



# Ayurvedic Nutrition & Cooking Made Easy

**8 PROVEN STEPS**  
TO HEAL YOUR DIGESTION &  
STRENGTHEN YOUR METABOLISM

By Nadia Marshall

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STRENGTHEN YOUR METABOLISM**

**NADIA MARSHALL**

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Mudita Institute Northern NSW Australia

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## About the Author



Hi there! I'm Nadia Marshall and I run the Mudita Institute in Byron Bay, Australia with my husband, Kester. After suffering from a restricted eating disorder in my late teens, I spent my twenties trying to find a way to 'be healthy' and easily maintain a comfortable weight that didn't involve gruelling exercise, obsessing over points or portions or eliminating foods that I loved. When studying naturopathy in my late twenties, I came across Ayurveda and decided to study that instead... and it changed my life forever! I finally found the answer!

And... I have been living, breathing, researching and writing about Ayurveda ever since. Formerly a professional Speech Writer, I decided to combine my passion for writing with my passion for Ayurveda. I am the author of three self-published books and have been a regular contributor to Nova Magazine, Everyday Ayurveda and an occasional consultant to Sarah Wilson's blog.

With my husband Kester (an Ayurvedic Practitioner and Zen Monk) and our Zen Buddhist Teacher, Doko, we started up the [Mudita Institute](#) in 2008 with the aim of introducing people to Ayurveda and Mindfulness in a way that was easy to understand and apply in modern life. For over a decade we have run retreats, workshops and a clinic together.

I'm super excited to share the information in this book with you. I hope it helps you and transforms your life as much as it has mine!!

**Let me guess..**

You've tried everything else. You've tried all manner of diets and approaches to health. But nothing has worked for you. Nothing has felt quite right. You're confused, your digestion isn't great and you don't feel as nourished and energetic as you'd like. You're not quite thriving.

But now you've come across Ayurveda. Maybe a friend mentioned it or perhaps your Yoga teacher? Maybe you came across it years ago but forgot about it or got distracted by other things.

You've read a book or two and it makes so much sense! You think you've managed to work out your body type (maybe?) and you finally understand why some things work for some people but not for others. Of course! Everyone is different!

You understand why digestion is so important and that most other dietary approaches don't really consider it. But Ayurveda does! You're intrigued. Perhaps even hooked... you've looked up some recipes online and the food you've made so far is delicious and feels great in your belly.

**But...**

You're also confused. This is more complicated than you thought. How do you incorporate this Ayurvedic approach into your life? How do you even say it?

Do you have to start eating daal all the time? Do you have to become a vegetarian?

Do you have to follow the food charts? And what if everyone in the family has a different constitution?

Do you have to learn Sanskrit? Or perhaps you need to study Ayurveda formally to really get it?

**Don't worry.**

There is an easy way to understand and incorporate an Ayurvedic diet into a modern western life without studying it formally. And this is what this little book is all about.

If you'd like to start wrapping your head around the Ayurvedic approach to nutrition and cooking, below you'll find a complete, proven step-by-step approach that we've taught to thousands of clients for over a decade through the Mudita Institute's retreats, workshops, courses, clinic and publications.

It will give you everything you really need to know as a beginner, and nothing that you don't... so you won't get side-tracked or bogged down by unnecessary details.

And the best news is, you already speak the language of Ayurveda and intuitively know what to do.... you just don't know it yet!

Afterall, Ayurveda is an elemental science so it is actually the science of nature. And even though we may have lost touch with nature, we've already learnt her language as children.

So let's remind ourselves....

Enjoy!!

Love Nadia xx

# Food is at the Heart of Ayurveda

Ayurveda is India's timeless traditional system of medicine. Although developed more than 5000 years ago, it is based on the fundamental, unchanging laws of nature so remains as relevant today as ever before.

However, Ayurveda is more than a medical system, it is a 'science of life', teaching principles and practices that help us live a life of greater depth, health and happiness.

Food is at the very heart of this journey. Ayurveda teaches us how to choose, prepare, eat and relate to our food in a way that makes it deeply nourishing to our body, mind and spirit.

## The Problem

Many of the books and cookbooks about Ayurvedic nutrition and cooking that exist tend to scare the new explorer of this beautiful science away before they even really begin.

This has been our personal experience and we have seen it with many clients and friends over the years.

Why? Because Ayurveda can get very complicated and confusing. But it doesn't have to be this way!

When starting out on the Ayurvedic path, it is vitally important to take baby steps. You need to get to know yourself a little better and to get to know your food a little better; over time. This is a relationship that cannot be rushed!

You also need a simple framework or context to work within, so you know why you are doing what you are doing. But you don't need to know everything all at once.

Knowledge is a bit like salt in a dish; you want just enough to enhance the other flavours but not so much that it takes over and spoils the dish!

So let's get started.

We'll begin with some fundamental concepts, some fun information and then we'll get into the nitty gritty...

# Ayurvedic Fundamentals

## The Ten Qualities

You may not remember this, but let me remind you how, as a child, we explored and described nature....

The very first things we experienced, the very first words we learnt were the qualities. Our mothers would warn us that something was 'hot' and not to touch it or 'rough' and to be careful sliding down it or 'sticky' and not to touch anything with our sticky fingers!

This is the language of nature... and we already know it! Ayurveda uses ten opposing qualities to describe everything in nature... from our constitutions to diseases to the food we eat and the environments we live in.

They are:

1. Heavy – Light
2. Cold – Hot
3. Dry – Oily
4. Dull – Sharp
5. Rough – Smooth
6. Dense – Liquid
7. Hard – Soft
8. Static – Mobile
9. Gross – Subtle
10. Sticky – Clear

Just 20 words that you already know. And for most of the rest of this book we'll mainly be concentrating on just 6 of these 20 words.

# The Elements

Ayurveda is an elemental medical system. What does this mean? For a western mind, thinking in terms of the elements in relation to our health, our bodies, and our digestion is a very weird thing to do. It feels very new and abstract. But it is the exact opposite really.

We are actually all intimately familiar with the five elements. They're not new at all. We have all experienced an impressive space like standing in a grand cathedral or large open field with a huge sky; we have all experienced a light breeze compared to a super windy day; we have all sat around an open fire and observed fire burning wood; we have all jumped into a body of water, even if it was just a pool or observed the incredible power of a waterfall; and we have all experienced the presence of a mountain or the grounding effect of walking bare foot on the earth. We know how they feel. We know the effect they have on our bodies and our minds.

We also know that every element has certain qualities. They can all be described using our 20 words above.

- ETHER or SPACE is clear, light, subtle and soft
- AIR or wind is mobile, dry, light, cold and rough
- FIRE is hot, sharp, light, dry and subtle
- WATER is cold, liquid, smooth, soft and oily
- EARTH is heavy, static, dense, hard and gross

So Ayurveda is an elemental science because it teaches that everything in existence is composed of the five elements – Ether (or Space), Air, Fire, Water and Earth. It also teaches that all five elements can be found in every single substance that exists, to varying degrees. One or more elements will be predominant but ALL elements will be present.

Water is a great example of this idea. You might think that water would just contain the Water element. However, when you apply heat or Fire to water, it evaporates and turns to gas, demonstrating some of the qualities of Air and Ether. When you apply extreme cold to water, it becomes solid, demonstrating some of the qualities of Earth. However, its predominant element is indeed Water. Let's use the human body as another example.

*ETHER:* In relation to the human body, Ether (or space) relates to the spaces in our bodies – our hollow bones and bone cavities, our hollow blood vessels and lymph channels and our hollow organs such as the stomach, lungs, bladder and intestines. We are actually predominantly space.

