

# The Character of Dosha



It was a crazy quiet, summer evening in LA years ago. Traipsing to an audition at a studio lot, I was bubbly with anticipation. After entering a marble-floored atrium, I felt stomach-churning energy of competition rise to my throat. A beautiful young woman exited a door in front of me and I entered. Within seconds, my field of vision soaked in the pantheon of some sixty actresses. All of us had been sent based on the call, "...21-26 year old female, brunette, medium build...cheerful disposition..." We were assimilated into industry culture, all slightly tanned, whitened teeth, and moderately talented. Eerily reproduced, each of us was vying for the chance to be unique. The scene is indelible in my memory, the paradox, timeless.

The dramatic irony of yoga is that we seek to identify with ourselves knowing ultimately, this path leads to letting it all go. We yearn to express our uniqueness. Yet, difference is baffling. For example, your sister is giggly, but your brother is serious. Your wife is dynamic and your son is quite shy. So, our approach to how we connect with each personality must vary to be effective. That's why you may choose to rehearse an upcoming conversation with your boss, but wing your presentation to a colleague.

Ayurvedic texts like Charaka and Shoshruta Samhitas flesh out three qualities of energy in our constitutions that differ like characters in a play. Each type corresponds to the elements (mahabhutas) of yoga philosophy. Termed the doshas, they are Vata (V)/air and ether, Pitta (P)/fire and water, and Kapha (K)/earth and water.

Though we have a bit of all three doshas, we either display a predominance of one, a combination of two (VP, PK, VK), or a balance of all three. These combos comprise our prakriti, or physical selves. When imbalanced, one dosha upstages the others and becomes a vikriti. Calming down the excessive dosha will balance the body and mind back to its personal blueprint. Each dosha has best food choices, types of physical and mental exercises and lifestyle. But, this article focuses on the emotional temperament of each dosha and how to recognize our own loved ones through this system.

Dosha tests are used in Ayurveda, and in some ways are similar to personality tests used in corporate hiring, management seminars, and psychology magazines. As a yoga therapist, I utilize varying approaches based in part on my client's dosha. The test I use with clients is posted on my website, [www.TreetopYogaTherapy.com](http://www.TreetopYogaTherapy.com). See if you recognize yourself and your loved one.

## **Vata (V):**

### **The Artist, The Philosopher**

#### **Primary traits: Dry, etheric, cold**

Your loved one's Vata airy nature presents in a shorter or taller than average frame. They love to move and may be athletic. Vata's camera-interesting face is typically irregular, defined, with darker skin or eyes compared to others of the same racial heritage. Their eyes may be dark blue, or brown and small. Their hair is often curly and coarse, their skin rougher with a tendency towards dryness.

Vata is artistic, intuitive, and may even be clairvoyant. Their conversational style is usually pleasant, easily moving from one topic to another. Though empathetic, they can struggle with boundaries. Vata has wonderful ideas, but in vikriti, has a difficulty achieving goals. Sensitive and introspective, Vata is also prone to worry, racing thoughts, weight loss, and constipation. When imbalanced, the world seems hard to manage and trust. The windy, gusty aspect of this dosha may create self-doubt and trouble with memory. Vata's emotional state veers toward anxiety when over stimulated or stressed. Vata time of life is approximately 50 + and its season is Autumn.

#### ***Your Best Approach:***

With your Vata loved one, you may notice worry and fidgety tendencies. They need encouragement and touch to feel grounded. Vata is comforted by warm, cooked meals with sauces, with sour, sweet, and salty flavors. They can be fearful of the dark, so brighten the room. Speak calmly and assuringly. Though adaptable, Vata can lack direction. They love many points of view, but sometimes don't know which to make their own. Remind your Vata of their positive patterns of behavior to help them develop faith and see continuity. Cedar and pine essences evoke the earth. Feeling, rather than avoiding their emotions, grounds them.



## **Pitta (P):**

### **The Politician, The Organizer**

#### **Primary Traits: Oily, intense, hot**

Your Pitta loved one may have yellowish or pink freckled skin, reddish tint to the hair, and intense light blue, green, or hazel eyes. Their voice and speaking style is clear, sometimes loud, and often talkative. They are known for leading and motivating others and skillfully implementing plans into action. Pitta's build is average and develops muscles easily. Born leaders, Pitta can also be intolerant with those not focused and driven and can easily burn themselves out.

Pitta energy sorts and transforms what has been collected, acting as a problem solver. They are helpful, especially if it suits a personal agenda. Count on Pitta to whip a closet into shape or help you organize your thoughts. An excellent manager, imbalance makes them edge towards anger and irritability. They require proof with new information and can be impatient with those who aren't properly prepared. Pitta time of life is 25-50 when career is important and the season is Summer.



