Eight limbed system as enumerated by Sage Patanjali explains the methods of the system as a whole approach to life, preparation, internalization and liberation. The postures and breathing exercise serve as components of the preparatory phase and are beneficial on both physical therapeutic level and on the psycho spiritual level of raising awareness. The highest intention of both sciences is self-realization and each tradition offers its own unique scientific approach to reaching this goal.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Therapeutic Basis

The Concept of *Chikitsa*

The word *Chikitsa* (therapy) does not exist in yoga independent of Ayurveda. Any form of using yoga in a therapeutic context is essentially Ayurvedic in nature. Traditional yoga was ritualistic and was practiced, as sacred gestures to the Gods, postures and sequences are types of invocations to the Gods or human potentials awakened from within. The therapeutic application of asanas (postures) began around the beginning of the 20th century and has continued to increase in popularity through today. The modern term of “Yoga Therapy” describes the use of postures in order to heal various ailments or treat injuries.
The commercial approach to yoga therapy is generally aligned with modern medical views and is misaligned with its counterpart Ayurveda. The practice of therapeutic yoga must be aligned with Ayurveda in order to maintain its efficacy and capacity for removing causes of diseases. Even the practice of yoga for mere physical therapeutic benefit is better suited when aligned with Ayurveda as it allows for specialized prescriptions according to the individuals needs. The science of Tri-dosha (Vata, Pitta & Kapha) treats the individual/patient and is compatible with the yoga concept of Gurukul or teacher-student relationship, which allows the Guru to give specific teachings and suggestions to the disciple necessary for removing karma.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Therapeutic Basis

The Concept of Chikitsa (Cont’d)

The benefit of practicing yoga postures comes from its ability to work beyond the outer aspects of the body and has a cleansing action on the internal organs and a simulative effect on the three main regions of the spine. In this regard, western health and fitness falls short as wellness is often determined by outer appearance, not inner function. Most of us are aware of the many forms or styles of yoga that are mainly fabrications of a western approach to fitness and branding. The use of postures and its various components such as breathing as explained by me in this program module follows a traditional view of yoga as explained in the main Asana yoga text titled “Hatha Yoga Pradipika.” The application of such use of the body and its mechanics also includes the integration of the energetic principles of the science of tri-dosha as taught in Ayurveda. This unique approach combines two vast systems aligned with the same intention to heal the body and mind and raise consciousness. Both are intrinsically intertwined and realistically cannot be practiced separate of each other.
It is also important to note that healing or the concept of Chikitsa, therapies according to yoga and Ayurveda is based on the elemental energies that abide with in us. Energy in particular cannot always be diagnosed or compartmentalized into absolute places through out the body or traced in specific patterns, as energy is found in varying degrees of vibration and differs from one individual to another depending on prakriti (constitution), karma, geography, etc. Therefore we must conclude that any treatment on a therapeutic level must be addressed on an individual basis.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Therapeutic Basis

The Three Shariras (Bodies) Concept of Healing

Yoga like Ayurveda views healing on the level of each body, namely the physical, astral and causal. Keeping in this view of healing that health is achieved on three levels (3 bodies) the practice of yoga assumes its basis as an integral science for healing. On this premise we can conclude that Yoga as a scientific system must be kept unfragmented in its practice in order to establish real healing. This additionally concludes that the individual bodies function on five elemental levels of vibration, the gross body functions/heals through the five great elements (Pancha Maha Bhutas), the subtle body functions/heals through the spinal plexuses (Chakras) and the causal body functions/heals through the five sheaths (Koshas).
As we look at healing in this way one can gather the depth and scope of such a system, which can bring a greater understanding of the time required to truly heal any aspect of the body or mind. There are no quick fixes in yoga although some basic practice of yoga on a daily basis can be one of the most powerful preventative health measures taken, especially for those preaching or teaching Ayurveda. The practice of yoga strengthens the foundation of individual discipline and responsibility, of which Ayurvedic healing is based on. Healing is not done independent of a person’s effort but is highly dependent on the individual’s level of participation and knowledge.
The Spine and the Doshas

