



An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking

the workbooks

BY DIVYA ALTER



About this document

This document is a compilation of the four companion workbooks that follow Divya's online masterclass series, *An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking*. Each workbook, featured here in series, is also a stand-alone document that can be printed individually. Note that when printing individually or when viewing on a screen, each part (i.e., 1, 2, 3, and 4) begins at page 1. As such, the page numbers in the document will not exactly align with the page numbers that the pdf viewer shows.

When viewed on an electronic device, we have provided features that allow you to easily navigate to a specific Part or Lesson of interest. To go directly to a workbook (Part), click on its title listed below. To go directly to a Lesson (within a Part), navigate to that Part's contents page and click the lesson title. Alternatively, use the pdf viewer's bookmark feature (to the left in Adobe) to pick the Part or Lesson you want to jump to.

Workbook Parts

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An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking

Part 1

General Principles of Ayurvedic Cooking

BY DIVYA ALTER



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How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is a companion to the video "General Principles of Ayurvedic Cooking," part one of An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking. In it, you'll find an easy-to-read summary of the essential principles from each lesson.

Any text you see in [blue](#) is clickable—simply click on the text to be taken directly to that page in this workbook, or (if it is a reference to a company or organization) to the associated website. However, I encourage you to print the entire workbook before starting the class, or at least the pages you want to work with (some of the charts are great for a quick reference when hung in your kitchen!). Then follow along as you watch the videos and complete the learning activities.

It will also be handy to flip through later on as you review key concepts, take notes, or reflect on various topics, like trying to determine your unique body type (dosha). As you go through the workbook, you'll notice **bolded** words in the main text. These are key concepts that are further defined on the page's right column for easy reference.

Much of Ayurveda's meaning is held within its Sanskrit origins. In an attempt to preserve the most accurate connotation and translation of the key Ayurvedic concepts I discuss in this course, I've included some of the Sanskrit words in this workbook. You'll see these written in Italics in parentheses; for example, Sour (*amla*) and Metabolic Effect (*virya*).

Whenever you can't decide which foods are the most balancing for you, use the Digestion Questionnaire on [page 28](#) to assess the current strength of your digestion. Then apply the Golden Rule of Balance ([page 15](#)) to determine the foods you need that day.

On [page 47](#), you will find more information on my cookbooks, blog, culinary products, and special offers.

Now, let's get into it.

"Always postpone a bad habit, and never delay a good one."

-VAIDYA KAMLESH MISHRA

KEY CONCEPTS

Key concepts in **bold** are defined in detail in the right columns



Reflective Questions

Scattered throughout the workbook are Reflective Questions, which appear in boxes (like this one). These questions prompt you to integrate a lesson or concept into your personal experience, thereby making it more applicable to you. They are optional, and you may answer them to any degree and in a variety of ways: mentally, typed in the "Notes" tab on the masterclass portal, or handwritten in a journal. They also make great discussion prompts for conversation with friends and family.



Welcome

Dear student,

Thank you for joining me for my video course *An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking*. This workbook covers what I teach in "General Principles of Ayurvedic Cooking," part one of the four-part series.

In this part, I present the necessary foundation for you to prepare the healthiest meals at home. In the following three parts, I'll show you how to optimize your kitchen setup, teach you plenty of recipes, and cover essential cooking techniques.

"General Principles of Ayurvedic Cooking" is the longest of the four parts and it focuses more on knowledge than practice; therefore, I suggest that you approach it one or two segments at a time: watch a video, take notes, engage in the video's learning activities, and refer to the workbook's corresponding sections.

I hope my teachings in this course empower you to develop a more personal relationship with food. I also hope you feel inspired to fine tune your eating habits so that you can maintain optimal health through every stage of your life.

Thank you again and welcome!



ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Divya Alter is a certified nutritional consultant, educator, and chef in the Shaka Vansiya Ayurveda tradition. Her relationship with Ayurveda began in her native country Bulgaria while interning in the kitchen of an underground Bhakti yoga ashram – an experience that inspired a 5-year study in India where she witnessed the true power of this ancient healing system. Over time, it has helped her cure her own digestive issues, chronic fatigue, and an autoimmune disorder. In 2009, she began teaching Ayurvedic cooking at the Bhakti Center in New York City. In 2016 she and her husband Prentiss founded [Divya's Kitchen](#), a plant-based restaurant in Manhattan that reimagines classic dishes through an Ayurvedic lens. Divya's brand has since expanded to include a line of plant-based retail food products and educational videos. Divya is also the co-founder of [Bhagavat Life](#), a nonprofit culinary school that offers cooking classes and an Ayurvedic chef certification program. Divya is the author of *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen* (Rizzoli, 2017) and *Joy of Balance: An Ayurvedic Guide to Cooking with Healing Ingredients* (Rizzoli, 2022).



1.1

What Is Ayurveda?

Ayurveda is the traditional healing system of ancient India. By addressing the causes of a disease rather than just its symptoms, this healing system treats the person as a whole. Ayurveda presents comprehensive knowledge of both preventative care and treatment of disease. Modern medicine recognizes that many diseases today are associated with the way a person eats or lives—they're called "lifestyle diseases." The ancient practice of Ayurveda can help us prevent or reverse such diseases. That's why Ayurveda is called "the lifestyle medicine."

Schools of medicine, such as Harvard and Johns Hopkins University, recognize that Ayurveda can have positive effects when used as a complementary therapy with standard, conventional medical care.

Ayurveda presents the principles of life—the universal truths that can be applied by any person, anywhere, at anytime. By intuitively following these principles, we can tune in to our intelligence to choose what is best for our life right now. The more you are in alignment with nature, the easier it will be to make your healthiest food and lifestyle choices. This alignment begins with self-awareness. The result we're looking for—health and happiness!

