



## What is my Body-Type?

by Nadia Marshall

One of the things that Ayurveda is best known for is its idea of Constitution, Body Type or 'Prakriti' in Sanskrit. I think people love this concept so much because it can be such a useful and positive tool for self-understanding.

The literal meaning of Prakriti is 'first creation'. It is the unique psychological, physiological and mental pre-disposition or make-up of an individual. It is determined by our parents' constitutions and imbalances at the time of our conception as well as our mother's diet, lifestyle, sensory inputs and imbalances during pregnancy. Our Prakriti can be any one of seven possible combinations, but within these, infinite expressions of the elements exist within the body - Prakriti is just a guide.

Constitution is looked at in terms of a predominance of the five elements in the body. However rather than having pure 'Air' or 'Earth' types etc, the elements are grouped together and given another name. Why? Because no element exists in the body in isolation, it always needs to combine with another element in order to remain in the body in a functional way. But you don't need to understand that to understand the different constitutions described in Ayurveda so let's get into them straight away!

### Vata – Air & Ether

The Vata person has a strong predominance of the elements Air and Ether. The predominant qualities of Vata are cold, dry, light, rough, subtle, mobile and clear. However, when you think of Vata, above all things, think COLD, DRY and IRREGULAR, like air moving through space.

Physically, Vata folk are ethereal and irregular. They are either very tall or very short with very long limbs or very short ones. They tend to have slight, light

frames as if they might blow away in the wind and usually find it difficult to put on weight (although even Vata people can become overweight). Their limbs are usually well defined with the bones protruding from the rest of the limb and they are generally quite flat-chested. They have more irregular facial features – maybe a weak chin or an unusually large one; a large or very small, irregular nose and sunken eyes. They tend to have a dull/matt or brownish complexion with dry or rough skin and small, brittle fingernails. Vata teeth are usually small, crooked or irregular. Vata eyes are clear, black, brown, grey, violet or slate blue with thin eyelashes. Vata hair is thin, dry and brittle. Their ears are either very small with no lobes or large and irregular, but not fleshy. They have variable digestion (strong one minute, weak the next), are prone to gas formation and bloating, and are more likely to suffer from dry stools or constipation or very loose stools (usually due to nervousness). Vata folk are very light sleepers and often suffer from insomnia. They tend towards poor circulation, pain and cracking in the joints and dislike the cold more than any other constitution. They have light, high voices and tend to speak very quickly and erratically.

Mentally, Vata people are spatial in their intelligence. They tend to be very creative, highly adaptable and have an excellent ability to grasp new ideas or concepts. However, they have terrible memories and will quickly forget any concepts they've previously understood – making them quite successful in 'cram for exam' situations! On the downside, they are the constitution that is most prone to suffering from insecurity, anxiety, panic attacks, nervous disorders and high stress. They also have the least robust constitutions and weakest immune systems.

Vata folk have a tendency towards a low sex drive or a very changeable one – high

one moment, non-existent the next. Their energy levels are very changeable and they expend energy with great enthusiasm. The minute they have some, they'll spend it in a flurry of activity and then collapse in a heap. It is a similar situation with their finances - they make money quickly but spend it equally quickly. Very little remains with them... things flow through them like the wind.

When you think of a pure Vata person, think of the ethereal, awkward or irregular looking person who is never quite 'present'. They lack intensity, drive and groundedness. They seem as if they might just float away, mentally and physically! Pure Vata people are dreamers, creators... always a little unstable, shy, shifty or 'off with the fairies'.

You might have gathered that our society is somewhat in love with the 'Vata' look. We worship models that are stick thin, we put them in positions that emphasise their boniness and put eye shadow and blush on them to increase the sunken eye and protruding cheekbone look.... and yet we are always amazed to hear that they suffer from insecurity and anxiety. Rest assured there is an upside and a downside to every constitution!

### 2) Pitta – Fire & Water

The Pitta person has a strong predominance of the elements Fire and Water. The predominant qualities of Pitta are hot, sharp, liquid, mobile and oily. However, when you think of Pitta, above all things, think HOT, OILY, INTENSE and IRRITABLE, like oil on fire.