*AIR:* The human body also contains the Air element – Air moves into our lungs and is circulated throughout the body via the blood. More subtly, the Air element relates to all movement and communication in our body, from nervous impulses to muscle movements and the movement of nutrients through cell walls to the influence of hormones etc.

*FIRE:* Fire is found throughout our physical body in the form of metabolism or transformation - from the obviously acidic and burning digestive juices through to our temperature regulation mechanism right down to every single chemical reaction that takes place in the body to create something new.

*WATER:* As we have all been told since we were little, our bodies are about 75-80% water when we're babies and 50-65% when we're adults. The Water element contributes to the juiciness or moistness of our tissues, our blood, lymph, joint lubrication, mucous secretions and all other things liquid and juicy. It contributes to lubrication but also to structure (just as water in a balloon gives it its shape).

*EARTH*: Finally, the expression of the Earth element in our bodies is an obvious one. It relates to all things relatively solid, including our muscle, bone and bone marrow, which are predominant in the Earth element (although bone is also closely related to the Air element as it is hollow).

Each of us has a different amount of the five elements in our bodies – some of us are more ethereal, some more airy, some more moist and others more solid, with more earth... but we ALL must contain ALL of the elements or we would not go on living.

## Like Increases Like

So why is the concept of elements and qualities so important and what does it have to do with nutrition and digestion?

Well, the idea of elements is important because it will help us to understand the Ayurvedic view of constitution (and therefore metabolic tendencies), which we'll talk about next.

The idea of qualities is so important because in Ayurveda it is believed that exposure to certain qualities will increase those qualities in your own body and mind – the concept of LIKE INCREASES LIKE.

If we are exposed to cold, light, dry, rough, mobile qualities through our environment these same qualities will be increased in our body and mind. We know this to be true. For example, when we spend time in a windy environment (that has these qualities) we might feel light and invigorated at first. But, if we can't get out of it for a few days (like when we're camping or bushwalking) LIKE INCREASES LIKE and we'll start taking on the qualities of the wind.

Our skin dries out and gets rough. Our lips might dry out, crack and peel, along with the mucous membranes in our nose. And we'll quickly go from feeling invigorated to feeling agitated and cold.

It is the same with food. Take the silly season as an example. At this time of the year we tend to eat a lot more heavy, rich food than we might normally. At first this might be fun but after a few days of eating heavy, oily, gross, hard, dense food we will feel its effects on our body and mind. We'll start to feel heavy, lethargic, unmotivated and maybe even a little dull or depressed. We'll be craving something light to get back into balance.

Understanding this concept of LIKE INCREASES LIKE can provide you with a very simple and powerful tool for influencing the qualities of your own mind and body.

## Body Type (Prakriti)

Let me now briefly introduce the concept of body types / constitution or Prakriti. Often in Ayurveda this will be the first thing you learn and it will then form the basis of your approach to an Ayurvedic diet.

This is not what will be happening in this book.

I am only even mentioning body type because it is a very powerful tool for understanding our genetic digestive tendencies. And if I didn't mention it, it might be weird. Plus, if you know how to apply this information in the right way, it can be a very helpful tool for understanding ourselves.

Ayurveda doesn't just see our physical structure from an elemental perspective as described above. It also recognises the influence of the elements upon our genetics, through our genetic expression. In this way it can help us understand why we might be short and stocky when our sister is tall and lean even when we have the same parents. It explains why we're all different and why we all respond differently to our food, our drinks, our sensory inputs and our environments.

Prakriti means 'first creation'. It is our first expression of the elements through our constitution, before the qualities of food and life lead us into imbalance. It is taught in Ayurveda that our Prakriti is based on three things:

1. The constitution of our parents
2. Our parent's imbalances at the time of conception
3. Our mother's dietary and lifestyle habits (and psychological influences) during pregnancy.

There are three basic elemental body types described in Ayurveda, referred to as 'the Doshas'. They are **Vata**, **Pitta** and **Kapha**.

VATA people have a predominance of the Air and Space elements, PITTA people a predominance of the Fire and Water elements and KAPHA people have a predominance of the Earth and Water elements in their constitutions.

This means they express the qualities of these elements through their looks, personality traits, cravings, as well as their tendencies towards imbalance.

## What are VATA (Air/Ether) people like?

Because Vata is the expression of Air and Ether (or space) through our genetics, Vata people have a predominance of the qualities that these elements contain.

The main qualities of Vata are COLD, LIGHT, DRY, MOBILE and IRREGULAR. Pure Vata people:

- hate the cold, usually have poor circulation and don't sweat much
- have fine, light, ethereal bodies and usually have difficulty gaining weight
- have prominent joints with a tendency to cracking when moved
- are either quite tall or quite short with irregular or asymmetrical features – maybe sunken eyes; irises in slightly different directions; a weak chin (or very prominent one); an unusual, large or very small nose; and usually irregular or crooked teeth (often small)
- have thin, dry and brittle hair (often frizzy), skin and nails
- tend not to look people in the eye when speaking with them (they will often avert their gaze or gaze off into the distance)
- have variable energy and as soon as they have some, they use it up
- are very sensitive and can particularly be sensitive to foods, noises, scents etc
- have very active, restless minds and move and speak quickly
- understand concepts quickly, have amazing spatial intelligence and are highly creative and adaptable
- have poor memories and are the constitution most prone to stress and anxiety

When you think of a Vata person, think of ethereal dreamers, artists and creators. Some celebrity examples are Adrien Brody, David Bowie, Tilda Swinton and Woody Allen.

From a digestion perspective, predominantly Vata people generally have variable appetites (sometimes strong, sometimes weak), sensitive digestion with a tendency for gas, bloating, belching and pain... and often suffer from dry constipation. They are the constitution most likely to suffer from food sensitivities or intolerances, due to their sensitivity.

### What are PITTA (Fire/Water) people like?

Pitta folk are a combination of Fire and Water. The qualities of these two elements are often opposing and tend to balance each other out (Hot vs Cold, Sharp vs Smooth etc). This makes Pitta people relatively balanced and robust compared with Vata constitutions.

The main qualities of this combination are WARM to HOT, OILY and MODERATE. The exact physical and mental tendencies of a Pitta person depend on whether they have more Water or more Fire but overall pure Pittas tend to:

- dislike the heat, have good circulation and are vigorous sweaters
- have moderately sized bodies with good muscle formation
- are of average height with moderate, sharp features – symmetrical facial features, often with a strong chin; a fair or ruddy complexion; plenty of moles and freckles; intense blue eyes (but are prone to poor eyesight – too much heat in the eyes); often auburn or red hair; and moderate, sharp teeth with a slight yellow tinge
- have an intense gaze when speaking with others

- well-defined and well-lubricated joints
- have slightly oily and soft (but strong) hair, skin and nails (with a pink nail bed) with a tendency for premature greying or baldness and inflammatory skin conditions
- maintain a moderate weight with relative ease
- have good energy and tend not to run out easily
- have an intense drive to get things done and speak with purpose
- have sharp intelligence, good memories and great warmth
- are the constitution most prone to anger, irritability, frustration and judgment.

When you think of a pure Pitta person, think of an attractive, driven, warm and intense person. Most of our successful athletes, business leaders and politicians are predominantly Pitta, as are many of our celebrities. Some examples are Kelly Slater, Sally Pearson, Daniel Craig and Julianne Moore.

From a digestion perspective, predominantly Pitta people have strong (often insatiable) appetites and strong digestion with a tendency for excess heat, reflux and heartburn... and are more prone to loose stools.