Reflective Questions

1. How do you currently define healthy food?
2. Describe a time when you recognized a direct correlation between a food/meal you ate and the way you felt soon after (physically or emotionally).



1.2

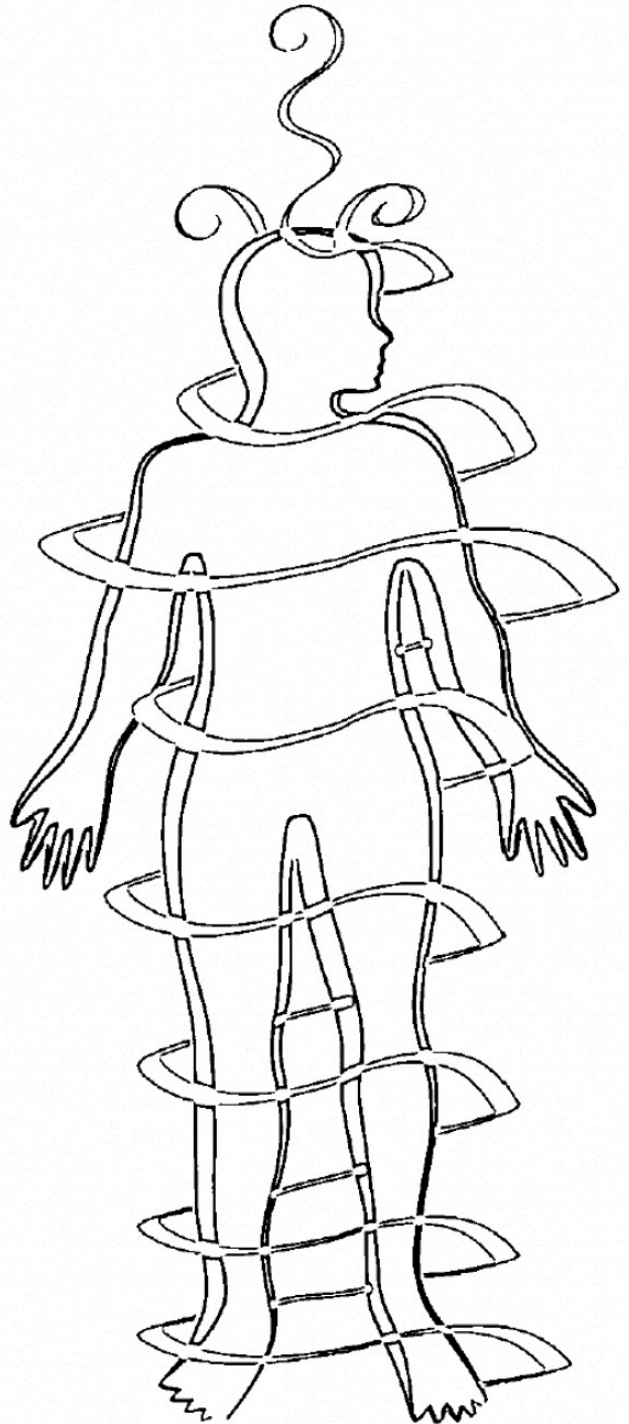
The Three Doshas

In this segment, I explain the three doshas, or the bioenergies that manage all functions in our organism. The distinctive combination of the doshas at our time of birth defines our constitution or natural disposition (called *prakriti* in Sanskrit).

Ayurveda's concept of body types helps us understand the architecture of our bodies and minds—how they operate and what strengthens or weakens them. It is yet another way to increase our self-awareness. With such awareness, we can immediately tell when we're moving away from balance and decide what we need to bring ourselves back on the wellness track.

It is important to understand what your constitution is because it is your original blueprint for perfect health, and it guides you to proactively and continually maintain a healthy lifestyle. It is even more important to know how stress causes your current dosha dysfunction, the cause of your illness, or your feeling of being unwell. That dysfunction is what you need to correct in order to bring yourself back to flawless health.

To find out your body type and your current imbalance, it is best to consult with an Ayurvedic doctor or practitioner. They will determine both by reading your pulse. Similar to Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurveda has used pulse diagnosis for thousands of years. It is a unique method to determine the state of the doshas, disturbed physiological functions, toxicity seated in different body tissues, the state of the mind, and more. When performed properly, pulse diagnosis is surprisingly accurate. Until you can visit an Ayurvedic doctor or





practitioner, try the quizzes I list in Sources on [Page 28](#) for a quick and fun self-analysis.

As you study the characteristics of the different body types, please do not focus on what's wrong with you (or others) when you identify with some of the weaknesses. Understanding them is helpful for educational purposes, but dwelling on them will drag down your mind. Elevate yourself by acknowledging the strengths in you or another individual. Find the positive charge in the negative expression.

The Cosmic Origins of the Elements and Doshas

PRANA

Prana has several interpretations. It can mean the cosmic subtle energy, which is the elementary biophoton particles of the sun and moon and their effects on everything on earth. In the words of Vaidya Atreya Smith, this type of *prana* is the energy that carries the potential of matter. *Prana* can also mean the life-giving energy that circulates in every living being and acts as the "thread" that keeps the body and soul together. Ayurveda defines life as the flow of *prana* in the body.

The three main components of cosmic *prana* are **Soma** (the lunar energy), **Agni** (the solar energy), and **Marut** (the cosmic space energy).

These three energies coexist in a way that is analogous to a temperature control system in your house: it delivers cold or hot air (Soma and Agni, respectively), and the programmed thermostat (Marut) determines when to activate which temperature and for how long.