Physically, Pitta folk can best be described as moderate. They are usually an average height and an average weight with good muscle development and reasonable limb definition. Women will have moderate breasts and moderate hips.

They tend to have more regular and symmetrical facial features, but often these will be quite sharp and angular. The very manly, angular chins you see on soap stars are very Pitta. They tend to be hot-blooded and have blood near their skin giving their complexion a pinkish or ruddy-red hue. They also have more moles and freckles than other constitutions and soft, warm, slightly oily skin that will burn easily. Pitta nails are moderate and usually soft and pink; teeth are moderate in size and relatively straight but with a yellowish tinge and sometimes sharp. Pitta eyes are hazel, green, pale blue and often intense in their gaze. Their speech is usually also quite intense and deliberate. Pitta folk will have medium thickness hair that is prone to oiliness and premature greying. The classic natural redhead is usually predominantly Pitta. They have strong digestion and keen appetites but are prone to heartburn and loose stools (due to their liquid qualities). They sleep well but are hot sleepers. Their circulation is good and they have a tendency towards profuse sweating. Pitta people cannot bear the heat – they are so hot-blooded already, they far prefer cooler climates.

Pitta people are blessed mentally. They have sharp intelligences, reasonable memories and are highly organised. They are motivated, ambitious, passionate and courageous and make excellent leaders due to their ability to manifest ideas into reality. They enjoy control and taking centre state. On the downside, they are the constitution that is most prone to suffering from anger, jealousy, frustration, irritability and all of those other fiery emotions! Other tendencies include being overly judgmental, perfectionistic, arrogant and even violent.

As passionate folk, Pitta people usually have a moderate sex drive and think they are great lovers (although this may not always be the case!) – as with everything else, they are intense in bed. They have good energy generally and use it wisely, rarely running out. It is a similar situation with their finances – they are good at making money and good at saving it. They have reasonable strength and good immunity but have a tendency towards poor eyesight, inflammation (skin, joint etc), skin eruptions, acidity problems and heart attacks.

When you think of a pure Pitta person, think of a strong, determined, intense and ambitious person who is dedicated to achieving. They are the person prone to grumpiness or regularly erupting with anger or frustration. Pitta people are always on a mission, working on a project of some sort or solving a problem...

### 3) Kapha – Earth & Water

The Kapha person has a strong predominance of the elements Earth and Water. The predominant qualities of Kapha are heavy, static or immobile, slow, dull, cold, oily, liquid, slimy/smooth, dense, soft, sticky and gross. However, when you think of Kapha, think COLD, WET and STABLE, like Earth in Water. Rather than ‘mud’, think Mother Earth.

Physically, Kapha folk can best be described as solid, stable and attractive. When in balance, they can maintain a moderate weight but they are the constitution most inclined to gain weight with ease, especially in the lower parts of the body. They have broad, strong frames with dense bones (they literally have heavier bones and denser tissues than Vata or Pitta people!). They are usually considered the most robust and attractive constitution with dark, thick, lustrous, wavy hair; large, full lips; big, white, straight teeth; large doe-like dark eyes with long, thick lashes; thick, strong nails; and pale, soft, slightly oily and slightly thick skin (which tans easily and evenly).

Their appetites are moderate and stable, their digestion is slow but reasonable and their elimination tends to be regular with well-formed stools. They generally sleep easily and heavily but have a tendency to want to sleep more than they should as they enjoy conserving energy (the opposite of Vata folk who love to spend it!). In terms of temperature preferences, they are stable enough to not be overly affected by either extreme. Their circulation is good and perspiration is moderate. Their voices are usually deep and delicious – many famous singers have a strong Kaphic influence in their constitutions (think Pavarotti).

Mentally, Kapha people grasp concepts slowly but remember them forever. In line with the Mother Earth analogy, they tend to be emotionally calm and stable,

loving, compassionate and nurturing, when in balance. They have excellent stamina and are very fertile – they make the best mothers and lovers. Don't you just wish you were Kapha?!!

When out of balance, their more negative emotional tendencies include possessiveness, rigidity, coldness, cloudiness of thought, depression, laziness and attachment. They are also particularly prone to emotional eating and therefore gaining weight. Kapha people have excellent strength and the best immunity out of all single constitutions but do have a tendency towards oedema (swelling) and obesity.