Knowledge of the spine is essential in therapeutic application of both Yoga and Ayurveda. The spine is the main anatomical structure of the body in which the use of postures is directed towards to increase energy and strength and to raise consciousness. Any complete practice or therapeutic prescription of yoga asana should include positions that effect the three main spinal sections, namely sacrum/lumbar, thoracic and cervical. All yoga is essentially spinal in nature and on the physical level, awareness and concentration should be placed on the feeling in the spine as the posture is held and on the psycho-spiritual level the concentration and visualization of the spine should be emphasized for deeper balancing of the subtle body, charkas and emotional body.
The principles of Ayurveda combined into yoga are not mere methods of trial and error or some system based on the view of one individual but is a scientific system based on energetic balance. Ayurvedic yoga is not limited to a particular style or brand of fixed positions or sequences but takes from the many modalities, tools and techniques of the yoga tradition and those devised by great yogis over the ages. Ayurvedic yoga is about understanding the use of postures and forms of breathing and applying them more specifically to an individual’s needs both physically and mentally. The rule of thumb is often “what we need the most, we resist the most” for example with the Vata types that generally can be a bit restless, do best with positions on the floor and slow moving sequences that will gradually slow them down and bring them into stillness. The first step in working with this original approach is education and to have the basic understanding of why yoga should be practiced in a certain way. Yoga must include basic education and have meaning as to why it is being done, the purpose and its steps must be clear.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Therapeutic Basis

Vata Yoga

The asanas for Vata should be practiced slowly with emphasis on maintaining stability and stillness. Unless it is a balancing posture they should hold positions for longer periods until there is a feeling of being well settled in a position. Vata types should aim to release tension from the lower spinal region, that of the hips, sacrum and lower lumbar spine. It is important for Vata types to warm up thoroughly and to maintain a consistent body temperature throughout the practice. Deep fluid breathing should be practiced in postures to improve circulation, which is a common Vata issue. The most important rule for Vata in asana practice is to do whatever is necessary to maintain both physical and a mental sense of stability and a feeling of being secure and grounded in each pose. At times this may require lowering a knee down in a lunging warrior posture or dropping the fingers to tips to the ground during a balancing pose. Floor postures are the best especially spinal compressing positions that heat the body and bring a constant flow of stimulation to the central nervous system along the spine. Such classic asanas are Urdhva Danurasana (floor bow) and Bhujangasana (cobra) and Urdhva Muka Savanasana (upward facing dog). Asanas are very helpful in strengthening the digestive fire (Jathra agni) and keeping bowel movements regular, both of which are common issues with high Vata.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Therapeutic Basis

Pitta Yoga

The asanas for pitta types should be practiced in moderation and with a surrendering intention. Pittas should avoid pushing or bouncing in postures and should keep to the mantra that “less is better” to avoid always going to the edge or maximum range of capacity and flexibility in each posture. Pitta types have the greatest ability in practicing yoga and usually are the best athletes and asana teachers. Pitta types should aim to release accumulation of Pitta in the mid region of the spine in the small intestine, to emphasize cooling the blood and the liver. Forward bends are best in this case as well as spinal twist to release this tension and heat that builds there and also fuels the mind. Backbends or any spinal compressing posture should be done carefully as over compression can damage in the vertebral disk especially the five lumbar vertebrae (in the lower lumbar region), which are most commonly aggravated from over pressure from sitting in chairs and cars, also these vertebrae are the first to be compressed in any back bend, so they get the most activity. Twisting positions are excellent especially those done in lunging positions or performed kneeling to avoid over heating. The seated and lying twist are very soothing for Pitta as well.
Kapha Yoga

Kapha types need to have full motivation and stimulation through asana and pranayama. They benefit from quickness when transitioning to the next posture and should hold standing and balancing postures the longest. Of all types of asanas those performed on the floor should be practiced the least as kapha types are very comfortable on the earth and tend to get lazy and sluggish very quickly. In working with Kapha one should aim at releasing kapha in the upper spine, by stimulating the lungs and improving respiratory function. Strong and quick respiration improves circulation and helps increase heat and promote sweat (svedhana) a key component to keeping kapha in balance. Svedhana is one of the main actions in the therapeutic system Pancha Karma, which helps reduce excess Medas (adipose tissue). Vinyasas or sequences that link movement with breath are excellent for kapha because they really stimulate and strengthen the cardiovascular system. In general to treat kapha floor postures should be held for short periods and then combined with intervals of pranayama for deeper purification of the tissues and nadis (nerve channels). Standing postures can be held for longer periods of time.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Therapeutic Basis

Yoga Practice According to Prakriti

The key to an Ayurvedic approach to yoga for all types is mainly concerned with the intention behind the practice of postures and techniques and less regard on what is being practiced or prescribed. In general, everyone will benefit from a yoga practice that includes all types of postures and sequences and breathing techniques etc... more importantly is how students/patients are approaching the yoga and for what purpose. In more chronic health conditions yoga should be prescribed specifically according to the persons Vikriti (imbalance) in order to obtain maximum health benefit and reduce any risk of further complications or injury.
Physiological Effects of Asana and Pranayama