### **What are KAPHA (Water/Earth) people like?**

Kapha people have a combination of the qualities of the Water and Earth elements. Again some of the qualities of these elements balance each other out so the qualities expressed depend on whether they are more predominant in Earth or Water. But the main qualities of Earth and Water coming together are COLD, HEAVY, DENSE, SOFT and OILY.

Pure Kapha people are considered to be the healthiest, most robust and most attractive constitution in Ayurveda. Kapha people:

- are stable enough to not be bothered too much by cold or heat (but prefer the heat), and can have sluggish circulation
- have very broad, strong frames and dense bones (their bones are literally heavier than Vata's or Pitta's) and strong, well-lubricated joints
- are moderate in height with soft, full features – dark, thick, lustrous, wavy hair; large, full lips; big, white, straight teeth; large eyes (usually brown) with long, thick lashes; thick, strong nails; and pale, soft, slightly oily and slightly thick skin (which tans evenly and easily)
- tend to have a soft, engaged gaze when speaking with others
- gain weight quite easily compared to other constitutions and can have trouble shifting it, particularly in the lower parts of the body
- have strong, robust, stable energy and don't like to spend it
- have slow-moving minds so take a little time to understand concepts... but once they understand something, they remember it forever
- are generally emotionally stable, sentimental, loving and very maternal
- but when out of balance, are the constitution most prone to depression, laziness and attachment.

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 stable. Some of our greatest cooks, singers and mothers are/were Kapha folk... like Antonio Carluccio (one of the Two Greedy Italians), Nigella, Pavarotti and Oprah.

From a digestion perspective, predominantly Kapha people have good digestion generally but if out of balance suffer from low appetite and heaviness, and are prone to sticky constipation.

## Why Navigating Body-Types is Confusing...

When you were reading the brief descriptions above, you may have associated with a particular constitution or maybe you couldn't decide between two of them? Or perhaps you related to all three. This is because it is very common for people to have dual constitutions – a mixture of Vata/Pitta or Pitta/Kapha or Vata/Kapha.

And to make things more complicated, you may be relating to aspects of the descriptions above because you are actually out of balance. Let me explain.

For example, you may have a Pitta constitution but think you are a bit Kapha because you're carrying more weight than you should be and have imbalanced digestion. If we have a Pitta or even a Vata constitution but are exposed to Kapha-type qualities for a long time (e.g. heavy, oily, excessively sweet food) then due to the law of LIKE INCREASES LIKE, Water/Earth or Kapha will be increased in our body/mind and we can begin to look more like we have Kapha in our constitution. But we just have a Kapha imbalance.

Likewise, if we have a Pitta or Kapha constitution and have had long-term exposure to Vata-type qualities (e.g. light, rough, dry, excessively bitter or astringent food) then again, due to the law of LIKE INCREASES LIKE, Air/Ether will be increased in our body/mind and we can begin to look like we have Vata in our constitution when we just have a Vata imbalance. And, by the way, Vata imbalances are very very very common.

The most common of imbalances in fact! They may not show up as weight-loss (and can often show up as weight-gain actually) but will show up as an agitated mind and sensitive digestion.

So you can quickly see why the body type approach to Ayurvedic nutrition can get complicated and you can get it very wrong. You might think you know what your constitution is and start following the Ayurvedic body type food charts accordingly... only to discover later that you got your constitution all wrong and were actually just out of balance!

Let's look instead at an approach to Ayurvedic nutrition that is suitable for ALL constitutions and ALL imbalances. And... will bring EVERYONE back into the most balanced version of themselves.

Sound good??

# The Digestion Approach to Ayurvedic Nutrition

The Ayurvedic approach to diet and lifestyle that we'll be covering from now on is all about digestion, or more specifically, the digestive fire. It is all about balancing our digestive fire as best we can, despite our constitutional tendencies or long-term imbalances. But first we need to introduce a few more concepts (and Sanskrit words).

## The Digestive Fire (Agni)

The first thing you need to understand about Ayurveda is the concept of AGNI. 'Agni' (pronounced ugg-knee) is a Sanskrit term that refers to our digestive fire and it plays a central role in Ayurveda whether you are eating breakfast or undergoing heart surgery.

In every case, in every situation, Agni is at the forefront of a practitioners mind because it is believed that, at the physical level, imbalanced Agni is the root cause of ALL disease.

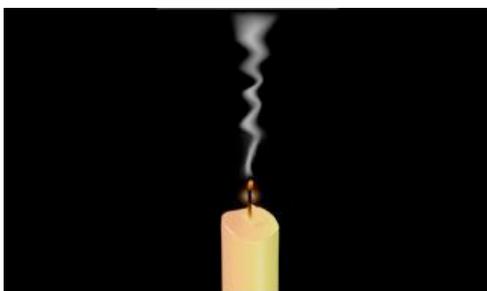
Agni can be **BALANCED** or it can be **IMBALANCED**.

**BALANCED DIGESTION:** When our AGNI is balanced, we have a good appetite at meal times. When we eat we don't suffer from any symptoms of indigestion and we have good eliminations (not too loose, not too dry... just right!). We feel light and energetic after meals and have good energy generally. We also tend not to get sick when everyone around us is (our immunity is strong) and we feel both physically and mentally robust; able to cope with the demands of life. Sounds pretty great, right?

Then there are three states of imbalanced Agni which most of us suffer from - SHARP, DULL and IRREGULAR. So how do these imbalanced states feel and what effect do they have? In a nut-shell...



**SHARP DIGESTION:** If our AGNI is too sharp, we will have an insatiable appetite... but our food will be 'overcooked' in the gut and nothing but charcoal will remain. SHARP AGNI can manifest as things like heartburn, reflux or burning pain after eating. We also tend to have loose stools. People with Pitta constitutions or Pitta imbalances will tend to have SHARP AGNI.



**DULL DIGESTION:** If our fire is too dull, our appetite will be low or non-existent... and when we eat, our food won't be cooked properly. If we have DULL AGNI we can eat very little and still gain weight. We may feel heavy, dull and lethargic, especially after eating and tend to have sticky constipation. People with Kapha constitutions or Kapha imbalances will tend to have DULL AGNI.



**VARIABLE DIGESTION:** If our fire is variable we may have a raging appetite one minute and no appetite at all the next. When we eat, even if we think we're hungry we feel full and bloated after eating even a small amount. When we put food on a variable fire, it remains uncooked - some bits burn, other bits don't cook at all. VARIABLE AGNI can manifest as things like bloating, pain, burping and farting and can create either dry constipation or loose stools (or both). People with Vata constitutions or Vata imbalances will tend to have VARIABLE AGNI.

## Undigested Food Toxins (Ama)

When our AGNI is in an imbalanced state, our food isn't cooked properly. It is like when we cook on a stove that is too high, too low or too up and down – the food doesn't cook and we are left with undigested food waste (undercooked or overcooked).

These undigested food wastes are known as 'AMA' in Ayurveda and they are toxic to the body. You can just call them toxins. We usually imagine 'toxins' as coming from harmful chemicals in our food or environment. These make up accumulating AMA in the body as well but the majority of AMA, from an Ayurvedic perspective, comes from an imbalanced digestive fire and not digesting our food properly.

So we can eat the best quality food in the world but if we're not digesting it properly, it can still be toxic to us!

