

Modern-day Ayurveda

From herbal supplements to meditation, top
recommendations for connecting with today's consumer





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Ayurveda, a 5,000-year-old health system that promotes balance as the way to support whole wellness, is more relevant now than ever as consumers seek natural solutions for some of their most common health issues. It harnesses holistic living and the power of adaptogenic herbs that have worked for millennia to soothe today's top concerns: the stress, insomnia and fatigue flaring up from modern life.

In a time when people are looking beyond pharmaceuticals (and their side effects), Ayurveda empowers customers to personalize their health care with natural, science-backed solutions that harmonize body, mind and spirit. "At its core, Ayurveda is about right living," says Nick Bitz, ND, chief scientific officer at Nutrawise. "It's about slowing down, sleeping well, eating a seasonally and constitutionally appropriate diet, meditating, getting sunshine. ... It's an amazing tool with a lot of science behind it showing it simply works. Once you share that with people, they'll gravitate toward it." Experts agree that what will truly launch Ayurveda in America is people trying it and finding its value firsthand. After all, there's a reason it's still around after 5,000 years. Here are the basics of Ayurveda, modern applications and strategies for bringing it all into your store to help customers discover this powerful way to feel their best.

Ayurveda 101

Indian healers developed Ayurveda, the oldest health care system on record, to treat the the root of health issues by considering the whole person—body, mind and spirit. In Sanskrit, the term “Ayurveda” translates to “the sacred knowledge of life” or “the science of longevity.” According to Ayurveda, every person is born with a constitution (*dosha*), or mind-body type, that’s a mixture of natural elements. Stress and age throw the balance of these elements out of whack; when this happens, we’re more susceptible to health problems. Ayurvedic herbs, nutrition choices, and activities such as meditation, yoga, massage and sleep can help rebalance the elements.

Body types and vitality

We each contain a mixture of natural elements, but the ratio of them varies. There are three Ayurvedic constitutions: *vata* (air), *pitta* (fire) and *kapha* (earth and water). “Each is made up of pairs of elements in functional relationship to one another, which can and often does cause a tension to arise between the pair,” says Heather Baines, AD, RAAP, founder and managing director of Boulder, Colo.-based Roots of Wellness Ayurveda and president of the board of directors of the Colorado Ayurvedic Medical Association. Ayurveda recommends different protocols of herbs, foods and activities to best maintain balance for each body type. This essentially creates a personalized approach to health and wellness, but one that is rooted in thousands of years of practice.



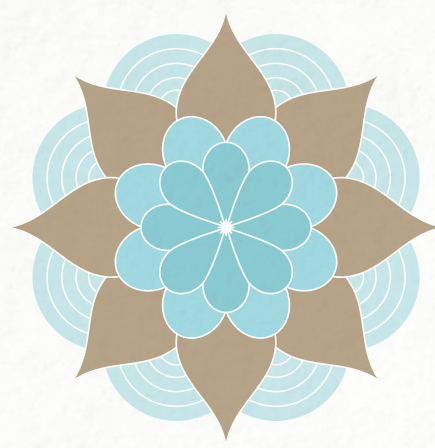
Ayurveda Doshas



Vata



Pitta



Kapha



The best way for consumers to discover their dosha is by taking a test that surveys certain mental and physical attributes—from metabolism and energy to feelings about competition and learning. Once people begin to understand the qualities of the elements that make up their doshas, they can better learn how to observe them and increase their self-awareness of imbalances, Baines says. “These are not mysterious concepts; they are common sense and knowable.”

Two other key Ayurvedic terms are important to know because they describe the teeter-totter of balance that can occur within each element, says Ayurvedic wellness consultant Rachel Warnock, who holds a master’s in vedic science. *Oja* translates loosely to vitality and *ama* to toxins. “*Ama* can be a physical toxin, or an emotional or mental one—like a negative person in your life,” Warnock says. The difference between the two, according to Bitz, is “the difference between a grape and a raisin—plump and juicy or dried out.” Ayurveda promotes actions that increase *oja* and decrease *ama*.

Ayurveda teaches you to learn about your relationship to the elements, to take action to balance them and be an active participant in your own healing—not simply to take a pill to knock out an immediate symptom. It’s exactly the type of personalized health care today’s consumers crave.

Ayurvedic terms to know

Dosha: Functional elements of energy in nature; a body-mind type or constitution, dominated by certain natural elements.

Vata: One of the three doshas, dominated by air.

Pitta: One of the three doshas, dominated by fire.

Kapha: One of the three doshas, dominated by earth and water.

Oja: Vigor, vitality.

Ama: Something toxic to body, mind or spirit.