According to Ayurveda the “mother of the body” is the digestive system and its balance (tri-dosha) is the foundation for optimum health. Yoga postures as exercises predominantly bring vigor to the digestive system by increasing the rate of metabolism. Modern medicine defines two distinguishable types of metabolism: constructive metabolism, the synthesis of the proteins, carbohydrates, and fats that form tissue and store energy, and destructive metabolism, the breakdown of complex substances and the consequent production of energy and waste material. Postures that effect the three main regions of the spine will ultimately have an overall balancing effect on the Doshas and their respective organs the stomach, large and small intestines.
Physiological Effects of Asana and Pranayama (Cont’d)

Like asana although more subtle, Pranayama improves the circulatory system, which naturally increases digestive strength and adaptability. Improved circulation brings fresh oxygenated blood to the stomach for quicker elimination and supports synergistic harmony between each organ. Unlike some allopathic views of anatomy and physiology Ayurveda sees the function of our physiology as intrinsically connected to one another and supported by the elements, air, fire and water. Through knowledge of Ayurveda we know that the subtler element purifies the denser, hence the air element or Vata in this respect is the master influence on Pitta and Kapha. Pranayama becomes a vital tool for balancing and controlling Prana and thus bringing the air element (Vata Dosha) into balance. Once this has occurred Pitta and Kapha Dosha issues can be more effectively treated. Posture and breath go to together as two sides of the same coin, proper breathing must be understood according to the posture and the constitution.
The body becomes an important tool not only for the body but for the mind as well. The body serves as a vehicle for the mind to unravel its agitation (Rajas) and awaken from dullness (Tamas). Asanas are essentially a Rajasic (stimulative) action that can stir the dormant energies. Healing cannot be limited to the physical body but must connect the mind to play an active role in the process otherwise healing becomes remedial or symptomatic. Often times when the mind is awakened through the use of multiple postural sequences it can allow for greater insight into the nature of certain emotions or mental patterns correlated to pain, injury or blocks. The mind can raise its state of presence especially when postures are combined with Pranayamas and Bandhas (energy locks). With repetition yoga brings the mind into sattva (purity & calmness) the highest level of being where true health and healing abide.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Therapeutic Basis

Physiological Effects of Asana and Pranayama (Cont’d)

In order for healing to occur the mind must become discriminative (Viveka) to drive out the Tamas and Rajas. The greatest benefit of yoga on the mental factory is the capacity to slow it down, enhancing the capability of discerning between disease creating habits born of the ego (Ahankara) or the soul qualities of happiness found in the calm state known as sattva guna. In verse 37 of the Bhagavad Gita Krishna states “That which is born of the clear perceptive discrimination of self-realization—that happiness is called Sattvic. It seems like poison at first, but like nectar afterward.” This sacred scriptural teaching reveals the initial difficult states of resistance and discontent like “poison” that is experienced by the practitioner during battle with senses as they release their grip of rajas and Tamasic attachments. The body and the mind are the tools by which asana and Pranayama can sever the causes of disease, pain and suffering once and for all.
Asanas & Doshas: The Basics

Types of Asanas

There are various types of asanas that are used to strengthen the muscles, increase suppleness and length in the spine and improve overall tone to the body and dhatu (tissues). A complete practice or therapeutic prescription of asana should include a variety that addresses the three main parts of the spine (lumbar, thoracic and cervical).

Sequences

Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutation) is considered the primary sequence of postures in the yoga tradition and has been the platform for a modern yoga class. It consists of twelve positions adapted according to the months of the year during the 365 days, the moon orbits the earth 12 times, hence the 12 months in the year and the salutation to the sun which brings light to the moon. This sequence is tri-doshic and can benefit all types of people of all levels. Surya Namaskar brings balance to the sun and moon nadis (channels) especially when combined with Nadi Shodhana (alternate nostril breathing). This sequence is often best used as preparatory to other asanas. Overall the sequence benefits the digestive and respiratory systems improves kidney function and the balance of the glandular (Endocrine) system.

There are seven main types of postures. A tri-doshic and well balanced asana routine should include all seven types.
Types of Asanas (Cont’d)

**Standing**
Standing postures generally serve to open the hips and the mid abdomen and reduce Vata and Pitta without creating too much heat. Standing postures would generally be considered having both legs active in the pose.

**Balancing**
These poses motivate the mind by creating the need to focus the attention and increase the function of the lungs and eventually the heart. This is the best way to create heat in the body. A balancing pose generally means that one leg is more active than the other.
Asanas & Doshas: The Basics

Types of Asanas (Cont’d)

**Seated**

Seated positions are a fundamental starting point for many postures like forward bends but also can be used as hip openers where Vata often stores. Twists are also very beneficial when done in the seated position because balance is not a factor and both the lower and mid spine get benefit.

**Inverted**

Any time the torso is above the head the posture can be considered inverted. These postures are usually heating and can be strengthening to the upper body, arms and torso.