When you think of a pure Kapha person, think of someone who is so grounded and earthy that just being around them makes you feel more stable. They are warm, loving, caring and incredibly patient. They are never in a hurry, always seem to be chilled out, make great listeners and give the best hugs in the world...Some of our best cooks, singers and mothers are Kapha people.

### DUAL CONSTITUTIONS

We've discussed predominant Vata, Pitta and Kapha constitutions. However, the reality for most of us is we have a dual constitution and therefore a mixture of the physical and mental tendencies described above. The exact expression of that mixture is different for each and every one of us. The other four possible constitutions, to make up the total of seven are:

#### 4) Vata/Pitta or Pitta/Vata

Vata/Pitta or Pitta/Vata people are more moderate and robust than Vata people but more irregular and fragile than Pitta people. They have LIGHTNESS and INTENSITY as their common qualities.

If they're lucky, they can combine Vata's creativity with Pitta's capacity to get things done. If they're not quite so lucky, they can combine Vata's insecurity with Pitta's ambition or obsession, making them quite prone to stress disorders (and also eating disorders, particularly of the anorexic kind). The one element they are missing is EARTH, therefore they are

prone to instability and excess movement.

Vata/Pitta people have more Vata than Pitta in their constitutions while Pitta/Vata people have more Pitta than Vata in their constitutions.

### 5) Pitta/Kapha or Kapha/Pitta

Apart from Tridoshic constitutions, Pitta/Kapha or Kapha/Pitta constitutions probably enjoy the best combination of any constitution. I'm always jealous of Pitta/Kaphas. They have the strength and stability of Kapha combined with Pitta drive and determination; which helps to antidote Kapha laziness. They have moderate, strong bodies with excellent immunity and seem to get away with all manner of sins. The great downfall of Pitta/Kapha's therefore tends to be pushing the limits of their minds and bodies far too much which can lead to dramatic collapses in later life.

Out of balance, Pitta ambition and arrogance can combine with Kapha greed to create a not-so-pleasant combination. The quality they have in common is OILINESS so any form of criticism in this state will tend to slide right off of them too!

Pitta/Kapha people have more Pitta than Kapha in their constitutions while Kapha/Pitta people have more Kapha than Pitta in their constitutions.

### 6) Kapha/Vata or Vata Kapha

Kapha/Vata or Vata Kapha people have COLD as their common quality so have an extreme intolerance of cold. Physically they may have tiny, ethereal frames with Kapha boobs and facial features (Vata/Kapha); they may have large, solid frames with irregular Vata facial features (Kapha/Vata) or they may have a mixture of the two.

If they're lucky they will get Vata's ability to grasp concepts easily combined with Kapha's awesome memory. If not so lucky, they may get Kapha's mental slowness combined with Vata's hopeless memory (which may explain why some Vata/Kapha models don't have a great reputation for intelligence). The one

element they are missing is FIRE so above all, they need to introduce greater warmth into their lives.

Kapha/Vata people have more Kapha than Vata in their constitutions while Vata/Kapha people have more Vata than Kapha in their constitutions.

### 7) Vata/Pitta/Kapha

Very few people are lucky enough to be blessed with a Vata/Pitta/Kapha constitution. These exceptional folk are not deficient or excess in any elements and so are naturally inclined towards balance and health. If you find a true example of one, please let me know! I think I know of just one....

### What is my body type?

A quick note - when you're reading about the various constitutions, you will naturally try and associate with them and think, 'oh, that's me' ... 'that's not me' etc. Try to avoid this to some extent as determining your Prakriti can be quite a challenging exercise. Some people are very obvious and can be worked out immediately. Others can take months to determine. Even a trained Ayurvedic Practitioner may find some people particularly difficult.

You can go through a detailed chart at the end of this Article that will help you to identify your constitution. It is best to go through the chart with an open mind (so that you don't 'doctor' the results by already believing you are a particular constitution). It might also be good to go through it with a good friend to gain a more accurate and honest picture of your 'first creation'. The best idea, however, is to see a trained Ayurvedic Practitioner as they can usually tell through your pulse, if not your physical and mental characteristics.