## The Disease Process

AMA is a thick, heavy, sticky, mucous-like substance that is created in the stomach and then accumulates and lines the walls of our digestive tract, hampering our digestion further (by clogging up all of the sphincters and tubes releasing critical chemicals for digestion). For this reason any form of imbalanced digestion including SHARP or VARIABLE eventually becomes DULL if left untreated. Eventually the heavy, dense, thick, sticky qualities of AMA will dull the digestive fire like pouring goop on a camp fire!

Accumulating AMA can also affect the bacterial profile in the gut, encouraging 'bad' bacteria to flourish and discouraging 'good' bacteria. It will cause fermentation followed by inflammation and damage to the gut wall where it can then be absorbed into our lymph and eventually enter the many thousands of channels in our body - channels responsible for carrying nutrients to; and wastes away from our cells.

These toxins pollute our lymph and hamper our cellular nutrition and cellular waste disposal. Eventually the AMA will move deeper into the tissues and channels of the body and lodge into areas of weakness where they cause disturbance of cellular intelligence and the manifestation of disease.

Ayurveda teaches that ALL diseases (from the common cold to cancer) begin in this way; with imbalanced digestion and accumulating undigested food toxins.

And imbalanced digestion usually begins with an agitated mind because nothing hampers our AGNI like stress, anxiety and agitation!

## Do you have Ama?

So AMA sounds pretty nasty doesn't it?! Are you freaking out that you're full of Ama? Let's find out. How do you know if you have AMA accumulating in your body?

**General symptoms of AMA in the body include:**

- all of the states of indigestion and imbalanced appetite described
- a thick coating on the tongue in the morning (usually white but can be tinged green, yellow or brown)
- bad-smelling sweat, faeces and urine (worse smelling than usual!)
- a feeling of fogginess behind the eyes, poor concentration
- general fatigue despite ample sleep
- a lack-lustre of the skin
- irregular elimination (and often sticky stools - lots of wipes!)
- pain and stiffness in the joints; and
- a lack of muscle strength despite good muscle formation.

Normally the body is capable of eliminating AMA all on its own. However, when the digestive fire is imbalanced long-term and the 'toxic load' increases with every meal, the body becomes overwhelmed and the disease process is inevitable.

**To reverse the process, we need to bring our attention to cultivating BALANCED AGNI and reducing our AMA load.**

# 8 Steps to Balanced Digestion

## 8 Steps to Balance AGNI and Reduce AMA

As we now know, the principle law of nature Ayurveda teaches is LIKE INCREASES LIKE. This means we have a very powerful tool right here for cultivating balanced AGNI. We just need to know the main qualities of a balanced digestive fire... and then introduce more of those qualities into our body/mind through our food, sensory impressions and lifestyle practices. Easy!

Balanced AGNI has the qualities of (drumroll).....

**WARM, LIGHT and SLIGHTLY OILY.**

A balanced fire (like a small campfire or candle)... is warm, it is light and it is most stable if fed by a little oil, like a ghee lamp or the bees wax in a candle. It stays more balanced if we keep it out of the wind, don't put too much fuel on it but also give it just the right amount of fuel at the right times. We are building a fire here people! It is an art-form. But most of us have done it before or at least seen it done.

But you don't have to work it out on your own! Here are 8 simple, proven Ayurvedic dietary and lifestyle guidelines to follow:

*\*NOTE: When reading the following Steps, please take note of my language. I will use words like FAVOUR, AVOID and PREDOMINANTLY. Notice I tend not to use definitive words like 'never eat,' or 'eliminate'. That's because nothing is eliminated in Ayurveda. All foods are welcome... we just want to FAVOUR certain foods with certain qualities and AVOID others (or magically transform them through our cooking).\**

## STEP 1: Quality

As a basic starting point, we need to favour food that is unprocessed and fresh - that is, wholefood that hasn't been processed by food manufacturers and doesn't come in colourful packets with a list of unrecognisable ingredients (and has been sitting stale on a shelf for days, weeks or months). Pretty much anything our great grandmother wouldn't recognise as food! This simply means we need to predominantly shop in wholefood stores, fruit and veggie shops and farmers markets... or on the outer edge of supermarkets where the real food tends to reside.

Our body finds it easier to digest fresh, seasonal, preferably organic wholefoods because they, like our body, are more 'natural'. They also have a more 'Sattvic' or peaceful quality to them which has an effect on our mind, calming agitation.

Stale food tends to be heavy and difficult to digest... and any food sitting on super market shelves for a long time is pretty stale (an exception is foods that have been traditionally dried or preserved like jam, chutneys, pickles etc). Also food that has been tampered with by manufacturers to look like the real thing or 'imitation food' but is full of ingredients our body doesn't recognize also tends to be heavy and of poor quality for our digestive fire. It is like putting fake wood on a fire!

INTERESTING FACT... processed food produced by food manufacturers actually used to have to be labeled 'Imitation Food' by law. Imagine if this law hadn't changed! We might be more likely to think twice about buying 'imitation cereal', 'imitation milk' or 'imitation yoghurt'?!

## STEP 2: Favour WARM Food

To introduce the quality of 'WARM' into our food, we simply need to favour predominantly cooked foods, use mild spices in our cooking and sip warm drinks throughout the day (like herbal teas and boiled water).

You can think of food that is cooked as 'partially digested' or pre-cooked before it hits the little cooking pot in our bellies. It makes the food far easier to digest and also makes the nutrients more bio-available. The other great thing about cooking, especially one-pot meals, is all of the ingredients have time to combine their qualities and create a single cohesive meal in the pot before hitting our digestion. We all know that a soup or slow-cooked casserole feels better in our belly than steak and three vegetables.

Kitchen spices like cumin, coriander, fennel, ginger, garlic, cinnamon, cardamom, nutmeg, pepper, turmeric; and herbs like coriander, basil, parsley, rosemary, thyme, tarragon; all became culinary plants in the first place because they have a medicinal effect on our digestive fire. They ALL help to cultivate a more balanced digestive fire. And the effect is cumulative. The more we eat them, the more they heal our digestion.

The only spices it is best to avoid (or at least not overdo) are chilli and cayenne pepper. These two are very heating so can contribute to SHARP AGNI.

In order to cultivate WARMTH, we also need to avoid excessively COLD foods and drinks like iced drinks and icecream.

And, as I said, we want our drinks to be WARM as well. Try drinking herbals teas or boiled water throughout the day instead of chilled water and just see how different your digestion feels!

**Pro Tip!**

*Try starting the day with a ginger, honey and lemon tea - the best way to kick-start your AGNI and eliminate AMA in the morning.*

## STEP 3: Favour LIGHT Food

To introduce the quality of 'LIGHT' we need to avoid the excessive consumption of very heavy foods like meat, wheat, eggs, and dairy products. When we do eat them, we need to prepare them in a way that makes them lighter and easier to digest.

Meat is best consumed as a soup or a slow-cooked casserole or curry. A light, nourishing bone broth is the best choice of all!

Wheat is a grain that is cold, heavy, sticky and difficult to digest and combining it with yeast makes it even heavier. So to make it lighter we should favour yeast-free breads like mountain breads, wraps or chapattis. Or, if we do have yeasty-bread, sourdough is a good choice and we should eat it fresh and toasted.

Generally we should avoid eating too much cheese and yoghurt. Younger, white cheeses like ricotta, feta and cottage cheese are lighter and easier to digest than aged, yellow cheese. But when eating cheese, always sprinkle some cracked pepper on top to aid digestion. Yoghurt is sour, cold, heavy and congesting to the channels of the body. It's best consumed as a light lassi to enjoy the pro-biotic effect of yoghurt (see the recipes).