**Forward Bends**

These postures are the most important for cooling the body and releasing tension from the mid abdomen where Pitta accumulates.
Types of Asanas (Cont’d)

Back Bends

Compression of the spine increases heat and opens the chest and lungs where Kapha is predominant. Vata types can benefit by performing standing backbends with a slight (micro) bend in the knees to give them more stability in the pose. Backbends should also be practiced slowly as dizziness can often occur especially when exiting the posture.

Twisting

Twisting postures aim to cool the body and are particularly important to use at the end of a practice. All types of twist are very effective at releasing accumulated pitta in the mid abdomen. Balancing twist should be practiced the least and for short periods as these substantially increase heat in the body.
Asanas & Doshas: The Basics

Types of Asanas (Cont’d)

When practicing asana for spiritual reasons or using them for therapeutic benefit it is important to understand the basic principles of alignment of each posture to receive the greatest benefit and ensure safety in practice. Although alignment was not specifically detailed in classical yoga when combined with modern understanding of anatomy and orthopedics alignment can help reduce the risk of injury and provide better results in a shorter period of time. Over time a practitioner increases the level of efficiency through increased mental acuity and physical precision in the application of postures. It is important to note that alignment will vary from person to person depending on level of experience, age and Dosha type. The initial step of learning alignment begins with the orientation of the spine, most particularly the hips. The secondary step of practicing proper alignment is placement of the feet with relation to the position of the knees. The third principle of alignment is the positioning of the shoulders in conjunction with the neck with respect to the lower half of the spine. These three aspects combined create the foundation for the safe application of postures that will ultimately bring maximum benefit when practiced regularly. I recommend that anyone who is serious about yoga and Ayurveda begin to learn asanas by taking classes for a one to two year period at least until the basic postures are learned and then one should continue to practice at home and explore holding them in different variations.

Yoga postures should be learned with a common sense approach to feeling what is right according to your body. What may feel good to one may feel painful to another therefore each person should use their own judgment and find out how the postures can best benefit them.
Asanas & Doshas: Vata

1. Child’s Pose (Balasana)

An excellent asana to pacify vata as it is very calming and grounding. This posture has a particularly good effect on the large intestine and removing gas from this sight and for constipation issues. It soothes the lower spine releasing tension and promotes slow deep breathing.
Asanas & Doshas: Vata

2. Open Leg Forward Bend (Upavistha Konasana)

This posture both releases tension in the hips and increases length in the spine. It is very effective for anxiety and nervous disorders and improves sleep. As the flexibility increases the legs should be opened further apart.
3. Head to Knee (Janu Sirsasana)

This posture both releases tension in the hips and increases length in the spine. It is very effective for anxiety and nervous disorders and improves sleep. As the flexibility increases the legs should be opened further apart.
Asanas & Doshas: Vata

4. Shoulderstand (Sarvangasana)

This posture is one of the most therapeutic of the classic poses. It brings specific benefit to the central nervous, digestive and circulatory systems. The digestive organs are massaged internally and this inverted position promotes the loosening of ama (undigested food waste) in the colon, small intestines and stomach. Shoulderstand pools more freshly oxygenated blood in the upper lungs and heart therefore improving circulation. All 24 vertebrae in the spine are stimulated allowing for better nerve flow and greater space between the disc and length in the spinal muscles (erector spinae) improve nervous system balance and constancy. Sciatica can be treated with shoulderstand if the posture is practiced repeatedly over a 4 – 8 week period of time.
Asanas & Doshas: Vata

5. Kneeling Side Plank (Vasisthasana)

Of arm balances side plank is excellent for Vata as it builds upper body strength and increases mental confidence for those commonly plagued with slumping shoulders and spinal curvature. It also helps to strengthen the pectorals and deltoids are needed to support the upper spine and head. Concentration is improved as the knee is taken off the ground and the overall body’s agni is increased, also beneficial for Vata types. The basic full plank with all four limbs grounded is also a great option for Vata’s needing to build upper body strength.
Asanas & Doshas: Pitta

1. Seated Forward Bend (Paschimottanasana)

Given that when the spine is bending forward over the hips the body is less prone to heat this is beneficial for pitta. This posture completely stretch’s both the leg biceps and calves and through to the Achilles tendon as well as the main muscles of the back. It helps to reduce high blood pressure and gently improves conditions related to heart disease.
Asanas & Doshas: Pitta

2. Standing Open Leg Forward Bend (Padottanasana)

Like most forward bends this asana has a deeper stretching capacity than the seated variation as the head and torso’s weight can be leveraged to release back tension common to aggressive pitta types. It is a form of inversion that brings more blood and oxygen to the brain but not quite as heating as the head stand.
Asanas & Doshas: Pitta