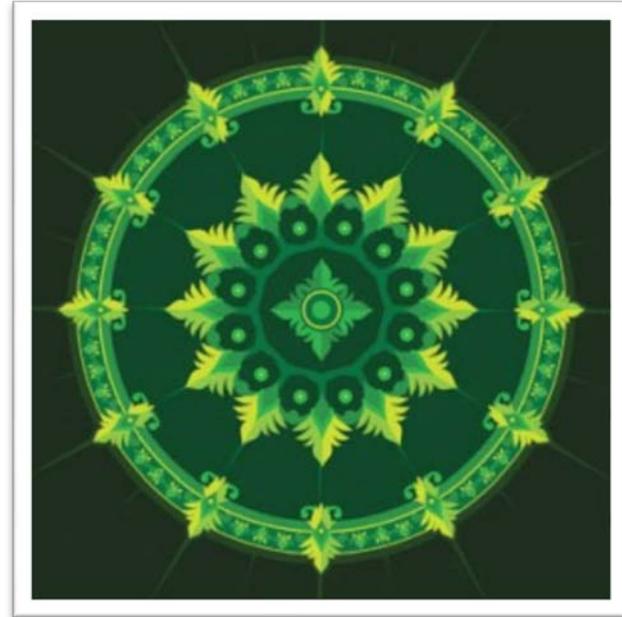
#### ***Your Best Approach:***

Help your Pitta take a break occasionally. Make a meal with raw and light foods, cooling spices like fennel and sweet flavors. Calmed by wide-open spaces, cool air, and meandering conversations; these things help break their laserlike focus. When trying to persuade them, be pragmatic and anecdotal. Pitta loves directness and stays on point. When they explode with anger, they typically feel better, but they can burn others around them. Pitta stays balanced with cool baths and sandalwood or rose essence. They are fabulous debaters and love with a passion.

**Kapha (K):**  
**The Queen, The Confidant**  
**Primary Traits: Soft, supportive, cold**

Your Kapha loved one is typically larger boned with big eyes of light brown or blue. They have wavy, lustrous hair, and lighter skin, and are sturdy with great endurance, though not really interested in movement. Kapha attracts children and animals and can be a gifted gardener or cook. They are level headed and diplomatic with steady faith in themselves and others. Kaphas make trustworthy judges, counselors, and teachers, and are also very supportive friends.

When imbalanced, Kapha gains weight and becomes depressed. They suffer excess mucous, colds, and weight gain. Sometimes stubborn, they have trouble shifting out of old patterns, beliefs, and ideologies. Their trademark, however, is regularity. They are reliable and predictable. The Kapha time of life is childhood and the season is Spring.



***Your Best Approach:***

Kapha enjoys intimate, animated talks that get to the heart of the issue. Not necessarily interested in problem solving, they would rather process emotions as they can feel stuck in their lives. They need prodding to exercise and get plenty of sunshine. Take Kapha for a walk on a bright day and maybe a trip to the sauna at the gym. Provide essences of mandarin or black pepper. They need to know they are structural to your life. They tend towards blue moods, so prepare lowfat, spicy foods. Kapha crave salty and sweet flavors, but need healthy alternatives.

**Each dosha has specific yogic practices to help them stay balanced as well:**

***Asana***

Vata loves yoga, but needs slower vinyasa and/or longer holds to discharge anxiety and balance scattered minds. Pitta needs cooler practices, and quieter flowing practices to elicit freedom. Pitta should avoid hot yoga. Restorative classes balance Vata and Pitta. Kapha needs vigorous asana like Ashtanga Vinyasa and Surya Namaskar (sun salutation) with movement and heat.

## *Pranayam*

Vata and Kapha benefit from Ujjai, Kapala Bhati, and Bhastrika for warmth. In colder climates, the former are OK seasonally for Pitta. For cooling off anger or excess physical heat, Pittas do well with Sitali/sitkari, especially in summer. Universally, 3-part yogic breath and Nadi Shodhana are balancing. Vatas may also be prone to panic attacks; longer exhales help acutely.

## *Meditation/Mantra*

Vatas are comforted with object meditation such as a feeling/ visual (bhavana) and mantra like the Gayatri (to the sun). Pitta benefits from spacious forms like insight meditation (vipassana) and peace mantras. Kapha is stirred by all forms of meditation as they evoke clarity, concentration, and vibration.

## *Oils*

Oils permeate the tissues (dhatus) becoming a vehicle for smoother ingestion, digestion, assimilation, and elimination on all levels. Oils also coat the nerves helping to insulate against stress. They can be used topically or ingested. Vata needs warming oils like sesame. Pitta needs cooling oils like coconut or neutral oil like almond. Kapha needs less oil and works well with warmer types like sesame. Ingesting ghee and EFA's is quintessential.

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Like an actress, a yogi's journey is to embody character while letting her true nature shine through. Knowing these basic Ayurvedic traits helps us understand ourselves and our loved ones more deeply.

I walked off that studio lot years ago praying for the call back. I got three of them. Each time, I had to be more of myself to be seen. A Lancome model got the part. But, a few years later, I went to my first yoga class. No audition necessary and it's one of my best roles yet.