



3 Reasons To Avoid Green Smoothies

by Nadia Marshall

Green smoothies are all the rage, particularly here in Byron Bay, and are promoted as one of the best things you can do for your health. In case you're one of the rare few who has never had one, green smoothies are usually made up of about 40% leafy greens, 60% fruit and often contain a bunch of other goodies to make them tastier or more nutritious such as chia or flax seeds, maca or camu powder, cacao nibs, hemp protein, spirulina or coconut oil...

At first glance, the power-packed hit of vitamins, minerals, anti-oxidants and fibre you get from a green smoothie seems indisputably healthy... so why on earth would you avoid them? Well the Ayurvedic view is never just about NUTRIENTS... it is always about QUALITIES and these seemingly super-smoothies have some qualities that can have a negative effect if consumed regularly over a long period of time.

So here we go, three reasons to avoid smoothies, from an Ayurvedic perspective:

1) THEY AGGRAVATE VATA

Green smoothie recipes usually call for chilled water or the addition of ice cubes. On top of this, the majority of the fruits and veggies added to them are cold in quality. Even if you're adding some warming ginger to your smoothie the overall quality of smoothies is still usually COLD. Leafy greens like kale, chard, spinach and cabbage; veggies like broccoli and celery; as well as a number of fruits are also DRY and ROUGH in quality.

The Vata (Air/Ether) dosha in our bodies has the qualities of dry, rough, cold, mobile and changeable. Foods that are COLD, DRY and ROUGH, therefore, directly aggravate Vata. Like increases like. When our Vata is aggravated it causes increased dryness, roughness, coldness, mobility and variability in the body/mind. This can be experienced as variable appetite; gas or pain after eating; dry constipation or loose motions (increased mobility); dry/rough skin and hair; variable energy; poor circulation and pain or cracking in the joints.

From a mental perspective, aggravated Vata is associated with increased mental agitation, restlessness, flightiness, grasping, anxiety, poor concentration, poor memory, changeable moods and insomnia. Vata has a strong association with the nervous, endocrine and excretory systems so excess Vata is most inclined to affect these systems and.... according to Ayurveda, the majority of all diseases are related to aggravated Vata dosha.

2) THEY DEplete OJAS

Aggravated Vata is also associated with catabolism or the breaking down of tissues. This is one of the reasons why people often feel very energetic when initially getting into green smoothies (and raw food generally) - because when a cell breaks down a huge amount of energy is released, like an exploding star!

The good news is your fat tissue gets broken down.... but the bad news is all of your other tissues do too

including the deeper tissues of bone, marrow, nerve and sexual reproductive tissue. Depletion of these important deep tissues is never a good thing - we're talking weaker teeth, weaker bones, compromised nerve conduction and communication, hormone issues and infertility.

Also, these deeper tissues are responsible for directly nourishing the foundation of our immune system, known as 'Ojas' in Ayurveda. If they become depleted, Ojas also becomes depleted and as a result, we can become susceptible to auto-immune problems, chronic fatigue and other diseases of depletion.

3) THEY ARE DIFFICULT TO DIGEST

Although many of the ingredients in a green smoothie are actually light, the sheer quantity of ingredients (e.g. 10 or more cups of fruit and veggies in one smoothie) makes them very dense and therefore heavy. If you're adding a bunch of superfoods to the mix, your smoothie is going to be even heavier. And heavy food, although satisfying to one's hunger, is difficult to digest.

Green smoothies are also very complex. Our digestive fire ('Agni' in Sanskrit) likes simplicity. For example, our Agni has no problem digesting a few veggies that have been cooked with mung daal, rice and spices to aid digestion. Foods cooked together in a single pot have time to get to know each other, to combine their qualities and be transformed from several individual ingredients to a single meal

with a particular character. In contrast, smoothies contain a multitude of ingredients with very different qualities combined raw in a blender. Raw food prepared in this way may be delicious, but it doesn't allow for this subtle marrying of qualities. As a result, the meal remains very complex which is difficult for the body to digest.

From an Ayurvedic perspective, green smoothies also contain the number one food combination no-no. Ayurveda teaches that fresh fruit should never be combined with any other foods. As we know, green smoothies combine fresh fruit with leafy greens, veggies and superfoods. Although somewhat pre-digested thanks to the blending process, the smoothies still stay in our stomachs for as long as the most difficult food contained within them takes to digest. As a result the fresh fruit (which is light and easy to digest in comparison to all other foods) generally stays in the stomach for too long and ferments - causing over-digested food wastes (or 'Ama' in Sanskrit).

In the short term, green smoothies may be cleansing, due to their high fibre content but they tend to put a strain on the digestive fire - which most people experience as a sensation of lasting 'fullness' (and think this is a good thing!). In the long run, the aggravation of Vata leads to an imbalanced digestive fire of the 'Variable' kind (like a candle blowing in the wind). Variable digestion is associated with pain, bloating, flatulence, burping and also leads to the under-cooking of foods or undigested food wastes ('Ama'). This is where the 'cleansing' benefit is reversed. These undigested wastes accumulate in the digestive tract and eventually overflow and relocate into the deeper channels and tissues of the body where they wreck havoc with cellular nutrition and waste disposal and can become the root cause of all disease... according to Ayurveda.

MAKING GREEN SMOOTHIES 'HEALTHIER'

So there you have it! Some pretty good reasons to reconsider the green smoothie trend.... aggravated Vata, depleted tissues, depleted Ojas, imbalanced Agni and accumulating Ama!

Having said all that, it should be noted that if you have a robust Pitta or Pitta/Kapha constitution with a super strong digestive fire and a body in need of a little cooling, you'll be able to handle green smoothies better than most (particularly during the summer months). On the other hand, if you have any Vata in your constitution, you should avoid them altogether.

If you're already addicted to green smoothies and are determined to keep having them for whatever reason, try the following adjustments to make them slightly more Ayurvedically-friendly:

- **add a pinch of turmeric and ginger and a squeeze of lemon to the mix to aid digestion**
- **have them at room temperature, not cold... or even add a little hot water**
- **keep the ingredients to a minimum, keep it simple and less dense - less is more!**
- **add a little coconut oil to offset the dry/rough qualities of the veggies**
- **try them without fruit or use fruit that takes a little longer to digest, like avocado or ripe bananas**
- **avoid the addition of superfoods - they make them even heavier**
- **only have them a couple of times a week, not daily.**

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