3. Locust (Salabhasana)

This is an excellent posture to stimulate and balance heart function. The heart is commonly associated with pitta disorders owing to lack of emotional fulfillment, overdoing most tasks including excessive exercise or work to escape a lack of contentment (santosha). When practiced locust stimulates kidneys function and subsequently brings fresh oxygenated blood to the heart. Heart strength is increased and blood pressure is regulated. An excellent posture to treat diabetes but should be practiced with caution by those with hypersensitive heart disease. Good for low back pain issues related to disc herniation and lumbar spondylosis (a painful condition of the spine resulting from the degeneration of the intervertebral disks).
Asanas & Doshas: Pitta

4. Seated Spinal Twist (Ardha Matsyendrasana)

This classic spinal twist targets the mid spinal region, the main site for Pachaka pitta and related organs (small intestine, liver and gall bladder). It is particularly good for curing cervical spondylosis, kyphosis (crooked spinal column). This asana enhances venous blood circulation, inflow into the liver from the intestine, pancreas, spleen and stomach and is also very relieving to issues related to diabetes.
Asanas & Doshas: Pitta

5. Rabbit (Sasangasana)

This is one of the most therapeutic asana as it brings benefit to a wide range of areas in the body and relieves pain from a range of disorders. It releases much tension throughout the 24 spinal vertebrae and has a strong stimulative effect on the internal organs. Rabbit has a specific benefit on the upper spine and head regions, issues often connected to Sadhaka (brain & heart) and Arochaka (eyes) pitta. Its unique positioning of the cervical spine in accordance with the chest and collar bone region stimulates the pituitary, thyroid, and para-thyroid glands of which can benefit the hormonal imbalances commonly affecting women.
Asanas & Doshas: Kapha

1. Dancing Shiva Pose (Natarajasana)

This balancing posture engages every muscle in the body and specifically helps strengthen the abdominal muscles and lower back. It has a strong effect on the digestive system and the related organs (intestines and stomach). It also is very invigorating to the lungs and heart as it raises the heart rate it becomes very beneficial to the cardiovascular system especially when held for long periods (1-2 minutes) or done repeatedly. Shiva’s pose is excellent for respiratory issues related to congestion and poor circulation and promotes weight loss.
2. Mayurasana (Peacock)

Peacock is rather difficult posture but can be practiced in different variations depending on the level of practice and prakriti (constitution). It brings acute stimulation to the transverse colon, therefore it is very beneficial for a sluggish digestion or even constipation. It is one of the best poses for all gastro intestinal diseases such as indigestion (dyspepsia), removes gas from the intestines and is valuable for balancing hyperglycemia (an excess of glucose in the bloodstream), a condition commonly associated with diabetes. Mostly all of the upper body muscles toned and conditioned in peacock, a posture worth learning and practicing.
Asanas & Doshas: Kapha

3. Camel Pose (Ustrasana)

To allow for the lungs to fully expand and increase stimulation the camel posture must be practiced in kapha conditions. The camel posture is a backend done standing on the knees and directly opens the chest and shoulders to allow for the lungs completely open. It increases heat and strongly improves circulation and reduces sinus issues and can cure asthmatic bronchitis. It is safe and very effective for many throat related issues such as tonsillitis (inflammation of the tonsils) and pharyngitis (inflammation which causes a sore throat).
Asanas & Doshas: Kapha

4. Cobra (Bhujangasana)

This posture is one of the most recognized and can be easily practiced by persons without much experience. It opens the chest and corrects upper muscular and spinal problems. Cobra improves kidney function and can improve issues related to irregular menstruation. This posture is unique in that it can be performed with benefit even at a very gentle level of practice. Its curative capacity is most probably associated with being able to practice it repeatedly without much stress to the spine and muscles. It helps make a majority of the muscles in the back supple and is very helpful for low back pain or general back tension.
Asanas & Doshas: Kapha

5. Headstand (Sirsasana)

This posture increases Pitta and decreases Kapha, as it is very heating (especially when held over 3 minutes) and stimulating to the internal organs, most specifically the lungs and heart. It is considered by many as the King of all asanas for its range of therapeutic benefits. Emotionally it can counter depression, poor self-esteem, anxiety and lethargy. It is useful for those with weak jathraagni (digestive fire) and weight loss.
Asanas & Doshas: The Basics

**Posture Modifications, Holds and Sequences**

The practice of asana will vary from one person to another depending on dosha type, experience, injuries, age and even karma and astrology can influence how postures are done. The most important theme of an Ayurvedic approach to yoga is to do what is best for you according to your current state of being. What may feel good one day may feel very different the next but in the end continuity will determine the range of variance from one practice to another. Postures should be arranged and practiced in such a way that three main regions of the spine are exercised by combining extensions (forward bending), compressions (back bending) and rotations (twists).
All types of people will ultimately achieve the greatest benefit if the posture is held for a certain period of time, and the length is usually determined by the level of experience. The general time that postures are held falls between twenty seconds to upwards of 2 minutes, although there are many exceptions to this. Even the time of the year should be considered as in the summer time due to the heat and humidity the body is much more flexible therefore less asana is required and the length of the holds can be reduced to avoid overheating and exhaustion.