Milk should be consumed full-cream and unhomogenised and preferably brought to the boil with spices. Bringing it to the boil breaks up the protein chains and makes it warm, lighter and easier to digest (and we can make it even lighter by just adding a little water).

It's also preferable to just eat heavy foods less often than we normally do in a standard Western diet.

Instead, we should incorporate more light foods into our diet like fresh fruit, mung daal, red lentils, puy lentils, adzuki beans, basmati rice, brown rice, red rice, barley, oats, amaranth, spelt and.... lots and lots of vegetables, especially green leafy veggies.

We can make heavy foods lighter by preparing them with lighter foods (like in a one-pot meal)... but it's even better to have entirely light meals more often that are vegetarian.

We can also make our food lighter by adding water! Soups, curries, daals, casseroles and one-pot meals are generally much lighter and easier to digest, especially if they've been slow-cooked. They're also more delicious!

### ***Pro Tip!***

*Eat fresh fruit on its own, in between meals. When combined with heavier foods, it stays in the belly too long, is over-digested and forms AMA. It is a lovely light food and should be appreciated on its own!*

## **STEP 4: Favour SLIGHTLY OILY Food**

To introduce the 'SLIGHTLY OILY' quality we should use a moderate amount of good quality oil in our cooking; such as ghee, sunflower oil, sesame oil, coconut oil or olive oil. You can choose the oil based on the cultural influence of what you're cooking. For example... olive oil for Mediterranean cuisine, coconut oil for Sri Lankan etc.

Ghee (clarified butter) is highly regarded in Ayurveda because it has the special quality of enkindling our digestive fire, is very subtle and easy to digest and is incredibly stable, even under high heat. It is also believed to directly nourish our immune system and to have a calming effect on the mind. To learn how to make your own, see the recipes below.

If we are prone to dryness and have an ethereal constitution (Vata) we can have more oil... and if we're hot-headed and prone to oiliness (Pitta) or heavy set (Kapha) then we should have a little less.

And... we should also avoid the excessive consumption of dry foods (crackers, baked goods, salads, low fat foods) or excessively oily foods (such as deep fried foods) as these are more in the 'heavy' category.

### ***Pro Tip!***

*Don't just add oil to your food, add it to your body! Try giving yourself a self-massage with gently warmed cold-pressed sesame oil (black sesame oil is best). Massage your whole body BEFORE having a warm shower (the shower acts as a mini-steam, helping the oil to be absorbed). This is wonderful for your digestion but also your nervous system and mind.*

## STEP 5: Quantity

The quantity of food we eat is also incredibly important. Like we said, we don't want to put too much fuel on our fire as this will put it out!

Ayurveda says it's best to half fill our stomach with solid, a quarter with liquid and leave a quarter empty to allow room for churning. An over-full stomach is like a pot that has been over-filled. It's impossible to cook the food properly! My old chef friend used to say, 'cooking in a pot that's too small is like trying to dance in a phonebooth'!

If you cup your two hands together, that's about the amount of food we should eat at a meal. If the food we're eating is heavy (like meat) we should eat a little less. If it is lighter (like a veggie soup), we can of course eat more. But the most important thing is to eat a little more slowly and chew your food more thoroughly so you have time to feel into your belly while you're eating and notice when you're full. Ask yourself the question... have I had enough? Be honest. Let your digestive fire answer the question rather than your mind!

Make a concerted effort to avoid over-eating on a regular basis. It is far better to be not-quite-sure-if-you've-had-enough at the end of the meal than being sure-that-you've-had-way-too-much! Constant over-eating puts a HUGE strain on our digestive fire.

Also, try to avoid eating your next meal if your previous meal hasn't yet been digested. This includes snacks. If you had a big lunch, you may want to skip afternoon tea. If you had a heavy dinner and you wake up feeling full, you may want to skip breakfast and just have some fruit at morning tea time instead.

***Pro Tip!***

*If you do happen to over-eat one meal, you can help your digestive fire by drinking a fennel-seed tea (1/2 tsp of ground fennel seeds in hot water) or a peppermint tea after your meal as a digestive aid...*

## STEP 6: Timing

The timing of our meals can make a HUGE difference to our AGNI.

Our digestive fire is at its strongest in the middle of the day, when the sun is at its highest point in the sky – because our digestive fire is a reflection of the sun. So, we should try to eat our main meal, or our heaviest meal at lunch and eat a lighter meal in the evening.

Traditional cultures, and some of our longest-lived communities have followed this practice for hundreds or thousands of years, but it has been forgotten in our modern culture. Try and bring it back whenever possible. I know it's challenging but if you can change the culture in your own household, that's a wonderful thing!

It's also really great for our AGNI if we can eat at a similar and reasonable time each day. Our body loves routine and is confused by a lack of it. If our body expects food at a certain time each day it will help to get our digestive juices flowing in a healthy way, especially if we're not cooking.

When we cook, our digestive juices are stimulated by the experience of cooking... the sights, sounds, smells. When we eat out we skip this step and suddenly eating can be a bit of a shock...so if we can at least eat at a similar time each day, it helps our Agni A LOT.

## STEP 7: Environment

Next, we should consider the environment in which we are eating. The environment is all to do with our stress levels. If we eat when we're stressed, we won't digest anything properly, even if it's the most delicious food in the world! Our Sympathetic Nervous Systems (Fight or Flight) will be triggered and our Parasympathetic Nervous System (Rest and Digest), as a result, will be switched off.

As much as we can, we need to create a PEACEFUL environment in which to eat, both externally and internally. We need to calm down and RELAX before and during eating.

When at work, get out of the office to eat in a peaceful environment or at the very least, turn away from your computer and have a quiet moment before eating. When at home, if the environment is stressful with kids being crazy etc, consider feeding them first and eating a little later.

## Step 8: The Six Tastes

Finally, we want to work towards eating meals that have a balance of the six tastes. You know when you've eaten a meal like this. Can you remember the yummiest soup you've ever had? It was warm, nourishing and light... it had seemingly vastly complex flavours but no one flavour jumped out or took over? And rather than leaving you sweating from chilli or having itchy skin and a weird feeling in your mouth from too much salt... it left you feeling utterly nourished, satisfied and calm. Peaceful. That's what a balanced meal can do.

Ayurveda recognises six tastes: Sweet, Sour, Salty, Pungent, Bitter and Astringent. Each of the six tastes has a predominance of two elements and the qualities that go with them. Therefore, each of the six tastes has an effect on Vata, Pitta and Kapha too.

Vata is aggravated by excessively Pungent, Bitter, Astringent food. Pitta is aggravated by excessively Salty, Sour and Pungent food and Kapha is aggravated by excessively Sweet, Sour and Salty.

Most processed and take-away food is excessively Sweet, Salty or Pungent (and is usually made from poor quality salt, sugar and spices). And most restaurant food is the same (but generally fresher food with better quality ingredients). We're talking Really. Punchy. Flavours. It's yummy when you're eating it but it leaves you feeling a little weird. Because of these punchy flavours, the average Western diet will aggravate Vata, Pitta AND Kapha.

If we eat these foods all the time, we won't notice just how intense the flavours are. But if we eat home-cooked meals more often and dial back the intensity of the tastes in our meals so that they're more balanced (and more balancing), we definitely will.

I don't want your meals to be bland. Far from it! I want them to be subtly sensational. The more we encourage subtlety in our flavouring, the more subtle our pallet will become and the more balanced our body/mind and digestion will be. But don't stress about this too much... it is step number eight because it is a bit of an art-form and takes some time to master. So for now, just keep it in mind and start to pay more attention to punchy tastes and how they make you feel.

