

# What Ayurvedic medicine has offered me

A greater sense of self-love and a seasonal lens on a life well lived

By Amy Beaith



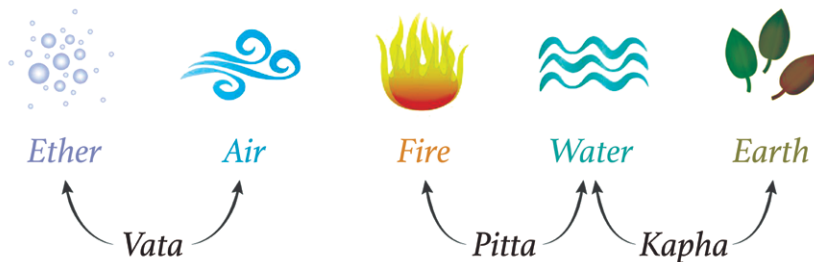
Growing up on a large acreage in rural Ontario, nature was always on my doorstep, beckoning me outside. I loved going barefoot, almost half-naked when I was really little. But then I developed primary lymphedema and a strong emphasis on keeping my skin clean to ward off infections was required. That meant no more barefoot wanderings on the grass or running through

This nature-based approach stuck with me as I built a career around plant-based skincare. I am now also studying Ayurvedic Medicine and taking Yoga teacher training. An Ayurvedic framework helps me look at living from a seasonal perspective, apply it to my overall health, and learn how to address my lymphedema daily self-care habits in a more natural way. Many practices from Ayurveda

between us and our environment; seeing humans as a microcosm of a macrocosm; that we are made up of the same elements as the universe: earth, air, fire, water, and ether. Just as nature ebbs and flows with the seasons, so do humans. We are not the same person in summer as we are in winter. I find this especially true when I think of my lymphedema and how my body feels at these different times. Our bodies change, as the weather and climate changes around us. So too should the care of our bodies. By altering our diet, sleeping, skincare, and lifestyle habits change to respond to how our body is interacting with our environment, we stay in balance with nature. Something that has helped me cope with lymphedema is knowing what to expect each season and anticipating how best to respond to my needs. This can mean wearing a different grade of compression stockings in the summer and winter, or adjusting to the seasonal needs for my skin and gut.

In Ayurveda, the five elements are grouped together in three pairs called Doshas; Vata (Air + Ether), Pitta (Fire + Water), and Kapha (Earth + Water). These doshas are within us in unique combinations, are attributed to each season, times of day, and different organ systems in our bodies. So what does this look like? As we are made up different combinations of these elements, in Ayurveda, you can have different constitutions, or body types/tendencies. So how does this look from a seasonal and lymphedema perspective? Here is an example.

## Ayurveda Elements and Doshas



the sand at the beach. I slowly became somewhat physically disconnected from nature in my body. However I learned to bring nature into my world in many other ways, from growing food in our garden, helping my dad with his beekeeping adventures, making maple syrup, or wandering the woods excited for spring and looking for the first trillium flowers!

have become more mainstream in recent years like Golden Milk Lattes, Tongue Scraping and Dry Skin Brushing. There are many simple everyday tools that I can easily apply to my Lymphie self-care routine and create a solid foundation for positive health following the rhythm of the seasons.

One of the special components of Ayurveda is the recognition of the central relationship



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**Golden latte—an Ayurvedic favourite; wonderful warming and lymph-loving elixir for the winter season.**

Winter time is Kapha; that heavy, solid energy of Earth and Water together. Think of trees, rocks, solidness in our bodies like muscles, bones; internal organs like our liver. The sturdiness of our legs to hold us up. The seasonal energy of Kapha is cold, dark, and wet. Here in Edmonton, the earth has a big, heavy, white, sparkly blanket on top. This heavier energy may affect us with heavy emotions, such as having a harder time with the darkness; feeling sad, unmotivated and lonely. This can affect our lymphedema in that we may spend less time on our self-care, we may be less motivated

to decrease our swelling, or get something checked out, order new stockings, or we may reach out to our community less than usual. Overall, we may want to do less. We may experience the feelings of heaviness in our bodies with our lymphedema limbs feeling more achy, full, or heavy. And that's okay. The first part is to acknowledge what's going on energetically and how it's affecting you and create a self-care plan to bring your body back into balance.

The cold air of winter brings a dryness (both inside and outside) that can be quite drying on both our skin and our respiratory tract. So, it's important to tend to your skin with moisture, much like we do in the fall dryness with root veggies, warming soups, stews, as well as making time for dry-brushing and moisturizing with balms and creams. Boosting our immune system throughout the winter can be helpful as well. Appropriate rest is probably one of the easiest elements of therapy as well as the cheapest health habits to add to your routine, especially in the winter. Ayurveda teaches us that from roughly 10pm until 2am (Pitta time), our body is digesting our day and detoxifying our

body, processing emotions and experiences into memories, and foods into nutrients, and gathering up toxins and wastes to be flushed out in the morning. Detoxifying is an important function of the lymphatic system, and as a person with lymphedema, this is an easy way to support my body's ability to detoxify the best that it can.

Other ways I dissipate the heaviness are to reach out to friends and community to chat, gather, and share a laugh or two! Laughter is such wonderful medicine to lighten the body, soul and mind! In winter, I make more time to use my compression pump during the day, as a break. I set aside time for this, making it special and shifting from thinking of it as a chore, to making it more enjoyable with a good book, a mug of tea, and a blanket.

#### **My morning winter routine:**

##### **Setting myself up for a good day ahead**

- ✓ Smile as soon as I wake
- ✓ Give my collarbone area and shoulders a little self MLD
- ✓ Take my compression garments off, dry brush and inspect my skin



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- ✓ Do five sun salutations to get my lymph and energy flowing
- ✓ Then shower, moisturize, and tongue scrape
- ✓ Get my compression garment on
- ✓ Drink a glass of warm water with lemon
- ✓ Walk/exercise/yoga

#### My typical evening winter routine: winding down from the day

- ✓ Finish eating 3-4 hours before bedtime
- ✓ Get ready for bed around 9pm with no blue light after 8pm (ideally)
- ✓ Fifteen minutes of gentle bedtime yoga stretches and self MLD to open up my lymph channels to encourage drainage and promote relaxation (e.g. seated cat-cow, gentle twists, self-MLD around my collar bones, neck, and shoulders)
- ✓ Gratitude. When I begin checking over my body, I approach this time with curiosity and tenderness. I thank my body for carrying me today, such as for my legs for being able to walk to pick up my kids at the bus, for hands that carried groceries and gave hugs, or eyes to see my notes for a project I am working on.

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- ✓ Skincare. Apply herbal body oils, balms and/or creams all over or where needed. Oiling the body in Ayurveda is called 'sneha' and also translates to 'to love the body'. Take time to care for your skin, especially the soles of the feet, which is very relaxing to the nervous system and encourages a good night's sleep.
- ✓ Listen to a Yoga Nidra sleep meditation to help me drift off to sleep

Ayurvedic medicine encourages us to do self-care throughout the day and is a wonderful framework that has allowed me to approach caring for my body with more curiosity, seeing myself as a beautiful, unique part of nature, with strengths and weaknesses, and to love my body with lymphedema. I now embrace a whole-self approach to my Lymphie self-

care (body, mind, and spirit), exploring what my body needs to thrive and be in balance in this moment in time. I have been able to reduce my inflammation, heal my gut (from many rounds of antibiotics over the years for cellulitis infections) and improve my self-care and compliance. Those are wins in learning to "Lymph Well to Live Well." <sup>LP</sup>

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