Sequences have become more popular in modern times particularly in the west and urban dwellers where people are restless and have very short attention spans. Although continuous sequences without pause for rest and internalization go against traditional principles, and such an approach becomes mere physical fitness exercises that leave a person more depleted whence they started.
Sequences are a very good way to harness the Vata energy through rajas (activity) to bring it into a state of stillness (sattva), the highest intention of yoga. Initially it may be beneficial to use sequences to slow a Vata type down but gradually the postures should be held longer and then include deeper moments of relaxation and internalization (Pratyahara). When a deep state of stillness is achieved in each posture and then subsequently in resting pose (savasana) it reflects a balanced mind. When the body feels, light, agile and energized it reflects a balanced body. Both of these are indications of a proper yoga routine.
Asanas & Doshas: The Basics

Asanas and the Dhatus

The seven bodily tissues, Dhatus, according to Ayurveda are the major players on the stage of an asana routine. They each play a vital role in maintaining the balanced state of tri-dosha. The strength of the tissues is a reflection of the state of our health, which can substantially be influenced through the practice of yoga and pranayama. Mamsa is the primary dhatu (tissue) most effected through asana as it is brought into balance through the stretching and strengthening action of the vigorous physical postures. The asanas are very preventative for arthritis and osteoporosis, common to Vayu disorders and Ashti dhatu (bone & cartilage). Asana can help to reduce the inflammation and improve the lack mobility associated with these diseases.
Asanas and the Dhatus (Cont’d)

The static action of asana is balancing to Majja dhatu (bone marrow & nerves) allowing for a more steady flow of energy through the nervous system. The combination of postures and the strong emphasis on proper breathing allow Rakta dhatu (blood) to be strengthened and purified with increased levels of hemoglobin (a red protein responsible for transporting oxygen in the blood of vertebrates). Through a Vinyasa (sequences that link movement with breath) approach to asana, Medas dhatu (fat) is balanced through the increased agni and bodily heat, both vital to keeping kapha in check. Through improved digestive power the body is able maintain Rasa dhatu (plasma) to nourish all the dhatus. Shukra dhatu (reproductive fluid) is the essence of all the tissues and gives us the inspiration and motivation to improve ourselves. All energy that the body expends is derived from Shukra and ignites the Agni (biological fire that provides energy for the body to function). Asana and Pranayama are the natural tools of practice and control of these energies. Any program aimed at improving the health of the dhatus must include some aspect of placing the body in dynamic positions combined with awareness of breath to develop a synchronicity between the mind and the body. In this current health crisis the core of all healing should be based on the intimate re-union of the body, mind and spirit.
Asanas & Doshas: The Basics

Asana, Pranayama and the Malas

According to the classical view of Hatha Yoga, asanas and pranayama are two of the main aids to purify and balance the bodily humors. The postures serve to purify the body by sweating through the largest organ in the body, the skin and pranayama serves to purify the mind and the subtle nerve channels (nadis) through focused and somewhat technical breath work. When Asana’s are combined with such breathing techniques as Ujjai (victory breath) and Bastrika (bellows breath) they induce heat, which promotes sweating. Sweating is a necessary physical function to keep the body purified of toxins ingested through poor diet, created by a weak digestive system and other factors like environment and air quality. Pranayama is extremely beneficial for clearing the sinuses and treating many respiratory disorders. As I mentioned in the previous sections the postures main physiological benefit is their capacity to increase metabolic function and improve circulation. This keeps the body properly eliminating waste in the form of feces and urination. Although sweating occurs with less regularity it is equally important as the skin covers the scope of the whole body. There is also a mental form clearing that occurs when the body sweats a sort tamasic (heavy) release that is represented in the processes of sweating.
Asanas & Doshas: The Basics

Asanas and Injuries

Yoga asana can be a very effective modality for healing all types of injuries, from muscular, skeletal, neurological and even for recovery from arthroscopic or laser surgery. In today's world a high majority of people have some type of injury that will require adapting to the yoga postures in some specific way that is unique to how that person experiences the pose. In this case, what may feel right to one, may feel uncomfortable to another, as is the case with various Dosha types. The most vital principle to working with injuries and also avoiding them is the need to “warm up” as this substantially reduces the risk of injury and also promotes elasticity of the muscles, circulation of blood and oxygen and joint mobility. A majority of injuries occur because the tissues are either, tight and dry or lack strength, both of which yoga postures can correct if practiced regularly.
Asanas & Doshas: The Basics

