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ASK THE ORGANIC BEAUTY EXPERT

Your inner and outer beauty questions answered.

By **Mary Beth Janssen**



I visited a spa where they practice Ayurveda. The esthetician told me I had “Vata” or dry skin, and her treatment was based on this. I was quite pleased with the result. Have you heard of this, and is it organic?

I’m pleased to take this question, as I’ve been practicing and teaching Ayurveda since becoming a mind-body health educator for the Chopra Center for Well-Being in 1997.

Ayurveda (Sanskrit for “science of life”) is recognized by the World Health Organization as an effective medical science and has undergone extensive research at the National Institutes of Health. Many studies suggest that Ayurvedic therapies may reduce cardiovascular disease risk factors, as well as prevent or treat certain cancers, infectious diseases, immune system deficiencies, neurological disorders, and hormonal problems.

Practiced in India for over 5,000 years, this natural system of healing draws on elements of meditation, yoga, pranayama, nutrition/herbalism, along with sensory modulation techniques, including massage, aroma, color, and sound/music therapies.

Ayurveda focuses on the mind-body connection and teaches that our experiences—including perceptions and lifestyle choices—are metabolized into molecules in our bodies.

At its heart and soul, Ayurveda guides us in determining our unique mind-body type (called “doshas”). We can then strive for a harmonious balance between these three doshas, or mind-body energies—Vata (air), Pitta (fire), and Kapha (earth)—that make up our constitution. This mind-body network influences our physical appearance—body frame, eyes, complexion, hair—along with the way we typically think, act, move, eat, and sleep. All three energies are in us—with one generally predominant, while another often sub-dominant.

With its spiritual underpinnings, Ayurveda recognizes there is this magnificent life force energy that flows through us and around us—creating wholeness in mind, body, spirit, and environment. When we disrupt this energy (read: uncontrolled stress!), patterns of *dis-ease* may set in, and can manifest both externally

and internally. Naturally, the items we use as we engage in Ayurvedic practices require our discernment in making the organic choice.

Following is a brief snapshot of the doshas.

Vata represents movement—that of the body, thoughts, food, blood, and more. Vata energy is light, cold, dry, irregular, and highly active. Predominant Vata types are naturally creative, lively, and stimulating. Imbalance or excessive “airiness” may come through as anxiety or restlessness, loss of skin tone, dry skin and hair, irregular digestion, constipation, insomnia, aching joints, and more. To balance, these individuals should reduce overstimulation and integrate more routine into their daily lives making certain to get ample sleep, gentle exercise, a regular, healthful, and warming diet (including fluids), and avoid becoming anxious. Nourishing plant and essential oils nurture the skin.

Pitta represents chemical transformation and light. It’s hot, intense and illuminating. Think metabolism. Pitta metabolizes food, ideas, emotions, and more. Those with predominant Pitta have a sharp intellect, strong passion, and focused ambition. When imbalanced, one is prone to inflammatory conditions like anger, heartburn, skin inflammation, hair thinning or premature graying, and other maladies. To balance, any cooling and soothing approach will be beneficial. All things in moderation, balance of activity and rest, and avoid being overly competitive (it stokes the

flames!). Decrease exposure to sun, hot or spicy foods, hot drinks, and alcohol. Quell the heat however you can. Cooling herbs and plant/essential oils soothe the skin.

Kapha represents structure, stability, and lubrication. It’s cold, heavy, slow, and cohesive. Kapha modulates building of tissues, organs, and bones, and can optimize fluids in the body. Predominant Kapha types should remain true to their loyal, down-to-earth, and easygoing self. Imbalanced, there’s a tendency toward lethargy, depression, physical congestion, and weight gain. This can manifest in lowered metabolism, slow digestion, fluid retention, sinus problems, oily skin, and more. Regular physical activity, stimulating activities—and a variety of experiences serve to motivate. Warmth and dryness are comforting. Use sensory modulation techniques that enliven and stimulate, whether music, aroma, or massage. ^{es}

Mary Beth Janssen is a highly respected beauty and wellness educator and a certified mind-body health educator for Deepak Chopra’s Chopra Center for Well-Being. She has authored five books, including *Radiant Beauty: Your Healthy and Organic Guide to Total Body Well-Being* and *Rejuvenation: Spa Secrets for Menopause*. Her newest is *Pleasure Healing: Mindful Practices and Sacred Spa Rituals for Self Nurturing*. To send her your questions, write to beauty@organicspamagazine.com.

MORE ABOUT AYURVEDA

If you’re interested in learning more, as always, Google Ayurveda or Organic, Ayurvedic Skin Care for resources and more in-depth study of this exquisite and time-honored system for beauty and wellness. And if inclined, visit these sites that I recommend: www.chopra.com (Take the dosha quiz found here. Quite enlightening!), www.doshacare.com, www.auromere.com, www.redcherrygroup.com (for their lovely Amrit organic brand), www.banyanbotanicals.com, www.esutras.com, and www.bodybistro.com.