



Losing Weight The Ayurvedic Way

by Nadia Marshall

At our most recent Mudita Health Retreat, we had a lot of women come along who were concerned about their weight. They didn't necessarily want to lose weight but they obviously didn't want to gain any. They were power-walking every morning, didn't miss a Yoga class and... they didn't actually eat much. We had more leftovers than ever before! Good for us, not so good them...

The boys were rather confused by this. Especially Doko. He thought that most people (like him) would set aside such concerns when faced with the sheer beauty and deliciousness of Stephen Galpin's food! He just couldn't fathom that a fear of gaining weight could have more sway over someone's mind than the joy of eating.

But I totally understood. Despite maintaining a similar weight for almost 10 years now without thinking about it or ever having to diet, I can still remember feeling like this. For me, my fear of gaining weight was intimately connected to a fear of losing control... a fear of not really knowing what to do... a fear of the inevitable deprivation that would ensue if I had to go on a diet... and a fear of the inevitable weightgain that would come again once I was off of the diet!

But Ayurveda saved me from all that. My fear of gaining weight has completely relaxed now because...

If I do ever gain a little weight, I know exactly what to do about it (and I can lose it again as quickly or as gradually as I like – I usually choose gradually)...

So I don't ever feel like I'm losing control (so the 'Control' seed in my mind has also relaxed)...

And the Ayurvedic way of losing weight doesn't have to involve any hardship or deprivation (especially if you choose the gradual way).

If you buy my AGNI Course and get familiar with the information and the practices described in it, you will know exactly what to do too. But for those of you who don't have it yet, here is a brief explanation...

Why We Gain Weight

The main law in Ayurveda to remember is 'LIKE increases LIKE'. So, if your body is getting heavier, if you are gaining unwelcome weight, then it is likely that you have simply been introducing too many HEAVY qualities through your food and lifestyle.

The really HEAVY and difficult to digest foods from an Ayurvedic perspective (in order) are:

Processed foods - especially those laden with trans fats, white sugar, white flour or high fructose corn syrup

Meat - especially beef, lamb and pork

Eggs – especially cage eggs

Cheese - especially hard, yellow cheeses like cheddar

Wheat - especially in the form of highly processed yeasty bread and pasta

Yoghurt – especially highly processed and laden with weird ingredients

Milk – especially highly processed milk (unhomogenised) consumed cold.

NOTE: I'd like to add alcohol to this list too. It may feel good at the time of drinking, but it is difficult for the body to digest (evidenced by the fact it doesn't feel so good in the morning) - arguable more difficult than white sugar.

If an excess of these HEAVY foods sneak into your diet, then you will gain weight as a result.

These foods are all difficult for the body to digest so if eaten in excess, they not only increase the HEAVY quality in the body, they can also increase our level of undigested food wastes or Ama. As Ama builds up in the digestive tract, it hampers digestion further causing Variable Agni and eventually Dull Agni in our central digestive fire which, in turn, causes Dull Agni in our tissue fires or dull tissue metabolism. As a result, our fat tissue is not created properly and we produce an excess of immature fat tissue - of the stodgy, lumpy kind. At the same time, more Ama gets produced because we're not digesting anything properly. This can easily become a viscous circle that is difficult to break if we don't know how to build a stronger digestive fire. Luckily, thanks to Ayurveda, we do....

Option 1: Gradual Weight Loss

If you feel like you've gotten a little HEAVY, your pants are starting to feel slightly tight around the hips and you know it's time to tip the balance back in the right direction, you simply need to avoid the HEAVY foods listed above as much as possible for a while and consciously choose lighter foods.

LIKE increases LIKE so lighter foods will make you lighter. It isn't rocket science. But you need lighter foods that will also be good to your Agni. Salads and low fat foods are light, but they aren't good for your Agni.

LIGHT foods that are easy to digest, good for Agni and will help you to lose weight include:

Herbs and Spices - they're not only light, they actually promote balanced digestion, especially ginger, turmeric, coriander, cumin and fennel

Split Moong Daal and Moong Daal Flour - the lightest, easiest to digest daal

Red Lentils – slightly heavier than split moong, but still super light

Veggies - especially green veggies (root veggies are obviously a little heavier)

Fruit - especially stewed apples and pears cooked with cloves and cinnamon and papaya (only eat between meals as a snack, not with meals)

Basmati Rice – the lightest, most balancing of grains

Millet, Raggi (Finger Millet) and Buckwheat – light and also slightly astringent so help dry out any excess fluid.

NOTE: Yoghurt can be eaten prepared as Buttermilk or as a Buttermilk Curry. And, if you want a wheat substitute that is much lighter and easier to digest, try wholemeal Spelt flour. You can still have a little milk in porridges and in tea if you like (just choose organic/biodynamic and unhomogenised milk).

If you want to lose a small amount of weight in a gradual, undramatic way, start eating more home-cooked vegetarian meals from our cookbooks that use these ingredients... and avoid the ones that have little notes about being slightly heavier. Eating more soups for dinner and heavier meals at lunchtime is also advisable, if at all possible. If you do want to eat a little salad, eat it at lunchtime as part of your meal.

To help your Agni along the way and eliminate any excess Ama, make sure you have a ginger tea in the morning before breaky and sip boiled water or herbal teas throughout the day too. This is a very, very important part of the process.

And that's it.