Adaptogens in Ayurveda

Adaptogens are herbs that help the body achieve homeostasis (which is essentially balance) by giving it what it needs to handle stress. Ashwagandha, *Rhodiola rosea* and *Bacopa monnieri* are a few well-known examples.

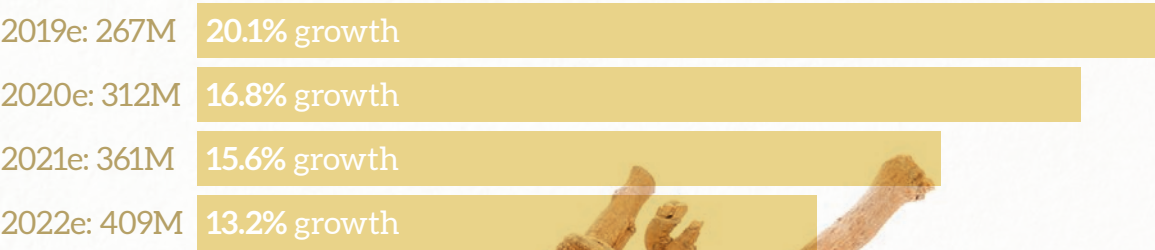
Remember *Alice in Wonderland*? A bite of one side of the mushroom made her grow larger. And a bite of the other side made her smaller. An adaptogen is like a clever combination of both sides. For example, if a body function needs a boost, the herb works to do that, but if the body function needs calming, the herb does that. Adaptogens tweak hormone production and physiological responses to balance out that stress and achieve a state of homeostasis. You can think about them as power tools in the Ayurvedic toolbox.

Soaring sales

Sales of adaptogens have skyrocketed in recent years. Why? Because Americans are more stressed than ever. “Adaptogens are an antidote to modern stress,” says Bitz. “If you look back about five years ago, it was all about energy—think about the rise of products like 5-hour ENERGY®. Now, people want the complete opposite. They’re anxious. Nervous. Everybody is just incredibly stressed out. With the pace of today’s world, it’s hard to just keep up.” Adaptogens help manage symptoms that sizzle up from stress: anxiety, insomnia and fatigue. Research has been backing up adaptogens’ power to rejuvenate mind and body and strengthen immunity—consumers are taking note, and sales reflect it:

Double-digit growth for Ayurvedic supplements

\$409M in Ayurvedic herb sales projected by 2022 (NBJ research)



Ayurvedic all-star: Ashwagandha

Known as “The Prince of Herbs” in Ayurvedic medicine, ashwagandha is growing in popularity among American consumers. Ashwagandha is a small, woody shrub that grows in India and a few parts of the Mediterranean and Africa. Withanolides in its roots fuel the plant’s healing power.

Of the 7,500 plants used in Ayurveda, ashwagandha sits at the top, says “Medicine Hunter” Chris Kilham, a botanical researcher and author. And it deserves that reverence. With clinical trials now backing up its uses for energy, stamina, sexual vitality, mental clarity and recovery from fatigue, “we can absolutely say that ashwagandha lives up to its place at the apex of Ayurvedic herbs,” says Kilham.

So, what should you know when stocking your aisles? Be sure to choose high-quality ashwagandha products with human clinical studies of the extract, says Gene Bruno, provost and professor of nutraceutical science at Huntington University of Health Sciences. Beyond supplements, you can find ashwagandha in a variety of functional foods, such as chocolate bars, energy drinks and even veggie burgers. Offering a range of delivery systems can appeal to a range of customers and make it easier for them to incorporate this Ayurvedic all-star into their everyday lives.



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT KSM-66 Ashwagandha

KSM-66 Ashwagandha is a branded ingredient that you may find in finished products. The highest-concentration root extract on the market today, with the most quality certifications, it’s been clinically proven to:

- Help reduce stress, anxiety, cortisol levels and stress-related food cravings
- Promote enhanced memory and cognitive function
- Promote endurance, strength, muscle size and muscle-recovery rate
- Help maintain peak sexual health in both men and women



Selling the Ayurvedic lifestyle

Taking herbs such as ashwagandha is one component of maintaining a balanced life, according to Ayurvedic teaching. Other keys to balancing body, mind and spirit include using food as medicine and practicing yoga and meditation.

While Ayurveda remains relatively unknown in America, cultural shifts have been clearing the way for its emergence. “Since around 2012, people have been gravitating more toward integrative and natural medicine as a whole, along with all things Eastern—Chinese and Indian both,” says Bitz. “Case in point: the explosion of yoga.” While some Americans have been Downward Dog-ing since the ’60s, it hasn’t been until the past few years that studios of every flavor popped up in cities across the country.