**Pro Tip!**

*When stocking your kitchen, buy good quality salt (like Maldon Sea Flakes and Pink Himalayan Salt), good quality sugar (like Rapadura and Billington's unrefined sugars) and good quality whole spices (preferably organic) that you can grind fresh yourself in a coffee/spice grinder. If a meal doesn't taste quite right when you're seasoning it, it often just needs a little more salt, a dash of sugar or a squeeze of lemon juice.*

## But what about Vata, Pitta & Kapha?

If you're eating in a way that supports a balanced digestive fire, as just described, you don't have to worry too much about food charts or aggravating Vata, Pitta or Kapha. Let me explain why. As discussed, the qualities we're aiming to eat more of are WARM, LIGHT and SLIGHTLY OILY.

Vata (Air/Ether) is aggravated by the qualities of COLD, DRY and ROUGH. If we're eating foods that are WARM, SLIGHTLY OILY and not too LIGHT then Vata will be pacified and stay in balance.

Pitta (Fire/Water) is aggravated by the qualities of HOT and EXCESSIVELY OILY. If we're eating foods that are just WARM (not HOT) and only SLIGHTLY OILY, we won't aggravate Pitta.

Kapha (Water/Earth) is aggravated by the qualities of COLD and HEAVY. If we're eating foods that are WARM and LIGHT (and not too OILY) then again, Kapha will be pacified and stay in balance.

Caring for our AGNI also cares for our DOSHAS... so you don't have to think about them! Just keep tending to the little fire in your belly.

## Looking ahead....

Once you've really embraced the 8 Steps above for some time, really experienced their benefits and come back into balance, you may have a better idea of what your constitution actually is. You may then want to know a bit more about caring for you're your constitution through food.

So, when you get to that place, here is just a little more information (come back to it in a few months after following the 8 Steps first!)..

### Caring for VATA People

As we said, Vata people are drawn out of balanced by foods and drinks that are too COLD, LIGHT, DRY, ROUGH and MOBILE (or stimulating). Therefore, they are kept in balance by eating the opposite - foods that are warm, oily and not too light (but not so heavy that their sensitive digestion can't handle them) and calming to the mind and nervous system.

Therefore, Vatas should avoid cold food and drinks particularly, including too much raw food. They should favour predominantly cooked food prepared with warming spices like turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, cloves (most spices pacify Vata); plenty of good quality oils like ghee and sesame and a sprinkle of unrefined salt.

They should generally avoid strong stimulants including caffeine, alcohol, chocolate, raw cacao and refined sugar.

The tastes that pacify Vata most are SWEET, SOUR and SALTY. Vatas should avoid excess raw food and salads but do well eating a little meat. However, it is best prepared as soups, slow cooked curries or casseroles and eaten in small quantities.

## Caring for PITTA People

As we said, Pitta people are particularly drawn out of balanced by foods and drinks that are too HOT/HEATING and too OILY.

Pittas need to avoid excess stimulants as well (because they are heating) as well as chilli, excess tomato (and tomato products like tomato paste, sauce etc and also too much fermented, sour or salty foods).

They do well with a mixture of cooked and raw foods prepared with cooling herbs and spices like coriander, fennel and mint; and a little good quality cooling oils like coconut oil and ghee.

The tastes that pacify Pitta are SWEET, BITTER and ASTRINGENT. Therefore, Pittas can handle more raw foods and plenty of bitter salad greens due to their strong digestion and need for constant cooling.

The most important things for Pittas is to make sure they eat on time - a hungry Pitta is a scary Pitta!

## Caring for KAPHA People

As discussed, Kapha people are drawn out of balance by eating foods and drinks that are too COLD, HEAVY and DENSE or STODGY. They need to favour predominantly cooked, light, dishes prepared with warming spices and just a little oil (not too much).

Given the stable, often static nature of their constitutions, they can handle stimulants like caffeine little more easily than the other two constitutions.

The tastes that most pacify KAPHA are PUNGENT, BITTER and ASTRINGENT. Raw food and salad greens are too cooling so these

tastes are best acquired through the generous use of spices (virtually all spices decrease Kapha) and cooked bitter greens.

Kaphas do particularly well on a vegetarian diet and can happily handle being vegan.

Skipping meals won't be an issue for them either so they can incorporate some intermittent fasting in the form of skipping dinner.

## It's cooking time!!

If you'd like to try out some AGNI-friendly recipes that are suitable for all constitutions, next you'll find some of my favourite recipes below taken from our cookbook, 'WARMTH: An Ayurvedic Cookbook'.

# Favourite Recipes

*Taken from our cookbook,  
"WARMTH: An Ayurvedic Cookbook",  
available from our website at [muditainstitute.com](http://muditainstitute.com)*

*"Ayurveda isn't just about eating 'Indian Food'.  
Afterall, the principles of good digestion are inherent in  
all traditional cuisines. Having said that, once you know  
how to make a really good daal or kicharee, you're  
going to want to eat them a lot!!" - Nadia*

# Oats Porridge

## *Ingredients:*

1 cup rolled oats  
1 tbsp ghee  
1 cup boiling water  
½ cup un-homogenised organic/biodynamic milk  
3-4 tsp raw sugar (unrefined) or jaggery  
2 tbsp sultanas/raisins  
1 tsp ground cinnamon

## *Method:*

Choose a heavy based pan and dry roast the oats, stirring over medium heat for 1-2 mins. Add the ghee to the pan and stir until oats are lightly coated in ghee. Stir slowly over low-medium heat for 1-2 mins then add the boiling water carefully (as it will spit a bit). Stir, then add the milk, sultanas, cinnamon and sugar.

Bring to the boil then turn down the heat to low. Stir occasionally until the oats are well cooked, add more water/milk as required to get the desired consistency. Serve into bowls and eat warm.

If you'd like a lighter porridge that cooks faster, you can grind the oats in a spice grinder first then follow the same method. Our teacher, Dr Ajit taught us to do this and it's a delicious approach! You can also do the same with rolled barley.

*GF OPTION: Although oats are technically gluten-free, coeliacs may wish to avoid them as they are usually processed on the same equipment as wheat products. However, you can purchase oats processed on wheat-free equipment (e.g. Bob's Red Mill Pure Rolled Oats). Alternatively, try rolled amaranth instead.*

**Serves 2, Gluten-Free Option**

# Mung Flour Pancakes

## *Ingredients:*

Ghee or sunflower oil for frying  
¼ tsp asafoetida (hing) powder  
1 tsp cumin seeds  
½ tsp turmeric powder  
½ tsp ground dry ginger  
1 cup mung daal flour (available from Indian Grocers)  
water to make a batter approx 1 ½ cups  
sml bunch coriander leaves, finely chopped  
salt to taste

## *Method:*

These pancakes make a delicious savoury breakfast but also a great lunch or light dinner (and are recommended during Ayurvedic cleanses). The most important element to their success is a good frying pan. We've had best results with a Bacarratt 26cm Health Pan. It's also a good idea to get a smallish ladle that contains about ½ to ¾ of a cup of batter.

Add all of the dry ingredients to a bowl and mix with a whisk. Then add enough water to create quite a liquidy batter. Next add the wet ingredients – the coriander and 1 tsp of ghee and stir. Heat your non-stick pan on a medium flame until it's nice and hot. Add a little more ghee to the pan then pour enough batter to make a thin, crepe-like evenly spread pancake.

Add a little more ghee around the edge of the pancake. Let it cook until the top is dry and the edges start to curl up then turn the pancake over using a thin spatula. Cook the other side for 30 seconds or so until it is golden brown. Serve hot with some chutney and some lightly cooked spinach or a vegetable subji like a sweet potato and spinach subji.

