



## **Support the Three Pillars of Life - Food, Sleep and Sex – During the Holidays, the Vata Season**

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Eating right, sleep, and appropriate use of sexual energy are the three “Pillars of Life,” according to [Ayurveda](#), and are intertwined in their relationship to our “ojas,” or vital life force, which protects the body and mind from illness. If any one of the pillars is compromised – as can so easily happen during the holidays – the other two can be affected as well.

The holidays usher in the winter season, which is considered the Vata time of year, with cold, light and dry conditions predominating (think of a snow flake for example). During this season in particular, those who are more Vata in nature, or have a Vata imbalance, can easily become unbalanced as they are exposed to the same conditions that are also dominant in their own makeup. According to Ayurveda, like creates more like, while opposites balance (see [doshas](#) for more details).

As we approach the darkest time of the year, all of nature slows down, yet we rarely allow ourselves to do so, which is essential for Vata. When out of balance, Vata types experience dry skin, constipation, tension headaches, cold hands and feet, anxiety and worry, fatigue, irregular appetite, and insomnia, for example. Simply taking time for reflection between holiday activities and make the three pillars of sleep, eating right and healthy intimate relationships a priority can keep our ojas strong, allowing us to truly connect with ourselves and others as we embrace the spirit of the season.

### **Food and digestion**

According to Ayurveda, eating right is one of the most important daily choices that we make, as we are what we eat. Ayurveda considers food as medicine. During the Vata (winter) season, foods with the opposite qualities of Vata – warm, heavy and moist – help ground and nourish the body, mind and spirit (of course, one should always take into consideration her or his individual dosha).

Ayurveda recognizes that food encompasses one of six tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent. Foods that are considered sweet (grains, meats), sour (cheeses) and salty have warm, heavy and moist qualities and should be emphasized. They include soups and stews, oatmeal, seasonal vegetables stir fried with sesame oil, whole wheat flour, dairy products, seasonal produce such as sweet potatoes, winter squashes, root vegetables and, on occasion, meat. Watch the coffee intake as it can be too stimulating and drying for Vata, instead replacing it with an herbal tea. Make sure to eat three meals a day, to reduce temptation to overeat at an evening

festivity. Eat enough breakfast to get you to lunch; make lunch your largest meal of the day whenever possible; and eat enough dinner to get you through until the next morning's breakfast.

For optimal digestion and to keep from holiday weight gain, finish dinner by 7 p.m., allowing three hours between dinner and bedtime, and enjoy holiday treats as an after-lunch dessert, when agni (digestive fire) is highest, and more likely to burn it up. Proper digestion is key to our wellbeing as our bodies extract the nutrients and "prana" (life force) from our food, and eating meals at the appropriate times helps to facilitate it.

### **Sleep and rest**

Sleep it is absolutely essential for good health. Too little sleep affects the Vata dosha, so make sleep a priority! Follow nature's rhythms by sleeping from approximately 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., waking with the sunrise. The later you go to bed, the more difficult it will be to fall asleep as you miss the body's prime time for shifting into sleep, which is around 10 p.m. or a bit earlier. Make sure your bedroom is free from distractions such as television and excessive light in order to support solid sleep. Invest in an eye mask if outside lights shine into your room. If you feel restless, take ashwagandha or valerian root prior to bed to help facilitate a deep sleep. In addition to sleep, make sure that your schedule allows for frequent breaks and rest during the day; cat naps are great for Vata types.

### **Sexuality**

Healthy, loving relationships play a major role in optimal health, which includes intimacy. Intimate relationships allow us to connect to others and increase life's joy. Sexual energy, known as shukra, is needed to build ojas. When shukra is depleted, ojas is depleted as well. The shukra can become exhausted from excessive sexual activity, or unhealthy intimate relationships. Shukra is one of the seven "dhatus" or tissues that form the body. In Ayurveda, it is considered the supreme body tissue as it has the power to not only create life, but to give birth to anything new in our lives. In order to experience pleasure, and healthy fertility, the shukra must be in a healthy state. During the holidays, take the time to really connect and bond with your partner, generating love that can positively benefit all those around you.

Those who tend to the three pillars of life during the holiday season pave the way for a long, healthy life and a great start to 2011.

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