PRANA

Cosmic/universal subtle energy; the life force that circulates in every living being

THREE MAIN COMPONENTS OF COSMIC PRANA

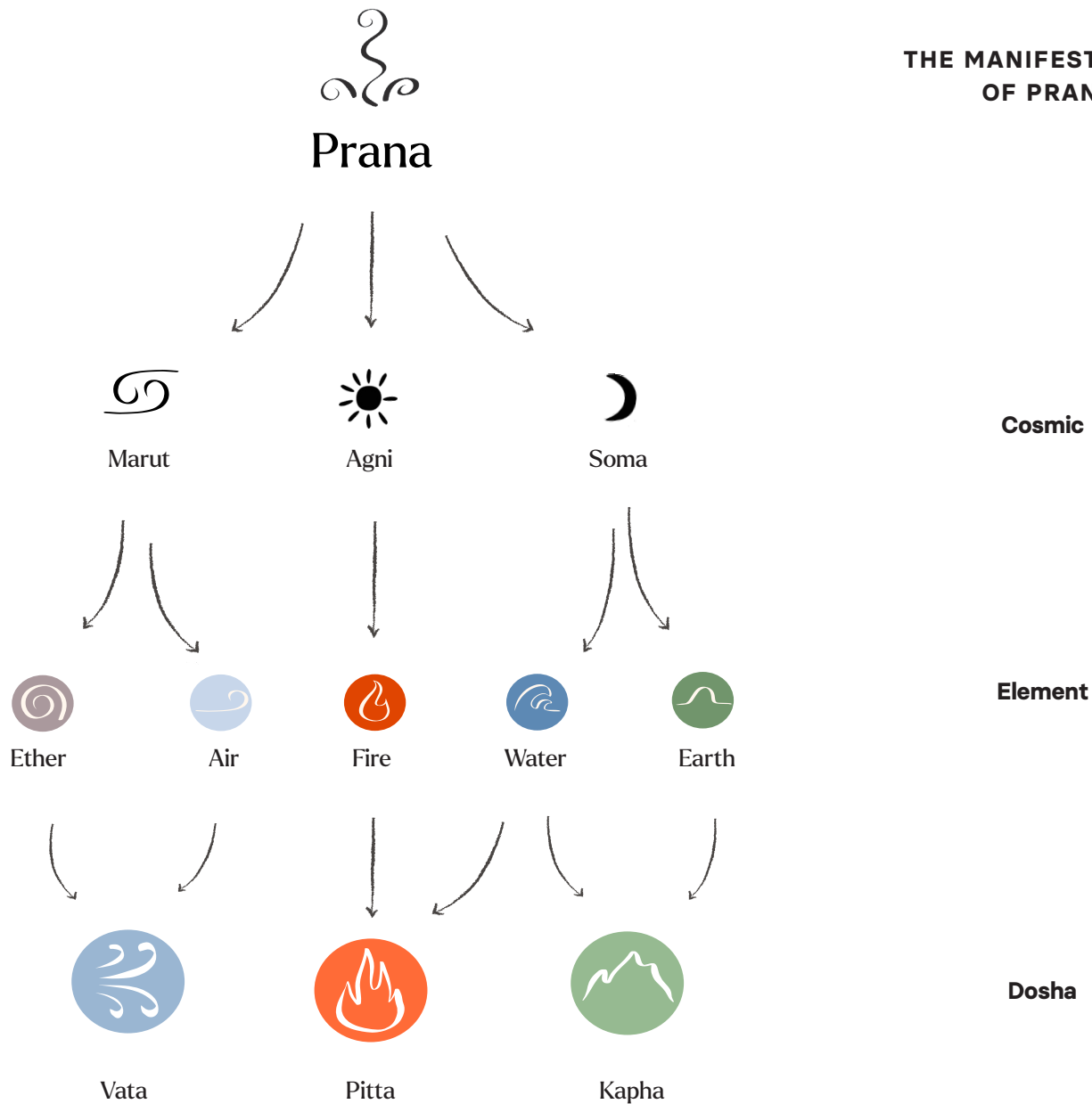
SOMA energy is cooling, stabilizing, and nurturing; it promotes growth and generates the taste in fruits and vegetables.

AGNI energy is heating and brightening; it fuels all transformational processes on our planet.

MARUT energy is the space and air that provide the container for the lunar and solar energies to circulate and interact; the subtle force that carries the grand intelligence behind creation's operations—it determines the paths of movement and the proportions of energetic transformations that constantly occur around us.



THE MANIFESTATIONS OF PRANA



Reflective Questions

1. To determine your dosha, complete at least one of these two body-type quizzes: by [Jai Dev Singh](#) or by [Dr. John Douillard, DC](#). Were the results a surprise? Why or why not?
2. How do your emotional tendencies and physical traits differ from your loved ones?



THE FIVE STATES OF MATTER

The vibrational forms of Soma, Agni, and Marut manifest on a physical level as the five elemental energies or states of matter (commonly known as the five elements). These five elemental energies are **earth, water, fire, air,** and **ether**.

Everything on earth is made of these elemental building blocks, and our relationship with them determines the level of harmony we have with nature.



EARTH: the state of solidity and stability



WATER: the state of fluidity, moisture, and flow



FIRE: the state of heat and transformation; that which engulfs whatever it comes into contact with



AIR: the state of mobility and movement



ETHER: the space or the field that contains the above four elements

THE THREE DOSHAS

The five states of matter express themselves in the human body as the three doshas: **Kapha, Pitta,** and **Vata**.

