

Cycling through the Day for Mindful Practice

According to Ayurveda, the energetic qualities of the doshas (*vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*) rotate throughout the day so that different influences predominate in different portions of the day. They can affect our practices of *asana*, *pranayama*, and meditation, as well as our strength, mood, state of mind, and more. As yoga therapists, acknowledging and understanding these cycles can help us to more effectively work with students and clients. The inherent qualities of the *doshas* have a strong influence on whatever is happening within those hours. We can fight against it, or flow with it and utilize practice to help find balance amidst the ever-fluctuating energetic ripples of the day.

The three *doshas*, for a brief reminder, are groupings of the five elements: space/ether, air, fire, water, and earth. The *vata dosha* is composed of space and air; *pitta* of fire and a bit of water; *kapha* of water and earth. The elements and their associated qualities give us a clue as to the types of physiological process and states of mind governed by that *dosha*. *Vata*, being air and space, is naturally dry, expansive, and mobile; therefore, the *vata dosha* governs all space and movement in the body, including the movement of impulses through the nervous system, the grace and coordination of the body, the spaces inside the joints, and our creative capacity. The *pitta dosha*, being fire (and a splash of water) is hot, intense, transformational, passionate, penetrating. It governs all of the processes of digestion in the body, including the digestion in the mind—the ability to process our experiences and to learn and practice discernment. The *pitta dosha* also governs our metabolism, radiance of our skin, and our desire and motivation. *Kapha*, being water and earth, is both grounding (and if we're not careful, a bit muddy and murky) governs all structure, stability, strength, memory, and our ability to feel and express unconditional love.

Each dosha cycles through the day twice in a rhythmic pattern:

The *pitta dosha* predominates from 10 am–2 pm and 10 pm–2 am.
The *vata dosha* predominates from 2 pm–6 pm and 2 am–6 am.
The *kapha dosha* predominates from 6 pm–10 pm and 6 am–10 am.

Calm Pitta during the Midday and Midnight Hours

Let's think about the implications of this for our students, starting with the *pitta dosha*. We know that the sun is highest in the sky and the most intense in the middle of the day. These midday hours are often a time of high energy and perhaps greater clarity for us. The digestive fire is strongest at this time, which is why Ayurveda values getting in the routine of eating the largest meal during these midday hours. If people are talking about feeling low in energy in the afternoon or feeling burned-out at work, remind them of the importance of lunch. A lack of midday fuel, when the fiery *dosha* of *pitta* needs it most, may be the culprit.

The middle of the day can be a good time for people to schedule a practice session, as these hours come with a surge of energy. Waiting until after an *asana*, *pranayama*, and/or meditation practice to enjoy lunch can help with digestion; including twists in the *asana* practice can stimulate the digestive fire. People can also feel overheated between 10 am and 2 pm. To reduce *pitta* and help your students manage the internal heat inherent in this time of day, suggest that they try evoking the sensation of the body as water moving through water; using cooling breaths as needed, such as *shitali*; incorporating meditation practices that evoke gratitude, love, and compassion (to mitigate fiery energy); and making sure to dress in clothing that breathes well.

The day's second *pitta* surge begins around 10 pm, leading to a late-night second wind. For this reason, Ayurveda suggests going to sleep before 10 pm. Falling asleep (or at least moving in that direction) before the fire rises also directs the energy of digestion toward deeper healing in the body. Encourage students who are trying to rebuild in any way to appropriately utilize this energy for repair.

If someone is feeling the effect of runaway fire with irritability or difficulty falling asleep, try suggesting cooling practices before sleep, such as walking or bathing beneath the moonlight, drinking water left out to absorb the rays of the moon, meditating envisioning the light of the moon, late-night restorative practices, or a few rounds of alternate nostril breathing.