“Yoga and Ayurveda are sister sciences,” says Warnock. “There are eight aspects of yoga; one is correct diet, and that is basically Ayurveda.” Popular yoga can be a gateway to other aspects of Ayurveda. Stock a favorite yoga book next to supplements or Ayurvedic beauty products next to yoga mats.

Shoppers can also use Ayurvedic balms, lotions, oils and more to treat the body’s largest organ, the skin, according to an individual’s constitutional needs. Oral health is another key element to this system of healing, including oil pulling (swishing coconut, sesame or sunflower oil) and tongue scraping—all of which involve a range of personal care products.

Cross-merchandising products involved in various aspects of the Ayurvedic lifestyle in different places across the store enforces the idea that all of these items and practices connect in a larger system of health care.



Asana science

A growing mass of studies supports the health benefits of Ayurveda's sister science, yoga. A 2019 review of 22 randomized clinical trials in the *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity* found that yoga practice can improve many aspects of physical and mental health among older adults.

Other research suggests yoga may...

- + Reduce stress and anxiety
- + Reduce inflammation
- + Improve heart health
- + Boost mood, reduce fatigue and enhance general quality of life
- + Decrease depression



Can meditation make you smarter?

Research backing the health benefits of meditation has been emerging for decades, including studies supporting the practice's potential to reduce symptoms of stress and depression and help with heart health, digestion and chronic pain. There are also links to mental functioning, and a 2018 study revealed that even a little bit of mindfulness may go a long way. Researchers found that just 10 minutes of daily mindfulness meditation training improved people's reaction times and accuracy scores.

(FC: *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*)



Food as medicine

About 80 percent of our health lies in our digestion and metabolism, according to Ayurvedic teachings, so the foods we eat—and when we eat them—are key. “All [healthful] foods can be ‘Ayurvedic,’ if taken in the right season at the right time and when our digestion is balanced,” says Baines. “To determine how a food is ‘Ayurvedic’ means that you learn to discern the qualities of the food and its effect on the body,” she says. As people learn to do so, they feel empowered to take charge of their health.

Balancing the elements

Ayurveda promotes eating foods to balance the elements in a person’s constitution, or dosha. Here are some basic suggestions for evening out basic imbalances, according to Heather Baines, AD, RAAP.



Pitta imbalance

In general, favor foods that are mild, easy to digest and on the sweet side. Foods such as pomegranate and dark leafy greens are astringent and help balance pitta. Avoid overly sour, salty or spicy foods.



Vata imbalance

Honor vata with warm, well-seasoned, nourishing and unctuous foods. Don’t know what unctuous is? Think homemade bone broth that has congealed as it has cooled. It is slightly oily, easy to digest and very, very nourishing. Heart-healthy fats are unctuous—and balancing to vata.



Kapha imbalance

Lighten up. Eat only when hungry, and drink only when thirsty. Favor vegetables, particularly green vegetables, and, as with vata, take foods warm or at room temperature. A little extra heat warms up cool, heavy kapha, so enjoy some extra spice with your meal.

Mango Coconut Smoothie

Mango and coconut are cooling, pitta-soothing foods, says Baines. “They are naturally available in the same season we need them. Coconut is one of the best foods to hone a discernment of the cooling nature of foods—a spoonful of coconut oil in the mouth ‘feels’ cold, as does coconut cream or milk, even if it’s room temperature.” Post this recipe in the produce section, or near the coconut water.

INGREDIENTS

24 ounces mango (about 2–3 large mangoes), cut into 1-inch pieces

2 cups coconut water

Juice of ½ lime

Fresh mint leaves

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a blender, combine mango and coconut water. Squeeze lime juice into the blender; blend until smooth. Garnish with fresh mint.



Ghee

Ghee is revered in Ayurveda, says Baines. “It promotes heart health, eye health and brain health. By modern nutrition standards, we now understand that ghee (when made from high-quality, pasture-raised dairy) is composed of CLAs, which are incredibly important to our health.”

Because of the way it is prepared, ghee contains little to none of the lactose of butter, making it more tolerable for those on a dairy-free diet. Ghee has a very high smoke point and is a rich source of fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K. Use ghee anytime you would use butter, or as a replacement for cooking oil. To promote consumer awareness of ghee, post this recipe in the dairy aisle.

INGREDIENTS

1 pound organic, cultured unsalted butter

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, melt and heat butter until boiling. Allow foam to rise to the surface. Continue to cook over medium heat until foam begins to break and subside. Turn heat to low, and watch butter carefully. If melted butter becomes still, increase heat slightly to maintain a low simmer. Continue to watch butter carefully, allowing the ghee-making to become a practice in mindful meditation.

2. After 15–20 minutes, the butter will begin to clarify, so you can see through to the bottom of the pan. The milk-protein solids will accumulate at the bottom of the saucepan. Do not stir!