The term "**dosha**" has several meanings, and in the context of Ayurveda, it is often translated as "fault" or "weakness." However, there is more to it. The doshas are *prana's* energies once they have come into contact with matter, the body. They are the functions at play in human physiology—they work nonstop. Because matter constantly fluctuates, each dosha fluctuates and thus becomes "that which creates imperfection." Anytime we do something in excess, our body systems and organs, "managed" by aggravated doshas, are subjected to pathology or disease.

To tie it all together, Soma, Agni, and Marut are the universal *prana* (macrocosm); these energies manifest into physical substances found in every aspect of the planet, creating the five states of matter. These five states of matter combine to perform functions in the body (microcosm) by means of the Kapha, Pitta, and Vata doshas.

Reflective Question

1. List the five states of matter. Which one are you aware of the most in your life right now? Which one seems the most foreign or lacking?

DOSHA

The *prana's* energies as they manifest in the body and govern its functions. The 3 doshas are:



VATA



PITTA



KAPHA



Kapha dosha

ELEMENTS



water



earth

QUALITIES

heavy, moist, smooth, stable, dense, cool, slow moving

Body Functions/Organs It Manages

Physical structure and support
 Stamina, stability
 The bulk of bodily tissues
 All bodily fluids and lubrication
 Nourishment of organs, tissues, and joints
 Lungs, chest
 Throat, head
 Lymph
 Fatty tissue
 Connective tissue
 Ligaments, tendons

Causes for Kapha Imbalance

Prolonged exposure to cold, damp, humid environment
 Consuming Kapha aggravating foods (predominantly sweet, sour, or salty tastes)
 Overeating, consuming clogging/heavy, fatty foods
 Consuming too much dairy
 Lack of physical activity/sedentary lifestyle
 Boredom, lack of stimulation
 Sleeping too much or waking up late
 Sleeping during the day
 Drinking too much water or other liquids

KAPHA CHARACTERISTICS

In Balance

Good physical strength, stamina, endurance
 Well-lubricated tissues and joints
 Thrives in warm, dry climate
 Caring and compassionate
 Good long-term memory
 Slow but steady
 Sound sleeper
 Content
 Loyal, devotional
 Loves routine
 Steady appetite
 Uplifts others with divine nurturing presence
 Good body-mind coordination

Out of Balance—Too Low

Physical weakness
 Stiffness, joint cracking
 Lower immunity
 Apathetic
 Poor memory
 Irregular
 Light sleeper
 Unsatisfied
 Doesn't care much
 Fearful of change
 Irregular appetite
 Distracted, not present
 Capricious, lack of confidence

Out of Balance—Too High

Weight gain, feeling heavy or sluggish
 Water retention, swelling
 Congestion, asthma
 Lack of boundaries, overly caring
 Begrudging, can't let go
 Delay things, procrastinate
 Sleep too much, feeling lazy
 Complacent, egoistic
 Unable to say no, fanatical
 Stagnation in life
 Low appetite / slow digestion
 Feelings of depression, sadness, lethargy
 Greedy



Vata dosha

ELEMENTS



air



ether

QUALITIES

light, dry, cold, mobile, rough, subtle

Body Functions/Organs It Manages

All movement in/of the body and mind
 Heartbeat, circulation
 Speech, breathing
 Elimination, menstrual flow, child birth
 Creativity, innovation, versatility
 Innate healing intelligence of body and mind
 Nervous system
 Stomach, large intestine
 Head, ears
 Mental activity

Causes for Vata Imbalance

Prolonged exposure to cold and wind/draft
 Consuming Vata aggravating foods (predominantly pungent, bitter, or astringent tastes)
 Eating raw, cold, dry, light foods
 Stress, fast-paced life
 Irregular schedule
 Traveling
 Staying up late at night, not sleeping enough
 Giving birth
 Surgery
 Excessive movement: exercise, dance, work
 Excessive talking or singing
 Exposure to electromagnetic frequencies/radiation (from cell phones, computers, Wi-Fi, etc.)
 Prolonged exposure to loud noise
 Various types of intoxication
 Grief

VATA CHARACTERISTICS

In Balance

Slender _____
 Cooler body temperature _____
 Drier skin and hair _____
 Irregular schedule or meals _____
 Sensitive stomach _____
 Lighter sleeper _____
 Active _____
 Creative _____
 Enthusiastic _____
 Bursts of energy _____
 Loves change _____
 Sensitive, intuitive _____
 Communicative _____
 Easily excited _____
 Cheerful _____
 Extroverted _____

Out of Balance

Unwanted weight loss, emaciated
 Cold hands/feet, catches cold easily
 Scaly skin, dandruff, wrinkles, eczema
 Irregular appetite, loss of appetite
 Gas, hiccups, bloating, chronic constipation
 Scary or active dreams, insomnia
 Hyperactive, worn down
 Absent-minded, scattered, can't materialize ideas
 Mood swings, short-term depression
 Low stamina, exhaustion, chronic fatigue
 Unsteady, frivolous, unregulated
 Bothered by noise or smell, hypersensitive
 Talkative, babbling
 Restless, anxious
 Unstrung, nervous breakdown
 Insecure, fearful, panic attacks



Pitta dosha

ELEMENTS



fire



water

QUALITIES

hot, sharp, intense, light, easily spreadable, slightly oily, foul smelling

Body Functions/Organs It Manages

Transformation of all chemical and metabolic processes
 Digestion of food, including absorption and assimilation of nutrients
 Digestion of life experiences
 Body temperature
 Visual and mental perception
 Hunger, thirst
 Intellect, courage
 Hormonal balance
 Skin, body luster
 Stomach, duodenum, small intestines
 Eyes
 Liver, spleen, pancreas
 Emotions