Asanas and Injuries (Cont’d)

In working with injured areas often it is required to direct the attention to the area opposite the site of the injury. This helps to create a counter support for the injured area while it is in a rehabilitation phase. Caution must be taken when treating an area that is recently injured as there could still be some inflammation or internal bleeding that is usually not visible and could degenerate if the postures are prescribed to acutely. Another important suggestion I give to patients that just completed a surgery or want to work through a recent injury is to begin at a 50% of their capacity even if it feels ok to push further. It is very common that injured areas become re-injured because the person started back with their physical exercises to quickly and did not allow enough time period to re-condition the area back to its original state. It is very important to communicate with the patient and never assume that something is ok because the practitioner knows it to be. When working with injuries it is always safer to work slowly and gradually back to a state of health, if the right amount of time is not allocated for treating an injury it could jeopardize the chances for a complete recovery and the problem may become permanent. At some point haven’t we all heard someone mention having a problem with a certain area as related to an old trauma that never healed or realistically was never really treated properly? This is the harsh truth. Injuries are one of the most challenging aspects of working with asanas as it requires the practitioner to be very creative and adaptable to every individual in a unique manner.
Asanas & Doshas: The Basics

Asanas and Life Routines

The use of asana can be adjusted according to the time of day and season to synchronize the energies of the body with nature in a more efficient way. In understanding the qualities of the elements we know that certain energies are predominant during certain seasons, like cold and moist in the winter and in the desert region, hot and dry, and other climates will vary as well. In keeping this in mind one could use a common sense approach to practicing yoga. It must make practical sense, for example during the summer season the body is naturally more flexible, owing to warmth and moisture the body can gain up to 25% more flexibility and improved joint function. With this in mind does it make sense to practice the same amount of physical yoga that one would practice in the winter time? Not really. The spring season is an important one for *Langhana* (Reduction) therapies and the yogic techniques should be aligned with purging the body from excesses accumulated during the winter months. Therefore the types of postures, sequences, length of holding each pose and Pranayamas all can be used specifically to balance the doshas during the appropriate season. Aligning our practice was a natural part of yoga during the golden era but has been lost during the modern ages because of a disaccord our societies have with nature. Another approach to therapeutic yoga is to nourish deficiencies in the body, known as *Brimhana* (Tonification). This can be particularly vital during the Fall season for Vata types after a long hot *Ojas* (Life sap) depleting summer. There are many such ways to accommodate the yoga practice according to the seasons and requires knowledge of basic Ayurvedic principles and a good understanding of the individual constitution.
Asanas & Doshas: The Basics

Asanas and Life Routines (Cont’d)

The other application of asana into lifestyle is that of the daily routine, Dinacharya. In general the yogic techniques should be aligned with the doshic energies throughout the day. Given that kapha is predominant in the morning more stimulating type asanas and pranayamas can be used to ignite the digestive fire and awaken the mind. Flowing sequences and challenging standing postures are also very helpful. In the late afternoon and early evening time as the sun sets and the winds of the day need to settle, a vata balancing practice is important and can be achieved with grounding floor poses, longer holds and slow deep breath work. A pitta practice would do best in the morning or evening time as these are the cool times of the day. In Ayurveda everything must be given consideration and ultimately gives this science its value as a comprehensive system that is seeking to re-align and unify us with nature and the higher cosmological forces.
Pranayama & Doshas: The Basics

Types of Pranayama

The art of breathing was taught by the ancient yogis as a way to control the mind. Naturally control of the mind includes its thoughts, ability to focus and concentrate and a balanced control of the emotions. Pranayama literally means “energy control”, and in yoga the breath is the body’s link to prana the life force energy that sustains all living things. Control of the senses is vitally linked to prana and proper conscious breathing is one powerful way to control the senses and the mind. The specialized breathing techniques of the Yoga tradition are practical tools for finding and uprooting the causes of diseases. The main text of Hatha Yoga, the “Pradipika” mentions eight such techniques of breathing, although there are many variations that have been created over the centuries by various lineages of masters, they essentially are forms of the original techniques taught in the yoga samhitas (texts).
Pranayama & Doshas: The Basics

Types of Pranayama (Cont’d)