3. Continue cooking, until the ghee becomes clear, like liquid sunshine, and solids become golden brown at the bottom and sides of the pan. For ghee to be thoroughly cooked and purified, the solids must brown slightly.

4. Turn off heat, remove pan from stovetop, and let cool briefly. Pour ghee into glass jar(s) through a fine strainer lined with cotton muslin, layers of cheesecloth or a coffee filter. If cooked properly, ghee can be stored at room temperature without turning rancid or molding. It is not recommended or necessary that you store ghee in the refrigerator. Use within two weeks.



“Ayurveda is a system of health care and wellness. It needs to be framed in a way that’s very Western and very American. Retailers should avoid making it a New Age phenomenon.” —Nick Bitz, ND, chief scientific officer, Nutrawise

Ayurveda in the aisle

What’s the best way to convey to shoppers the benefits of a health system most of them are not sure how to pronounce?

Keep it simple, say the retail experts. And skip the Sanskrit. “When you throw around Sanskrit terms, people just get lost and intimidated,” says Warnock. In signage and educational material, stick to English translations or use the English word first, with the Sanskrit in parentheses, like “air (vata).” “Instead of telling someone, ‘use Ayurveda to achieve perfectly balanced doshas,’ say ‘use ancient Indian wisdom to balance your elements.’ That’s more relatable,” she says.

When describing what Ayurveda is, you can simply say: “Ayurveda is a system of health care and wellness,” says Bitz. “It needs to be framed in a way that’s very Western and very American,” he says. “Retailers should avoid making it a New Age phenomenon.”

Kilham, who spent years heading up the marketing at Boston’s Bread & Circus before focusing on research, agrees. “When people come in, they want relief. For example, they say, ‘I can’t sleep.’ They don’t want a pulse diagnosis, a tongue exam or to know how many microveins I see in their eyes. They want to know: ‘What can I do for this?’” Kilham outlines what a response, rooted in Ayurveda, to these types of questions could look like. “You could say, ‘I know a great herb. Part of its name, *somnifera*, even means *to sleep*.’ Not to cheapen the philosophy, but simplifying it makes it more immediately available to people living in the modern world. While you do have people who really want to know more, most people are just shopping; they’re going to dinner afterward and heading off to pick up their kids.”

Bitz, who has been explaining Ayurveda to Americans for more than 20 years, emphasizes the importance of making it relatable. “Almost as a rule, I’d avoid certain areas. The conversation around body types is super polarizing, and people don’t get it.”



Using Ayurveda to feel better can be truly empowering—another thing customers crave, especially in a world of health care where they can feel like an anonymous number trapped in a phone maze.

“Empowerment’ is really a core principle these days,” says Kilham. “Any time you do something for yourself that enhances your health in any way at all, it’s innately empowering, growing a greater sense of our own ability to take care of ourselves in the world. When people take something and get results—that’s a very, very big motivation. And there’s a ripple effect.”



CASE STUDY

Natural Grocers by Vitamin Cottage

Natural Grocers sells Ayurvedic products ranging from supplements to toothpaste. To ensure staff is well-versed, the retailer educates employees with, among other things, a monthly video that can include information about Ayurveda and the latest science and materials from vendors, says Karen Falbo, the company's director of nutrition education, who spent years working as a nutrition consultant in the office of an Ayurvedic practitioner.

To promote Ayurveda, Natural Grocers also:
Holds a customer education class called "The Ayurvedic Way." Taught by a store's nutrition health coach (each location has a full-time coach), it includes the history of Ayurveda, body typing and how food affects the internal environment. Vendor reps often come and sample products.

Recommends Ayurvedic products in other classes.
Instructors will also suggest and sample Ayurvedic products during classes on topics such as stress management or skin care.

Maintains Ayurvedic resources within the store. Each store has a bookshelf and file cabinet with educational material, including Ayurvedic-specific books and handouts for staff and shoppers to access.



STORE TOURS

Partner with a local Ayurvedic professional to offer shoppers tours through your store's aisles. Heather Baines conducts these as part of her practice, as well as in-home pantry reviews. "Having a guide help you know what to eat and when, or which self-care techniques [and related products] would be most beneficial, would be very, very helpful for the consumer," she says.

Has a dosha quiz. Natural Grocers offers shoppers a simple quiz on paper that helps them determine their dosha, says Falbo. "Also, since everyone is shopping with a smartphone, it's perfectly appropriate to refer them to a more detailed online quiz on a vendor's site."

Has an Ayurvedic health fair. "Utilize vendor and local community partners to be engaged for a day of education," says Falbo. Invite yoga studios, Ayurvedic massage therapists, and Ayurvedic chefs or seasonally focused restaurants.