Causes for Pitta Imbalance

Prolonged exposure to heat from sunlight or a hot work environment
 Consuming Pitta aggravating foods (predominantly pungent, sour or salty tastes)
 Eating food that is dry, sharp, fermented, ultra-processed, or laden with chemicals and preservatives
 Skipping or delaying meals
 Excessive anger, frustration; emotional tension
 Overexercising
 Overstimulation—entertainment, drugs, alcohol, caffeine
 Excessive fasting
 Excessive sex
 Stress, tension
 Overworking, not resting properly
 Staying up past 10 pm
 Excessive intake of medications or other chemical toxicity

PITTA CHARACTERISTICS

In Balance

Warmer body temperature _____
 Healthy appetite _____
 Strong digestion and nutrient assimilation _____
 Dynamic, energetic _____
 Radiant skin _____
 Courageous _____
 Righteous _____
 Sharp intellect _____
 Persistent _____
 Precise _____
 Passionate _____
 Ambitious _____
 Emotional _____
 Positive leadership _____
 Protective _____

Out of Balance

Overheated / hot flashes, excessive sweat, inflammation, fever
 Excessive hunger or thirst, need to eat more than 3 meals a day
 Acidic digestion, heartburn, ulcers, poor assimilation
 Forceful, impulsive, overdoing everything
 Skin redness, rosacea, acne, psoriasis
 Takes unnecessary risks, foolhardy
 Rigid, dishonest, corrupt
 Sarcastic, critical, judgmental, manipulative
 Impatient, excessive, addicted
 Perfectionist, nitpicker
 Lustful, overly stimulated
 Pushy, aggressive
 Temperamental, irritable, angry, violent
 Bossy, runs on power
 Possessive, jealous, controlling



SUMMARY OF DOSHA FUNCTIONS

All three doshas, Kapha, Pitta, and Vata, are present in everyone, but they express themselves in a unique way in each one of us. The distinctive combination of the doshas at our time of birth defines our constitution or natural disposition or programming (prakriti). Most people have a predominance of one or two doshas; for example, Vata-Pitta, Pitta-Vata, Kapha-Pitta, Kapha-Vata, etc. Some people have an equal amount of the three (a.k.a. tridoshic). The dominant dosha will be reflected in your self-expression: it's the way you look, think, and operate in life. And your dominant dosha is usually the first one to go out of balance when you're under stress.



KAPHA activates when there is a need for something to grow, be lubricated, or be “cushioned” with protection.



PITTA activates when there is a need for something to transform.



VATA activates when there is a need for something to move.

Reflective Question

1. Doshas manage all functions in the body and the mind. Think about your physical and mental health over the past couple of weeks. Which dosha(s) do you feel is in balance and which one(s) is out of balance?

LEARNING ACTIVITY: DESCRIBE THE DOSHAS

List each dosha, the elements which comprises it, at least three of its qualities (i.e., words that describe its nature), and its primary functions (i.e., what it manages or governs in the body and mind).

Dosha	Compositional Elements	Qualities	Functions



1.3

Balance Your Doshas, Balance Your Life

It is important to understand your constitution, or unique body type, because it is your original blueprint for health, and it guides you to proactively and continually maintain a healthy lifestyle. Like it or not, for as long as you have a body and mind, you've got to deal with your doshas!

I want you to understand something very important. The three doshas constantly fluctuate, just like the constant movement of heat, water, and interior or structural changes in a well-functioning house. You will always have a mild dosha imbalance in some way, causing a slight discomfort. Your Vata will increase and you'll breathe heavily after a good run; your Pitta will get agitated when you're hungry; your Kapha will grow when it's time to wind down and fall asleep. These dosha fluctuations are normal, but the key indicator of someone's health is a quick alleviation of the doshas. When you're hungry, your Pitta goes high and you might get a little irritable and impatient, but as soon as you eat, your Pitta should be pacified and you'll be feeling great again. However, if you don't eat on time, and especially if you consistently skip or delay meals, that same agitated Pitta will spill out from its seat in the stomach and create burning sensations in your digestive tract or other parts of your body.

In other words, if you don't alleviate the doshas on time, they will accumulate and aggravate you, causing a chronic imbalance. When you've reached this point, you begin to feel unwell. You and your doctor may find that

your blood tests are "normal," but you feel that something is off, and your doctor cannot figure out what the problem is. It is likely the beginning stage of a chronic disorder, and this is where an expert Ayurvedic doctor or practitioner differs—he or she can immediately pinpoint the imbalance and its cause.

I love the concept of the doshas because it helps me learn and understand so much about myself and my tendencies. This is my personal reference point for good health, and from it, I can align with my unique nature. This Ayurvedic concept also helps me better understand the tendencies of others and to feel more compassion. It reduces my judgmental habit of comparing myself to others and thinking that others should be like me. Now it's easier for me to discern when someone's self-expression stems from harmony, as a call *of* love, or from imbalance, as a cry *for* love, and from there, I look for a kind way to connect with that person.

Keeping your doshas in good balance will also give you a strong foundation for accelerating your spiritual growth, which is the ultimate purpose of Ayurveda. I mention spirituality because it is an integral part of our human experience. I meditate and pray every day; I also love chanting Sanskrit poetry. Find a spiritual practice that can guide you toward increased self-awareness, one that makes you more conscious of who you are and what your unique purpose is. Hang out with the spiritually-inclined people who make *you* feel loved and



inspire you *to* love. Spiritual health is as important as physical health.

