



YOGA FOR YOUR *body type*

Want to enrich your yoga practice? Discover the ancient health system of Ayurveda and learn how to tailor your moves to suit your mind-body type

Do you ever come away from a yoga session feeling unfulfilled, anxious or even grumpier than when you started? The chances are there's something missing from your routine – and that's an understanding of your own personal needs and how to approach each move in a way that will reap the most benefits for you. Put simply, the best style of yoga for optimum health and wellbeing can vary greatly depending on your individual mind-body type. That's according to the principles of Ayurveda, the ancient system of health – known as the 'Science of Life' – which originated in India around 5,000 years ago.

Let's start with the basics. At the core of Ayurveda is the belief that everything is made up of five elements: space, air, fire, water and earth. From these elements

come three qualities, known as doshas: Vata, Pitta and Kapha [see side panel]. We all possess a certain amount of each of these doshas, with one normally more dominant. Most of us are a mixture of two doshas – with one dominant and the other secondary. According to Ayurvedic philosophy, doshas determine our personality, body shape, digestion, movement and emotions. Keeping these 'mind-body types' in balance holds the key to health, happiness and fulfilment.

'Adjusting your chosen activities to suit your nature can increase the benefits you gain from them,' explains Dr Brennan, an Ayurvedic practitioner and founder of the Ayurvedic Practitioners Association (apa.uk.com). 'Kapha types, for example, tend to have a larger build and more stamina, so do well at sports such as squash, football and rugby. Likewise,

taking your dosha into consideration during yoga can boost your results and enhance your enjoyment of the experience.'

In fact, Ayurveda and yoga are inherently connected: both are believed to take their roots from ancient Indian scriptures known as the Vedas. Ayurveda teaches us how to keep mind and body in balance – and so avoid illness and stress – by making the diet and lifestyle choices that suit us best. And yoga offers us a practical and effective way to achieve that personal balance.

HOW MUCH NEEDS TO CHANGE?

This doesn't necessarily mean you have to completely overhaul your yoga routine or stop going to the class you've been attending for years. Try shifting focus to you as an individual, rather than



subscribing to a one-size-fits-all regime.

Admittedly, certain schools of yoga lend themselves to some doshas more than others. Hot yoga, for instance, isn't really suitable for Pitta types as they benefit more from cooler temperatures, while fast-paced Vinyasa is great for balancing out the sluggishness in Kapha types. In most cases, however, you'll simply need to make minor tweaks to the moves you've always been doing – the pace at which you do them, the way you breathe and where you fix your gaze.

'Vata, Pitta and Kapha are energies that are present in our minds and bodies,' Dr Brennan explains. 'This means we can use our speed, breathing and attention

to balance our routine. Vata is balanced by a slower pace and longer [posture] holds, taking deeper breaths and focusing on each posture, rather than allowing ourselves to become distracted by thoughts of home or work. Pitta can be balanced by a moderate pace, a non-goal orientated approach and a little more pressure in the stretches. And Kapha will benefit from a faster pace and shorter pauses between poses with more vigour in the stretch.'

WHAT THROWS US OFF-BALANCE?

It's also important to bear in mind that the balance of our doshas can be influenced

WHAT'S BEST FOR YOU?

How to adjust your yoga moves to redress an imbalance.

VATA

Pace: Take things gently and slowly, holding each move for longer.

Breathing: Take long, slow, breaths.

Focus: Look straight ahead or slightly down for grounding and stability.

Beneficial moves: Standing postures held for eight to 10 breaths; and seated forward bends for around eight breaths.

PITTA

Pace: Maintain a moderate, fluid pace.

Breathing: Release excess heat by taking long exhalations through your mouth.

Focus: Keep your gaze soft and level to encourage coolness and tranquillity.

Beneficial moves: Standing and seated forward bends and twists; avoid strength-based postures as they generate heat.

KAPHA

Pace: Pick it up, with less time between moves, to generate heat and energy.

Breathing: Take faster, steady breaths.

Focus: Gaze sharply up to create heat.

Beneficial moves: Standing postures held for three to five breaths.

by other factors, such as time of day, time of year and what's happening in our lives during any given period. Relationships, work and even what we've just eaten can throw one or more of the doshas off-balance – so you may well need to take your secondary dosha into account during a yoga session and adjust your routine accordingly. For example, if your mind-body type is Pitta-Vata with Pitta dominant, but it's Vata that seems particularly off-balance today, it may help to slow the pace and take longer, slower breaths.

Feeling confused? Like any other science or philosophy, Ayurveda is a vast topic that takes time and practice to fully master. But as you become more familiar with your doshas and the subtle changes you need to make during your yoga sessions in order to get them into balance, the easier and more fruitful it will become. Trust us: before too long, these relatively minor adjustments will come as second nature, and make a huge difference to your health and wellbeing.

To find out more about Ayurveda Yoga, visit livingayurveda.co.uk/free-ayurvedayoga-booklet.

To learn ore about your mind-body type, go to livingayurveda.co.uk/questionnaire. ■

WHAT'S YOUR MIND-BODY TYPE?

Discover your dominant dosha with our at-a-glance guide.

Vata types are...

Slim, light sleepers, fast talkers, tend to have irregular mealtimes and are snackers. They're creative, sensitive, intuitive and lively – but can be forgetful, anxious, erratic and lack confidence when out of balance.

Kapha types are...

A heavier build with lots of stamina. Tend to speak slowly and sleep soundly. They deal with tasks methodically, and are relaxed, calm, loyal and reliable – but can be lethargic, unproductive, overweight and depressed.

Pitta types are...

Medium build, fair-skinned and don't like hot weather or spicy food. They're confident speakers, sharp, bright, competitive and passionate – but can be impatient, aggressive and angry when they're out of balance.

