

with a pinch of yoga



irina VERWER  
with a pinch of yoga

nourishing and nurturing food  
for everyday and everybody

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## *the divine in your kitchen*

.....  
In your hands, you're holding my second book on yoga and food. I never thought I'd create a first one – let alone another. However, my kitchen kept calling me, as did my yoga mat. My two passions longed to be expressed and so I started creating, measuring, cooking and writing again. It made my heart smile, dance and sing.

As you might already have guessed, I'm a lover of good food. I love to eat and I love to cook. For me, my yoga practice doesn't end when I step off my mat, and I certainly feel that cooking and eating is part of my practice.

My kitchen is my temple (as is my body, by the way), a place to remind me of the divine in everything – in you, in me, in the food we share... I love this verse from the Bhagavad Gita, as it expresses this divinity (or love, light, or any other word you feel comfortable using) in everything so perfectly:

Brahmarpanam Brahma-Havir  
Brahmagnau Brahmana Hutam  
Brahmaiva Tena Gantavyam  
Brahma-Karma-Samadhina

*See God everywhere: God is the ladle; God also is the food; God is the fire; God is the preparer; and God is the eater of the food. God is the reason for eating and God is the goal to be reached.*

To connect with this divine spark, it's vital to cook and eat with awareness, with love and with joy.

This already starts when you buy the groceries – choose pure, clean, real, fresh products, preferably organic and in season. Take your time choosing what to buy, instead of rushing through the grocery store while checking the latest Facebook updates on your smartphone. Connect with



those you meet in the store or at the market, say ‘hi’ to other shoppers, smile and be kind to the ones helping you at the counter.

Before cooking, set an intention. Your intention may be to nourish your loved ones, to connect with your divine spark or simply to cook with attention, care and love.

Feel your feet on the floor, breathe deeply and consciously start to prepare your dish (or drink).

Be mindful while you’re cooking. Feel the crispness of the vegetables, see the beauty of seeds and grains, smell the spices, enjoy all these different textures, flavors and scents.

If you like to sing, sing a mantra. It’ll help you to focus and to cook with joy.

When your dish or drink is ready, take a moment to feel grateful for this food. Sit down (on your heels would be best, according to yogic scriptures) and eat. Chew, chew, chew your food.

Eat with attention, don’t rush, enjoy all of the different flavors and textures. Try to eat when you eat. I know, that sounds silly, but really: don’t do anything else when you’re eating. No television, no arguments with your kids, no texting.

When you’re finished eating (or drinking), take a moment to say thanks again. To the earth, sun and rain for feeding you, to the farmers growing whatever was on your plate, to the divine spark in us all...

When you eat and drink with awareness, love and joy, cooking and eating will become part of your practice as well. And through practice, we’ll connect to that divine spark again.

As the Vijnana Bhairava says: ‘the taste of delicious food is the essence of the absolute’.

## *follow your dosha!*

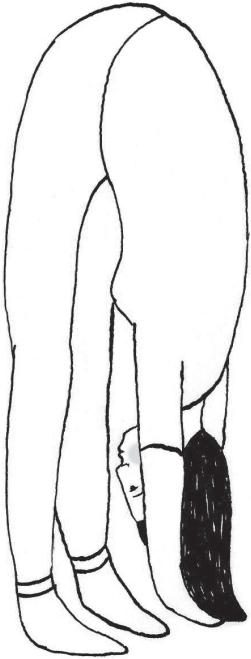
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Autumn is just around the corner when I'm writing this. Less than a week ago it was 31 degrees Celsius, hot and sunny. Now the temperature dropped to 11 degrees, it has been raining all day and the trees are losing their leaves.

Vata dosha is just as quickly changing as the weather at the moment.

Maybe you're completely new to the concept of doshas or you think the theory must be complicated. Still, they can help you to find out what kind of food supports you. And which food don't.

In my first book, I wrote a little piece on the doshas. They are the Ayurvedic constitution types and are present in everything and everyone. In food and in you. And in everything around and in between that.



Ayurveda is yoga's sister science. They both have their roots in the same country and emerged at around the same time. They even share the same 'goal': enlightenment or union. How they aim to arrive there does differ though.

Yoga's focus is more on poses, breathing exercises, mantra's and meditations, while Ayurveda focusses on nutrition, lifestyle and massages. This is in general, of course – as Ayurveda uses yoga poses and yoga pays a lot of attention to proper diet as well.

The word 'Ayurveda' consists of two different words: 'ayus' and 'veda'. 'Ayus' means 'life' or 'long life' (the English word 'age' comes from the Sanskrit 'ayus') and 'veda' translates as 'knowledge' or 'law'. So, Ayurveda teaches you the knowledge of how to age in a healthy manner.

What I find so powerful and beautiful in Ayurveda, is that it's philosophy takes into account that everyone is different and that everything changes. So, something that is a perfect fit for me, might not be so perfect for

you. It also means that what is a perfect fit for me now, might not be just that in twenty years from now. Something that really nourished me this summer, might not be so nourishing when I use it this winter.

To find out what is the most nourishing, supporting and healthy option in each given moment, it's important to understand Ayurveda's foundation. That foundation can be found in the five element theory.

All that exists, including your body and mind, is made out of the five elements. Those are space, air, fire, water and earth. As you can see, this line-up starts with the most vast, transparent elements, turns into slightly more dense ones and ends with the most solid and stable one.