Don't just get stuck on the doshas; allow your lifestyle to refine your mind and body so that you can tune in to the subtler and more powerful dimensions of human existence. This is when life gets interesting!

How do you keep your doshas in balance? There are several ways to do it, but I find the fastest way is through food: Because we eat two to three times a day, and each ingredient and combination of them have a physiological effect on our constitution, our meals are a powerful and efficient modality to balance our doshas. It can work both ways, though, so choosing the right food is critical.

Reflective Question

1. Describe a situation when a dosha goes out of balance for you. What is one way you alleviate it (i.e., bring it back to balance)?

The Golden Rule of Balance

In Ayurveda, the Golden Rule of Balance states, "like increases like, and opposites balance."

This golden "rule" is something we all have inherently applied in many areas of life, whether we've realized it or not. For example, when it's cold and windy outside, we seek warm shelter to alleviate the coldness and airiness in our body. In the scorching sun, we feel hot and look for a cool place to replenish ourselves.

Apply this same rule when selecting seasonal foods.

Weather

Cold and windy

Cool and humid

Hot

Balancing Food Qualities

warm, hearty, heavy, moist

warm, light, crunchy, spicy, dry

warm or room temperature, light, fresh, hydrating, mildly spiced

**"like increases like,
and opposites
balance."**

Reflective Questions

1. Describe a time when the first half of the Golden Rule of Balance led to discomfort or a greater degree of imbalance.
2. Describe a time when the second half of the Golden Rule of Balance led to pleasure or a greater degree of balance.

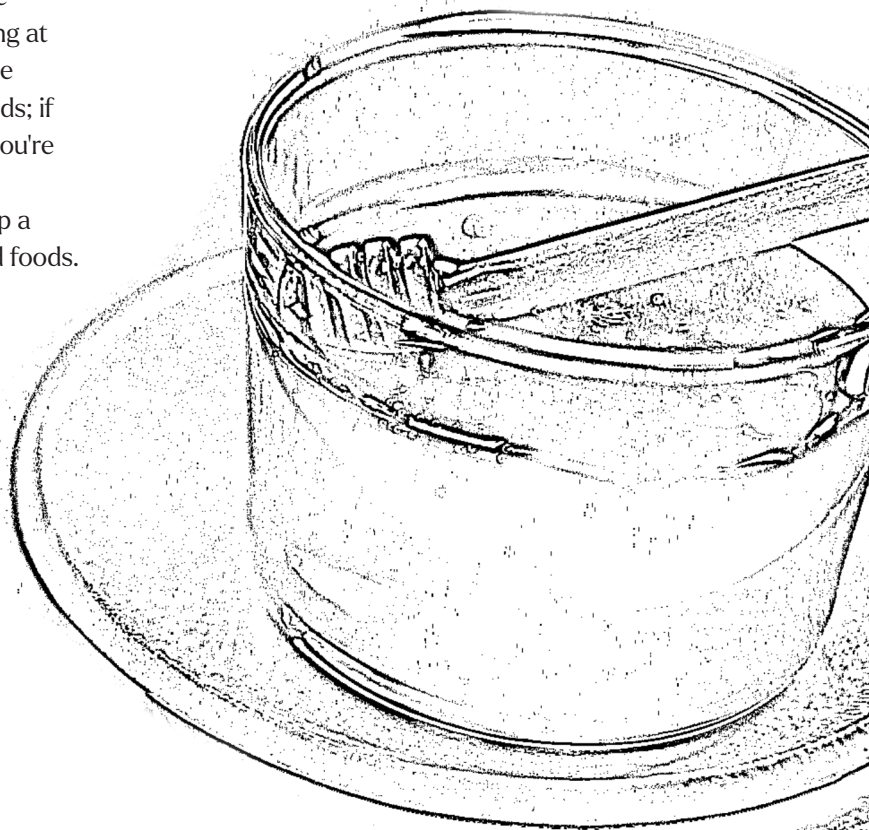


1.4

A New Relationship with Food

The Five Properties of Food

Ayurveda isn't so concerned about nutrition facts such as proteins, carbohydrates, and sugar, but instead investigates each ingredient's attributes—its taste(s), qualities, metabolic effect, post-digestive effect, and healing properties. These attributes allow us to interpret the energetics of food and how they affect us. By looking at food this way, it makes it so much easier to apply the Golden Rule of Balance: if you're cold, eat warm foods; if you're retaining water, eat dry and drying foods; if you're sluggish, get a kick with something spicy. I find such knowledge very empowering. It can help you develop a deeper, exciting connection with whole, plant-based foods.





The Five Categories in Which Ayurveda Describes Food

1. **SIX TASTES** ([Page 17](#))
2. **TWENTY QUALITIES** ([Page 22](#))
3. **TWO METABOLIC EFFECTS** ([Page 23](#))
4. **THREE POST DIGESTIVE EFFECTS** ([Page 23](#))
5. **UNIQUE HEALING BENEFITS** ([Page 24](#))

Reflective Question

1. In general, are you more familiar with a food's attributes (e.g., taste, qualities, healing properties) or its nutritional facts? What are some benefits of each perspective?

The Six Tastes of Food (*rasa*)

Ayurveda describes six tastes of food: **sweet** (*madhura*), **sour** (*amla*), **salty** (*lavana*), **pungent**, (*katu*), **bitter** (*tikta*), and **astringent** (*kashaya*).

