

## Balancing Act

Feeling out of whack? Bring yourself back into balance with a little help from the 10 pairs of opposites.

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By now you're probably familiar with the Ayurvedic idea of constitutional type, or *prakriti*. You might even be adept at choosing teas and lotions based on your personal association with the vata, pitta, or kapha dosha. But when you're a bit—or a lot—out of whack, *prakriti* takes a backseat. It's your *vikriti* that needs tending.

Sanskrit for "current state" or "manifest imbalance," *vikriti* can refer to any point on the spectrum of maladies, from a momentary chill to a complex illness such as heart disease. If you sense that a serious condition is developing, it's important to see your health care provider. But for subtler imbalances, the principles of Ayurveda can help you respond in simple ways to restore balance sooner rather than later. And addressing an imbalance in the early stages can prevent a more convoluted *vikriti* from developing.

The Charaka Samhita, one of the main texts of Ayurveda, offers 10 pairs of opposites (see "*The Opposites*," above) as a key to reinstating balance. Thousands of years ago, the yogi sages who developed Ayurveda created these principles. With clear minds and undisturbed senses as their instruments of research, the sages determined that qualities of matter exist in pairs of opposites. They also found that "like increases like"—for instance, adding heat to something warm increases the warmth. And they discovered that opposing qualities balance each other, so adding heat to something cold results in something warmer, or less cold.

By inquiring about the qualities present in ourselves and our surroundings, we can sharpen our skills of direct perception just like the sages did, ultimately keeping emerging manifestations of *vikriti* simple and short-lived. The next time you feel a bit off-kilter, try to discern the qualities affecting your senses through the weather, meals, aromas, relationships, and life situations. With mindful awareness, assess the qualities present in your body and mind. Then apply opposing qualities and watch the results.

Here's an example. Let's say you're out for a run one blustery afternoon and you start to feel a little off. Strands of hair blow in your face in an irritating way. You notice that your skin feels drier than usual. You're out of breath and spaced-out. If you take a moment to size all of this up, you might realize that running in the wind is overexposing you to light, dry, and mobile qualities.

Without mindful awareness, you might ignore your senses, run an extra mile (increasing mobility), then go home and scarf a bowl of popcorn while surfing the Web (increasing lightness, dryness, and mental mobility). These actions would probably make you more aggravated and uncomfortable, and your imbalance might increase, priming the pump for further distress.

### THE OPPOSITES

cold	hot
wet	dry
heavy	light
gross	subtle
dense	flowing
static	mobile
dull	sharp
soft	hard
smooth	rough
cloudy	clear

But armed with the knowledge that you should apply opposing qualities to restore balance, you cut your run short and head for home. You add moisture by taking a bath and applying oil to your skin. You then add heaviness by eating a sweet potato, and foster stillness and stability by sitting in meditation for a while. Before you know it, you're back to your best self again.

As you practice recognizing the pairs of opposites, your powers of perception will deepen and you'll naturally make choices that will keep vikriti at a minimum—and ultimately, you'll become a sage in your own life.