**Serves 2, Gluten-Free**

# Spelt & Buckwheat Pancakes

## *Ingredients:*

½ cup buckwheat flour  
½ cup spelt flour  
2 tsp almond meal  
½ tsp ground cinnamon  
1 ½ cups water (or a little less)  
ghee for cooking

## *Method:*

These pancakes make a delicious sweet breaky and a light alternative to the pancakes you've probably grown up with. The most important element to their success is a good non-stick frying pan.

Add all of the dry ingredients to a mixing bowl and stir with a whisk to remove lumps. Now add enough water to create a thinnish batter. If you have time, let the batter sit for 5-10 minutes before cooking the pancakes – it will thicken up as time passes so you may need to add a little extra water before cooking.

Heat your non-stick pan on a medium flame until it is nice and hot. Add a little ghee to the pan then pour enough batter to make a thinnish, evenly spread pancake (about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a large ladle). The pan should remain nice and hot throughout the cooking process so when the batter is added it sizzles and creates bubbles in the pancake.

Add a little ghee around the edge of the pancake. Let it cook until the top is dry then turn the pancake over. Cook the other side for 30 seconds or so until it is golden brown. Serve hot with maple syrup and some salted butter on top. Yummo!

*GF OPTION: If you'd like a gluten-free version, add mung flour or besan flour instead of the spelt flour and change the amounts to  $\frac{1}{4}$  mung/besan with  $\frac{3}{4}$  buckwheat flour.*

**Serves 2, Gluten-Free Option**

# Best Ever Kicharee

## **Ingredients:**

1 tbsp ghee  
1 tsp mustard seeds  
1 tsp cumin seeds  
1 tsp agni spice mix (ground cumin/coriander/fennel seeds in equal ratios)  
1-2 tbsp fresh ginger, finely grated  
¼ tsp asafoetida (hing) powder  
6-8 curry leaves  
½ tsp turmeric powder  
½ cup basmati rice  
½ cup split yellow mung daal  
5 cups boiling water  
a bunch of coriander; stalks finely chopped, leaves rough chopped  
juice of ½ lemon + salt to taste

## **Method:**

If you have time, soak the daal and rice for at least 30 mins, wash it 3-4 times then drain. If you have no time for soaking, that's okay too. In a large pot, heat up the ghee. Add the mustard seeds and fry until they start to pop. Add the cumin seeds and curry leaves, then the ginger and coriander stalks. Cook for a minute or two then add the soaked and drained rice and daal and agni spice mix (optional). Stir for a few minutes then add the boiling water, turmeric and hing/asafoetida. Cook for 20-30 mins (or 8 mins in a pressure cooker) or until the daal has broken down. When cooked, turn off the heat and let rest for a few mins.

Before serving, add the coriander leaves and lemon juice and stir through. Serve with some chutney, a little extra ghee and some steamed veggies or green salad on the side.

*NOTE: Kicharee is medicine for your digestion! Whenever you've over-done it or splashed out on foods that don't agree with you, always come back to kicharee as a comfort recovery dish. We eat it a few times a week!*

**Serves 2, Gluten-Free**

# Masoor (Red Lentil) Daal

## *Ingredients:*

2 tsp ghee  
1/2 tsp turmeric  
5 curry leaves  
1-2 garlic cloves, finely chopped  
1/2 tsp mustard seeds  
1 tsp cumin seeds  
1 tsp agni spice mix (ground cumin/ coriander/fennel seeds in equal ratios)  
1 cup red lentils  
1 medium tomato, diced  
4 sprigs spring onions, finely diced  
1 tsp salt + 1 tsp raw sugar (unrefined) or jaggery

## *Method:*

Rinse the lentils in the saucepan 3-4 times until the water runs clear. Add 3-4 cups boiling water and cook over low-medium heat for 15 mins or until the lentils have lost their form. Add the turmeric, salt, sugar and agni spice mix to the pot.

In a separate pan, heat up the ghee then add the mustard seeds. When the mustard seeds are popping, add the cumin seeds, curry leaves, garlic, spring onions and tomato and cook until the tomatoes soften. Next, add the mixture to the lentil pan and cook for another 5 minutes. If you have some, add some fresh finely chopped spinach and cook until soft.

Serve with basmati rice, some steamed green beans and mango chutney!

*NOTE: This delicious, bomb-proof daal is another digestion-friendly food that we have at least once a week. You're going to love it!*

**Serves 2-3, Gluten-Free**

# Chickpea Curry

## *Ingredients:*

4 tbsp ghee or oil  
2 brown onions, finely chopped  
2 inches fresh ginger,  
1/2 cup fresh coriander, washed & chopped  
1 1/2 cup chickpeas (soaked overnight in cold water)  
2 medium tomatoes, washed & chopped very finely chopped  
3 garlic cloves, crushed  
2 tsp ground cumin  
3 tsp ground coriander  
1/2 tsp tamarind paste  
salt to taste

## *Method:*

This crazy delicious curry is inspired by a recipe from our Ayurvedic teacher. Drain the soaked chickpeas and boil in different water with salt, in a pressure cooker for 30-40 mins. The chickpeas are done when they are soft enough to be easily squished between your fingers.

Make a paste of the garlic and ginger in a mortar and pestle or spice grinder. Heat the ghee or oil and add the onion, sautéing until brown. Add the garlic/ginger paste, cook for 1-2 mins, then add the tomatoes and cook until soft. Add the spices and cook until the oil begins to separate.

Drain the chickpeas, keeping the water. Add the chickpeas to the spice/tomato mix and stir together. Next, add the reserved chickpea cooking water a bit at a time until you have a nice gravy consistency (you separate it because you may not want to use it all). Finally, add the coriander before serving. Eat hot with basmati rice and some steamed greens on the side.

**Serves 4: GF, Vegan Option**

# Fennel & Zucchini Pasta

## *Ingredients:*

3 tbsp olive oil

1 brown onion cut in half & sliced finely lengthways

2 cloves garlic, crushed and finely chopped

a handful of fresh oregano/basil or flat-leaf parsley or a mixture of the 3, roughly chopped

your pasta of choice – suggest spirals, vermicelli or spaghetti

1 medium fennel bulb & 1 large zucchini – sliced very, very finely (preferably with a mandolin)

toasted pine nuts or sunflower seeds freshly grated parmesan cheese (optional)

salt & pepper to taste

## *Method:*

Cook your pasta according to packet instructions until al dente (cooked but still firm). At the same time, heat the oil in a medium sized pan and cook the onion until it is caramelised. Add the garlic and cook for a few more minutes. Add the finely chopped fennel and stir then add the lid, turn down the heat and cook for 5 mins then add the finely chopped zucchini and cook for another 5 minutes or until fennel is soft, stirring occasionally. When cooked, add the fresh herbs and a sprinkle of salt and pepper to taste.

When the pasta is cooked, drain the water and serve the pasta into bowls. Drizzle a little olive oil over the top, stir through and then spoon out the fennel, zucchini and herb mixture as a sauce on top of the pasta. Garnish with some freshly grated Parmesan, a sprinkle of roasted pine nuts/sunflower seeds and some pepper.