It's fascinating to understand how Ayurveda recognizes that each taste surpasses the pleasure or dissatisfaction of our taste buds—they each affects our physiology, mental capacity, and emotions in unique ways.



sweet
(*madhura*)



sour
(*amla*)



salty
(*lavana*)



pungent
(*katu*)



bitter
(*tikta*)



astringent
(*kashaya*)

Reflective Question

1. Think of a recent simple meal you ate and your overall feeling after eating it. Make a list of all of the ingredients, and next to each one, write its predominant taste. Review your list. Are all six tastes present? If one or more of the tastes were missing, what ingredient(s) could you have added to make it complete? How do you think this contributed to the way you felt after eating?



THE SIX TASTES OF FOOD



sweet

BUILDING AND NOURISHING FOODS

Physical Effects:

In Balance: nourishment, body building, energizing

In Excess: congestion, sluggishness, edema, indigestion, obesity, diabetes, puffy eyes, oily skin, blackheads

Emotional Effects:

In Balance: love, pleasure, satisfaction

In Excess: greed, attachment, neediness, complacency, lethargy, laziness

Sweet Predominant Food Examples:

Sweeteners, grapes, fruit juices, honey, rice, wheat and other complex heavy carbs, cow's milk, cream, ghee, fish, meat, fats/oils, most root vegetables (e.g., carrot, beet, celery root, sweet potato), most nuts, cucumber, most fruits, licorice, saffron, cardamom, cinnamon, tarragon



sour

DIGESTIVE FOODS

Physical Effects:

In Balance: efficient digestion and elimination, cleansing

In Excess: acidity, heartburn, ulcers, rashes, burning in the throat and chest and heart, indigestion, premature aging, muscle weakness

Emotional Effects:

In Balance: mental acuity and invigoration

In Excess: envy, resentment, regret, excessive criticism

Sour Predominant Food Examples:

Yogurt, cheese, green grapes, unsoaked raisins, citrus fruits, tamarind, tomatoes, vinegar, all fermented foods, miso, wine, strawberries, rose hips



salty

FLAVOR-ENHANCING FOODS

Physical Effects:

In Balance: supports circulation and appetite and digestion, stimulating, boosts all other tastes

In Excess: hyperacidity, high blood pressure, skin rashes, accelerated aging, inflammation, eye problems, swelling, obesity, weakness

Emotional Effects:

In Balance: mental ease, zest for life

In Excess: mental rigidity, greed, addiction

Salty Predominant Food Examples:

Sea salt, rock salt, sea vegetables



THE SIX TASTES OF FOOD



pungent

SHARP AND STIMULATING FOODS

Physical Effects:

In Balance: increases appetite, supports metabolism and circulation, clears phlegm, antifungal, antibacterial, gives glow to the skin

In Excess: acidic digestion, colitis, ulcers, diarrhea, redness of skin, skin rashes

Emotional Effects:

In Balance: ambition, motivation

In Excess: irritability, hate, anger, aggression, jealousy, overstimulation

Pungent Predominant Food Examples:

Onions, garlic, leeks, radishes, horseradish, turnips, mustard greens, ginger, chiles, cloves, asafoetida, cayenne, mustard seeds, black pepper, cumin, mace, paprika, marjoram



bitter

CLEANSING FOODS

Physical Effects:

In Balance: detoxifying, liver cleansing, blood purifying, skin toning, encourages weight loss, anti-inflammatory, antithesis of sweet

In Excess: depletion of bodily tissues, anemia, low blood pressure, constipation, cold, insomnia, vertigo, premature wrinkles

Emotional Effects:

In Balance: mental clarity, desire for change, insight, dispels illusion

In Excess: dissatisfaction, disillusionment, grief

Bitter Predominant Food Examples:

Bitter melons, dark leafy greens (e.g., arugula, kale, chard, collards), bitter greens (e.g. broccoli rabe, dandelion greens), turmeric, goldenseal, dill, fenugreek, gentian root, neem, coffee, cacao/cocoa, nicotine



astrigent

MOISTURE-ABSORBING FOODS

Physical Effects:

In Balance: increases nutrient absorption, heals wounds, stops bleeding, shrinks pores, decreases sweating

In Excess: slow digestion, gas, constipation, cramps, heart problems, dryness, excessive thirst

Emotional Effects:

In Balance: optimism, well-being, introspection

In Excess: fear, insecurity, self-absorption

Astringent Predominant Food Examples:

Apples, pomegranates, pears, mushrooms, cranberries, unripe bananas, persimmons, artichokes, sunchokes, plantains, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, potatoes, kohlrabi, sprouts, spinach, eggplant, parsley, lettuces, beans, lentils, tempeh, quinoa, buckwheat, rye



THE TASTES AND THE SEASONS

In general, to feel balanced and receive the most nutrients and satisfaction from our food, we need to have all six tastes in each meal. That said, we do need to adjust their proportions based on the current season.