The two most important pranayama exercises are *Nadi Shodhana* (alternate nostril breathing) and *Bastrika* (bellows breathing). The former balances and purifies the solar and lunar energies of the body and the latter awakens the *Shakti* (inner powers) of the body and also has a physically therapeutic effect on the nervous and circulatory system. Due to the structure and nature of this course we will focus on these two techniques only as learning these techniques properly will require much practical time and additional study. Alternate nostril breathing is considered as a primary exercise because of its ability to balance flow between the solar (pingala) and lunar (Ida) channels (nadis). On the physical level alternate nostril equalizes blood pressure and flow throughout the body allowing for a safer and more effective use of the asanas and other tools of yoga. This balanced flow must be established prior to asana and especially before other breathing techniques are performed such as Bastrika (Bellows breath) to safely ensure that the prana moves up through the spinal charkas in an equal manner.
Instructions for the Practice of Nadi Shodhana

One should be in a seated, cross-legged position, in a chair if necessary or in a kneeling position (Vajrasana) with the spine straight, the chest slightly lifted and the shoulders are gently pulled back, the chin is parallel to the floor. Using the right hand, the right thumb and ring fingers are used to close the right and left nostrils. Inhalation begins through the left side practiced slowly to ensure for a deep and complete breath and exhalation proceeds through the right nostril. The flowing breath is then reversed, by inhaling through the right nostril and exhaling through the left nostril; this completes one cycle of alternate nostril breathing. This technique should be practiced for a minimum of five minutes in order to have a healing effect on the mind but can be practiced upwards of thirty minutes when continuity of practice has been established over time. Initially, the general ratio for breathing is in equal parts. The technique of Kumbhaka (retention) can also be added at the end of the inhalation in equal proportion to the inhaling and exhaling breath. Alternate nostril breathing has a unique way of subduing the mind and is therefore very beneficial as a preparation to meditation. In this particular exercise breathing should be long and slow so to fully stretch the lungs and allow for a steady flow through the channels to bring more balance to the mind. Although there are exceptions and variations with regards to doshas.
Pranayama & Doshas: The Basics

Instructions for the Practice of Bastrika

One should be in a seated, cross-legged position, in a chair if necessary or in a kneeling position (Vajrasana) with the spine straight, the chest is slightly lifted and the shoulders are gently pulled back, the chin is parallel to the floor. Bellows breath in essence is a function of the diaphragm (a dome-shaped, muscular partition separating the thorax from the abdomen). The action of breathing; is done primarily by the diaphragm and the intercostal muscles because the lungs do not have any muscles of their own. Both the inhalation and exhalation are performed through the nostrils and should be equal in force. One should begin this type of breathing very slowly observing the natural rhythm of the abdomen. Bastrika is the primary Pranayama for learning to breath in various tempos in order to bring balance to the doshas. Slow breathing brings balance to Vata, moderate rhythm brings balance to Pitta and Kapha’s benefit from a shorter and faster breathing tempo. As the diaphragm contracts it moves downward leading to an expansion of the chest cavity. This natural breathing function is very therapeutic to many systems especially the respiratory, circulatory and digestive. It helps to reduce Kapha build up in the stomach and lungs and increases the digestive fire (Jatharagni).
Pranayama & Doshas: The Basics

Pranayama to Treat the Doshas

Any aspect of therapeutic yoga should include Pranayama to properly treat doshic imbalances. Pranayama becomes not only essential for physical types of imbalances but is vital for disorders related to the mental and emotional body, particularly Vata. Pranayama is like a flame of light that can guide us through uncertainty, worry and fear but if the flame is blown inconsistently it can create much complexity for the mind. Pranayama allows us to see beyond the body into the hidden portals that hold the Samskaras (mental seed tendencies) of our previous actions. Those new to yoga should begin Pranayama practice slowly to gradually purify the body of the subtle mental toxins that lie lodged in the tissues, nadis and charkas. The two above mentioned techniques are tri-doshic and can be used for Vata related issues connected to the nervous system and the joints, for Pitta related issues connected to the digestive system and for removing excess Kapha from its sites in the stomach and lungs through improved respiration and digestive strength. It is imperative to note that Pranayama takes time to see the results and must be practiced consistently in order to garner the effects for long term. Patience and knowledge of why the breathing techniques are being practiced will help anyone deepen the benefits of these ancient techniques.
Yoga & Ayurveda: Conclusion

Ayurvedic yoga is a unique system that can bring substantial healing in a simple and natural way. Do not become overwhelmed with the vastness and complexity of such a system as Yoga but begin practicing what you do know on your own and see the results for yourself. There is no better teacher than personal experience so that you can understand how it works first hand. Many talk about yoga but only a few make the time to move beyond the intellect to develop intuitive knowledge, this is the greatness of this science. Ayurveda teaches us a way of life and Yoga gives us the secretive tools for reaching the highest level of healing, body, mind and spirit. May we all follow in the footsteps of the great sages and rishis in keeping these dharmas authentic and pure supported with sincere aspirations of serving humanity and attaining self realization.