The qualities I'm mentioning here (vastness, denseness, stability) can be found in everything that is made out of those elements. And, as I mentioned before, that is everything.

### space

The element space is formless and still. It's the empty container. A vessel for something. An empty page. Silence in which sounds appear. The beginning.

In our body it's the space in between, in and around all cells. It's the place in which thoughts arise.

### air

From that stillness, from that formlessness, movement arises. That movement is being initiated by the element air. Air does not only move very quickly, it also has a cooling effect (an airless desert will feel totally different than the same desert with a light breeze), is clear and dry. This element can be found in all that moves around in the body: your breath, heartbeats, muscles, thoughts...

### fire

The next element is visible and therefore denser than space and air. It's the fire element.

Fire is hot, sharp, dry and pervasive. It's heat is used in our body primarily for the digestive system. You can also find this element in our intellect: that which was unclear suddenly becomes clear. In comics this is shown as a lightbulb that goes on when someone has a brilliant idea.

### water

Water is the next element. In contrast to the previous elements, water can be more easily touched, felt, held and contained. Water is heavy, soft and cold. Our body is made out of water for the most part, which makes it easy to recognize this element within us. Plasma, saliva, urine and sweat are all clear examples of the element water.

### earth

The last element is the most dense one. It's heavy, hard, rough, compact, solid and stable. Earth gives structure and strength and can be found in all solid structures in our body, such as bone, cartilage, teeth and hair. You can find the element earth within your mind as well, as everything that is solid, slow and attached: a memory.

These five elements come together in the Ayurvedic constitution types: the doshas. Therefore, the doshas are present in everything and everyone as well. They're present in all organs, tissues and in each cell.

Even though the doshas are present in everyone, we're still all unique. This is because the doshas are present in different proportions. Our own unique blend of doshas is called prakriti. Our way of life influences our prakriti and when prakriti changes because of this, the then formed constitution is called vrkiti.

The three different doshas are called vata, pitta and kapha.

## vata

Vata dosha is made out of the elements space and air. This means that those people who have a vata constitution (meaning vata is the dominant dosha here), contain a lot of these two elements. Therefore, these people move quickly and often, both physically (they love to tap their feet constantly, for instance) as well as mentally (they're wide awake at night because their mind just won't stop racing). They often have a dry skin, dry hair, cold hands and feet and cracky, popping joints. They tend to be restless, fearful and tend to worry. Constipation is a typical vata-ailment, as is insomnia. People with a vata constitution walk quickly, are often in a hurry, don't like a routine (although a routine is just what they need), talk a lot and fast, are creative and enthusiastic. They are the ones that start a thousand projects at once without ever finishing one.

Because vatas already have a lot of space and air within them, they don't need to ingest or do things that have the qualities of those elements. So it's best for vatas to do and eat the opposite: to rest, to stick to a routine, to practice yoga with awareness and ease, to stay warm and to adjust their diet. It's also best for vatas to avoid cold, dry, airy foods such as popcorn, rice crackers, ice cream and iceberg lettuce. A better option would be to eat warming, soft, fluid dishes, such as warm porridge, soup, sauces, warming spices (for example cinnamon, fennel, ginger and oregano), sweet fruits and sweet, grounding vegetables (such as pumpkins, carrots, red beets, asparagus and sweet potatoes).

Even for those who don't have a dominant vata-constitution will vata increase in the season in which everything changes constantly: autumn and early winter. The wind blows, leaves change their color, one moment it rains and the next the sun shines brightly. Your skin will get dryer and you'll feel colder more often. Therefore this is the time of the year to balance vata by adjusting your diet. So, make sure to choose warming and soft foods.

Once we're past forty, vata will go up as well. Same goes for when we're moving a lot. This can be literally, such as when we're on an airplane, or figuratively, when we're online all day. At times like these, it's best to calm vata down by bringing in warmth, calm and rhythm in your life and on your plate.

## pitta

Pitta is made out of fire and a splash of water. If you mix those two together, steam will form. Also, fire melts all that it comes in contact with – turning all solids into liquid or oil. Therefore, oil is something to avoid when you have a lot of pitta – as you already have enough of that oiliness within you.

That oiliness is clearly visible in the skin of people who are dominantly pitta. The fire element shows itself in other ways as well. People who have a pitta constitution are easily irritated, can be very judgmental, have a lot of energy, a lot of strength, a reddish skin with often pimples or freckles, they often experience inflammation, love order and can be pretty dominant. They're passionate, have a sharp intellect and are natural-born leaders. They like to be in control and they love to make lists.

To avoid more fiery outbursts, it's best to calm pitta down by eating cooling foods. Apples, cherries, grapes, mangos, broccoli, cucumbers, zucchini, lettuce, grains, legumes, turmeric, coriander and dill are great for pitta's. They best avoid everything that is very spicy, oily or sour.

When you're busy doing things that bring pitta up, it's equally important to adjust your diet. This goes for anything from practicing a competitive sport, to leading a meeting or to having the feeling you constantly need to prove yourself in your relationships. Pitta will rise as well during the summer, the hottest time of the year (at least where I live), as well as during puberty.

Aside from using pitta-balancing foods, can pitta be balanced out with humor. This takes the sharpness of pitta away and helps pittas to not take everything so seriously.