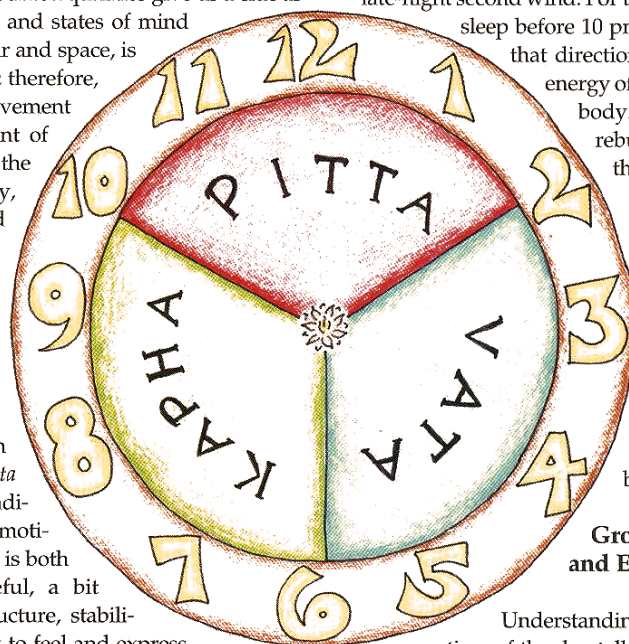
Ground Airy Vata in the Afternoon and Early Morning

Understanding that the mid-afternoon is the *vata* time of the day tells us something about why people may experience a mid-afternoon crash, particularly if they have ignored the instruction to eat a hearty lunch. Since *vata* is emptiness, when emptiness takes hold in the world around us, our energy sinks.

If your students are feeling that mid-afternoon crash, you can try suggesting practices to get them moving and in touch with the breath. But take extra care to cue practitioners to stay grounded rather than succumb to the impulse to simply fling the body through space. Use instructions that focus on maintaining awareness and connection with the actual feeling of the feet on the earth, the strength in the body, and the flow of *prana*, or life-force, through the *nadis* (energy channels). Warming breaths (as long as they are not overdone) can stoke the internal fire during the naturally cold *vata* time. A long *savasana* (resting pose) after fully embracing movement can help soothe the nervous system, which can be prone to irritation during the *vata* time of day.

The early morning *vata* time, the predawn hours, are valued by many traditions for their powerful effect on connecting with spiritual potential, intuition, and the great expanse that exists both beyond

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YogaTherapyforDailyLiving *continued*

and within the body. Interestingly, this is the time of day when a person's sleep cycles allow for the most space within the land of dreams—the intuitive movement within the psyche.

If people describe difficulties sleeping during this time of day or report feelings of anxiety, then try suggesting pre-bedtime practices to calm *vata*, including massaging the feet while in bed, alternate nostril breathing, a few minutes of legs-up-the-wall before bed, or drinking a cup of warm almond milk with *ashwagandha*. These can help calm to a cool breeze the hurricane winds that can blow when *vata* is out of balance. However, if someone wakes up during this time of day ready to engage in practice, then try suggesting indulging in a long meditation, a series of sun salutations, or *pranayama* that enhances mental clarity.

Stimulate Kapha, Enjoy Strength

The *kapha* times of day are times of strength, particularly in the morning, which for many are one of their most productive times of the day (if a person arises and gets ready before sunrise, or before this time of day begins).

If students complain of sleeping late and having trouble breaking the pattern, because it feels as though they're waking up and having to fight through a heavy, wet blanket (the energy of the *kapha dosha*), then the remedy is to shift the waking cycle to getting up before or around sunrise and engaging in a few sun salutations,

standing poses, or other warming practices (including the breath) to break up the stagnation.

The evening *kapha* time is one of the peak times in most yoga studios, where classes are full of people needing to shake off and counteract what may have been a sedentary day. When we encourage students to fully use this *kapha* strength to move through stagnation, to provide uplift, to connect to the truth within the heart, then it cultivates the strength of the earth element. Standing tall; balancing poses; sequences that include warrior poses, that evoke the warmth of the sun, that incorporate gentle warming *pranayama* practices—all can create balance within this time of the day.

Every time of the day has its potentials and its pitfalls. When we see the cycles for what they are and encourage this recognition in our students, we can, rather than becoming frustrated, experience clarity and harmony every hour of the day. **YTT**



Felicia Tomasko, RN, E-RYT500 is the editor in chief of LA YOGA Ayurveda and Health Magazine, the president of the California Association of Ayurvedic Medicine, and on the board of directors of the National Ayurvedic Medical Association. She teaches Ayurvedically inspired yoga at Yogaglo.com and maintains a private practice in California.