*NOTE: Pasta can be quite heavy and difficult to digest so it's best to eat with a light sauce and plenty of black pepper (a good digestive). We recommend using spelt pasta as it's easier to digest than wheat, or a good quality gluten-free pasta.*

**Serves 4: GF Option, Vegan**

# Zucchini & Spinach Soup

## *Ingredients:*

1 tbsp ghee/olive oil  
1 brown onion, finely chopped  
1-2 garlic cloves, crushed and finely chopped  
1 tsp ground cumin  
1 tsp ground coriander  
2-3 medium zucchinis diced into cubes  
5 large leaves of spinach or chard, finely chopped  
2 handfuls red lentils  
4 cups boiling water  
grated fresh parmesan cheese and roasted pine nuts (optional)  
salt, pepper & lemon juice to taste

## *Method:*

Heat the oil in a large pan and add the onions. Fry over low heat until soft and slightly golden and then add the garlic. Fry for a couple of minutes then add the ground cumin and coriander. Stir until the onions are coated in spices then add the zucchini and lentils. Stir until the mixture is covered in the spices and cook for a few minutes with the lid on, stirring occasionally.

Now, add the boiling water and a few pinches of salt and bring to the boil. Turn down the heat and simmer half covered for 10 mins or until the zucchinis and lentils are well cooked.

Add the spinach and cook for another 5 mins. Turn off the heat and with a stick blender, blend to your desired consistency. Season further with salt and pepper and a generous squeeze of lemon juice, to your taste. You can garnish the soup with fresh basil leaves and roasted pine nuts and/or grated parmesan and serve with flat breads or mountain breads.

**Serves 3-4: GF, Vegan Option**

# Thai Sweet Potato Soup

## *Ingredients:*

1 tbsp coconut oil  
3 kaffir lime leaves  
1 brown onion, finely diced  
1 tsp fresh ginger, finely chopped  
1 tsp salt  
a tiny pinch of cayenne pepper  
2 medium sweet potatoes peeled & cut into 1-2 cm cubes  
4-5 cups boiling water  
1/2 cup coconut milk  
a handful of fresh coriander, finely chopped  
2 tbsp lime juice  
salt & pepper to taste

## *Method:*

Heat the coconut oil in a large pan over low heat. Add the kaffir lime leaves and the onion and sauté until the onion is soft and golden. Next add the ginger and cook for a few minutes before adding the sweet potato and cayenne pepper. Stir until the sweet potato is coated in the oil and spices then pop the lid on and cook on a low-medium heat for 10-15 mins, stirring occasionally.

If the mixture starts to stick, add the salt as this will help draw moisture out. Next, add the boiling water and simmer, half covered for another 5-10 mins or until the sweet potato is soft.

Remove from the heat, remove the kaffir lime leaves and then, with a stick blender, puree the soup. Add the coconut milk and return to a simmer for 2 mins. Turn off the heat and add the lime juice, fresh coriander and additional salt and pepper to taste. Serve with flat breads or mountain breads.

**Serves 2-3: GF, Vegan**

# Energy Shake

## *Ingredients:*

3 almonds (blanched) or 1 tsp almond meal  
2 dried dates  
1 dried fig  
10 sultanas/raisins  
2/3 cup boiling water

## *Method:*

Soak the almonds/almond meal, dates, fig and sultanas/raisins in the boiling water for at least 3 hrs. If having in the afternoon, put on to soak in the morning. If having in the mid-morning, put on to soak in the evening.

Once soaked for the appropriate time, if you've used whole almonds, take them out and remove their skins then return them to the mixture and blend it with a stick blender for several minutes until it is a smooth consistency. Now, you can either add a little boiling water to make it less thick or you can have as is.

*NOTE: This drink is very nourishing to the tissues and is absolutely delicious. It is great for giving an energy hit in the afternoons, when our blood sugar gets a little low. It is high in iron and magnesium so is particularly good for building the blood, nervous systems under stress and for growing kids and pregnant/breastfeeding women.*

*OPTIONAL: To make the drink even more nourishing and delicious, you can add a little warm, unhomogenised biodynamic/organic cow milk or almond milk after blending.*

**Serves 1-2: GF, Vegan**

# Date & Coconut Balls

## *Ingredients:*

1 cup pitted dates  
1 cup desiccated coconut  
1/4 tsp ground cardamom  
1 tbsp ghee or coconut oil

## *Method:*

These tasty treats are a great alternative to processed cookies in the afternoon. It takes only about 10 minutes to make 16 balls!

Finely chop your dates. Pop them in a mixing bowl and soak them in boiled water for about 30 seconds, then drain.

Now add the coconut, cardamom and ghee and gently knead into a 'dough', being careful not to burn yourself on the hot dates!

Next, simply roll the 'dough' into small balls about the size of a walnut. Roll each ball in some dried coconut then when you're done, pop them in the fridge to harden.

*OPTION: To make them chocolatey, add 1-2 tsp of organic raw cacao powder at the same time as the coconut etc.*

*Makes approx 16 balls: GF, Vegan Option*

# Savoury Lassi

## *Ingredients:*

1 glass water  
2 tbsp biodynamic plain yoghurt (or coconut yoghurt)  
a pinch of cumin powder  
a pinch of black pepper & salt

## *Method:*

This is an excellent digestive to have after meals and the best way to consume yoghurt. It acts as an appetiser, cleanses the digestive tract and is very useful in any case of loose bowels, indigestion, mal-absorption, IBS, colitis, piles and anaemia.

Mix all ingredients together and whizz with a stick blender (or in a blender) for several minutes until froth forms on the top. If you don't have a blender, put the ingredients in a large jar and shake vigorously!

**Serves 1: GF, Vegan Option**

# Sunthi Chai

## *Ingredients:*

- 1-2 tsp freshly grated ginger
- 2 tsp loose black tea or 2 tea bags
- 2-3 tsp raw sugar (unrefined)
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup un-homogenised organic/biodynamic cow milk, soy or almond milk

## *Method:*

Put the milk and water in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Once boiled, remove from the heat and add the ginger, sugar and black tea. Leave to stand for 3 mins and pour through a strainer. Serve hot.

'Sunthi' is Sanskrit for fresh ginger. Fresh ginger is the best spice for promoting good digestion. This simple chai makes a great alternative to coffee.

*NOTE: If using honey as your sweetener, wait until the chai has cooled down to drinking temperature before adding the honey (as honey is very sensitive to heat).*

**Serves 2: GF, Vegan Option**

# Make Your Own Ghee

## *Ingredients:*

2 x 250g blocks of unsalted butter (preferably organic)

## *Method:*

Cut up the butter into smaller pieces, put into a medium-sized saucepan with a lip and melt slowly over a low heat. When the butter liquefies and comes to the boil, turn down the heat as low as it can possibly go. Continue to cook the butter at this heat, uncovered.

Ghee is clarified butter or 100% pure butter oil. We are removing the milk solids, buttermilk and moisture. At first, the milk solids and buttermilk will separate from the butter oil and will rise to the top. Next, some of the solids will begin to sink to the bottom of the pan. When there are very few bubbles of moisture left and the ghee goes quiet; the milk solids at the bottom of the pan have turned a light brown colour; the butter oil is a lovely golden colour and it starts to smell like popcorn, the ghee is ready. Take it off the heat now as it is prone to burning at this stage.

Let the ghee cool until just warm. Secure some folded muslin cloth onto the top an appropriate sized thick glass jar (sterilised) with a rubber band. Now pour the ghee through the muslin cloth to remove the milk solids and buttermilk foam. Remove the muslin and leave the lid off the jar, letting it cool for several hours before putting the lid on (if you put it on when warm, condensation will form and water will enter the ghee which will cause it to spoil). You shouldn't refrigerate ghee for the same reason – taking it in and out of the fridge will lead to condensation.

***GF, Lactose-Free***