The great thing about this gradual approach is you can make simple shifts without a fuss. There is no need for despair or dramatics. There is no need for outrageous diets or gruelling exercise regimes. And, the best part is, there is no need to give up fat or sugar (you can still have ghee and jaggery, in moderation).

You just need to make small adjustments to get back into balance. And because it is so easy, you can do it as soon as your clothes feel a bit tight, rather than putting it off until you're two dress sizes up!

This is what I do. Anytime I feel slightly heavy (for my constitution), I try not to panic. Instead, I assess my behaviour...realise I've eaten too much HEAVY food lately... and then quietly cut back on chocolate, processed cookies (and make my own instead), cheese, pasta, bread, pizza, meat and beer for a while. I rarely eat these heavy foods but even I overdo them from time to time...

The other good thing about this way of eating is that once you're back in balance, you don't have to avoid these HEAVY foods entirely. You don't need to eliminate them forever. You just need to become aware of their qualities and make them a smaller part of your diet, rather than a larger part. A special treat rather than the norm. You can also learn how to prepare them in a way that makes them a little lighter and easier to digest.

Option 2: Fast Weight Loss

I'm not a lover of losing weight quickly because I associate any strict regimes with dieting and that isn't so good for my psyche. But not everyone has the same issues as me. And of course, some folks need to lose more weight... and a kick start can help them to stay motivated.

If you want/need to lose weight quickly, the fast method is pretty much the same as the gradual one... but is slightly more dramatic. It involves eating VERY LIGHT food for 1-2 weeks before moving back to the GRADUAL OPTION.

When I say VERY LIGHT, I mean predominantly moong daal and vegetables with herbs, spices and oils and avoiding all meat, dairy and most grains apart from buckwheat (which technically isn't a grain anyway) and all fruit apart from papaya. So what I'm really talking about is living on:

split moong daal soup with veggies

vegetable soups

daals made from split moong daal

vegetable subjis

vegetable stirfrys

moong daal flour pancakes

buckwheat flour pancakes

and papaya as a snack.

Look for recipes in our cookbooks - there are lots of them!

Again, to help your Agni along the way and eliminate excess Ama, make sure you have a ginger tea in the morning before breaky and sip boiled water or herbal teas throughout the day.

This FAST OPTION to kick starting weightloss, fire up your Agni and reduce Ama can be fantastic but only keep it going for a short period of time (and if you are getting light headed or hungry along the way, it is best to introduce some rice to the equation). It is not advisable or sustainable as a longer-term diet.

If you need to lose a larger amount of weight (e.g. 15kgs or more) the best option is to mix up the two approaches. In your first month, follow the FAST OPTION for 2 weeks then the GRADUAL OPTION for 2 weeks. In subsequent months, follow the FAST OPTION for the first week of every month and the GRADUAL OPTION for the next 3 weeks - and keep this up until you reach your goal weight.

This can have a lovely, cumulative cleansing effect on the body without putting undue strain on your digestive system (or your mind!!). In fact, Ayurvedic Practitioners often prescribe this form of dietary therapy for people with pathological conditions where large amounts of Ama are present or weightloss is necessary.

Lifestyle Considerations

From a lifestyle perspective, we also get too HEAVY when we don't move enough. So as part of any weight-loss or weight-maintenance approach it is very, very important to exercise. But it shouldn't be too excessive, especially when following the FAST OPTION. Just 20-30mins of any relatively gentle exercise each day (e.g. brisk walking, yoga, tai chi, qi jing, swimming, gardening) can be enough to help lighten your load, fire up your Agni and burn up any excess Ama. If you're following the GRADUAL OPTION, you can do a little more. To stay motivated and make it a habit, only choose exercise that you really enjoy. If all else fails, think about getting yourself a dog. Preferably a sheepdog. They don't actually let you stay still! Trust me....

Sleeping during the day, especially after eating can also increase the HEAVY quality in our bodies so getting to bed by about 10/10.30pm and getting up no later than 7.30am is advised. If you have a late night, rather than sleeping in, get up at your usual time and have a short nap in the afternoon instead.

There are also a bunch of Ayurvedic treatments that can assist weightloss including Pindaswed Massage and Medicated Steam Treatments, both of which we offer at the Mudita Health Clinic. So, if you live locally and want to lose weight, come and see us!

Conclusion

So there you have it... the Ayurvedic secret to weightloss and weight maintenance. Makes intuitive sense doesn't it? And the best thing is, these approaches look after your Agni first and foremost. Most other 'Diets' don't. In my experience, they kill your Agni... so you lose weight initially but then very easily put it back on again when you're done. Hence the weight-loss-weight-gain roller coaster most of us have found ourselves on at one point or another. Or worse, we might end up with nasty symptoms of indigestion or develop food sensitivities from these diets.

Also, the Ayurvedic approach isn't just a weight-loss approach, it is actually a preventative health approach - it will help look after the Agni in your gut, your liver and your tissues, prevent the production and accumulation of Ama and help to balance your doshas (Vata/Pitta/Kapha); helping to directly prevent the onset of chronic diseases.

I'm a big fan. Clearly.

Let me know if you are too.... and let me know how you go with your weight-loss/weight-maintenance endeavours xxx

Love
Nadia xx

Disclaimer: If you follow these approaches and find you're not losing any weight, I recommend you go and see an Ayurvedic Practitioner for more specific dietary and lifestyle advice, herbal remedies and treatments that can help along the way. And of course there is always the possibility that you don't actually need to lose weight - that you are the perfect weight for your constitution already xx