late winter

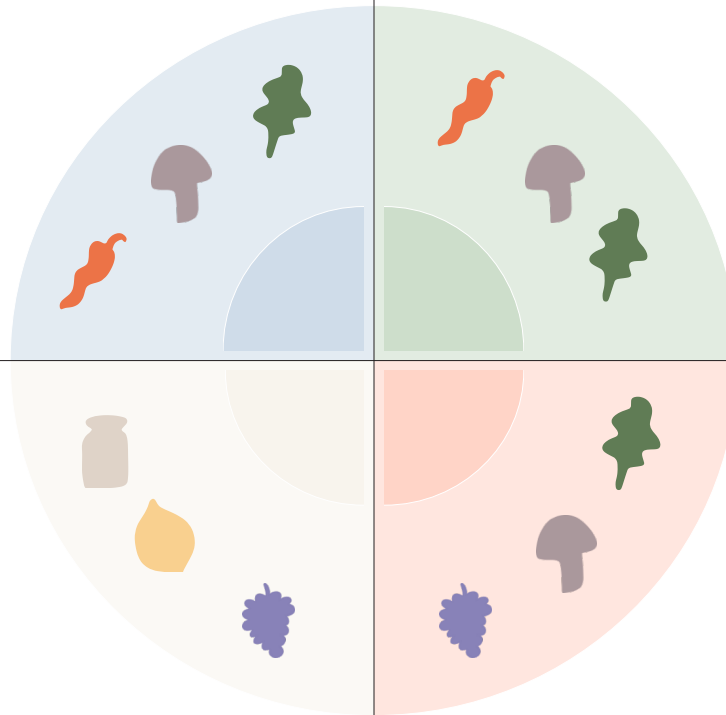
PUNGENT | BITTER | ASTRINGENT

Increase foods of these tastes to keep warm and counteract sluggishness.

spring

PUNGENT | BITTER | ASTRINGENT

Increase foods of these tastes to clear and lighten your body and mind.



fall - early winter

SWEET | SOUR | SALTY

Increase foods of these tastes to keep warm and feel satiated.

summer

SWEET | BITTER | ASTRINGENT

Increase foods of these tastes to keep cool and hydrated.

THE SIX TASTES KEY



sweet



sour



salty



pungent



bitter



astrigent



LEARNING ACTIVITY: EXPERIENCE THE TASTES

List each of the six tastes and choose a food example for each one that you readily have at home. Taste each one on its own, in a mindful way. Next to each taste, note your physical and emotional reaction to tasting and eating it.

Taste	Food Example	Noticeable Physical Reactions/Effects	Noticeable Emotional and Mental Reactions/Effects



The Twenty Qualities (*gunas*)

The following qualities represent how we experience food in our gut and the feelings they can produce in the body.

QUALITIES AND FOOD EXAMPLES THAT PROMOTE

STRENGTH AND GROWTH

Heavy	meat, fried foods, dairy, sweets, wheat
Dull	fats, meat
Cold	ice cream, chilled milk and drinks
Oily/Moist	butter, ghee, oils, avocado
Smooth	rice flour, all creamy substances
Solid	root vegetables, nuts, grains, meat
Soft	banana, avocado, fig, butter, ghee
Subtle	meat with bones, wheat, ghee
Bulky	meat, grains
Viscous	honey, gum resin, molasses

CLEANSING AND ELIMINATION

Light	puffed rice, popcorn, leafy greens
Sharp	hot chile peppers, garlic, moringa
Hot	ginger, chiles, garlic, alcohol
Rough	raw foods, dried dates, popcorn, chips
Dry	barley, toast, nutrition bars, popcorn, legumes, beans
Liquid	all fluids—water, milk, juices, broths
Hard	nuts, crackers, baked chickpeas
Moving	laxative foods, leafy vegetables
Subtle	alcohol, tobacco, recreational drugs
Clear	water-like, cleansing substances

Reflective Question

1. Write down the individual ingredients of your meal. List some of its qualities. Is your meal fairly balanced? If so, why? If not, what could you change to make it more balanced?



The Two Metabolic Effects (*virya*)

Your interaction with food releases one of two kinds of energy in your body: it heats you up or it cools you down. The **heating** and **cooling** actions are not determined by the thermometer but by the energy reaction after eating a particular food. A warm zucchini soup will have a cooling effect on your body, and a cold tomato salad with garlic and chiles will heat you up.

HEATING (STIMULATING) FOODS

chiles, mustard, flaxseed, onions, garlic, black pepper, honey, alcohol, vinegar, tomatoes, sesame, lemons, wasabi, radishes, arugula, grapefruits, yogurt, kombucha

COOLING (CALMING) FOODS

cow's milk, cucumbers, coconuts, summer squashes, coriander, fennel, melons, apples, pears, barley, almond milk, aloe, green beans, leafy greens, ghee, limes, rice, wheat

The Three Post-Digestive Effects (*vipaka*)

The unique Ayurvedic concept of **post-digestive effect** is about how food's energy transforms after it goes through the initial digestive and assimilation processes. Modern nutrition tells us a lot about what the food is like before we eat it, but not much about the subtle transformations that occur after we've eaten it. In the later stages of digestion, Ayurveda says food transforms to produce the effects of one of three tastes: sweet, sour, and pungent.

Knowing the three post-digestive effects of foods lays the foundation for eating them in their proper combinations to ensure compatibility at every level of digestion.

THE THREE POST-DIGESTIVE EFFECTS

1. sweet
2. sour
3. pungent



Unique Healing Benefits (*prabhava*)

Relationships come and go in life, but we remember people for who they are and what they are good at. It's the same with foods and herbs—we remember them based on their tastes or presence in a particular cuisine, as well as how they may help us. What remains after you digest the food, assimilate its nutrients, eliminate its wastes, and utilize its energy is the final memory of food, or its subtle action. When we talk about what a food or an herb is good for, we mean that special action that carries its ultimate healing intelligence. For example, cultures all over the world hold that pomegranate builds immunity, rose is good for the heart, and fennel regulates digestion.

So welcome to your new food world! The more you interact with and get to know an ingredient, the more you will know when to invite it to your plate and when to keep it on the shelf. Continue searching and you will find your "soul food": nourishing, satisfying, and supportive of your optimal performance.

"When we talk about what a food or an herb is good for, we mean that special action that carries its ultimate healing intelligence."

Reflective Question

1. Name a food from which you have experienced a unique healing benefit. What is its special power? Is it obvious or subtle? When do you feel this?



LEARNING ACTIVITY: PROPERTIES OF AN INGREDIENT

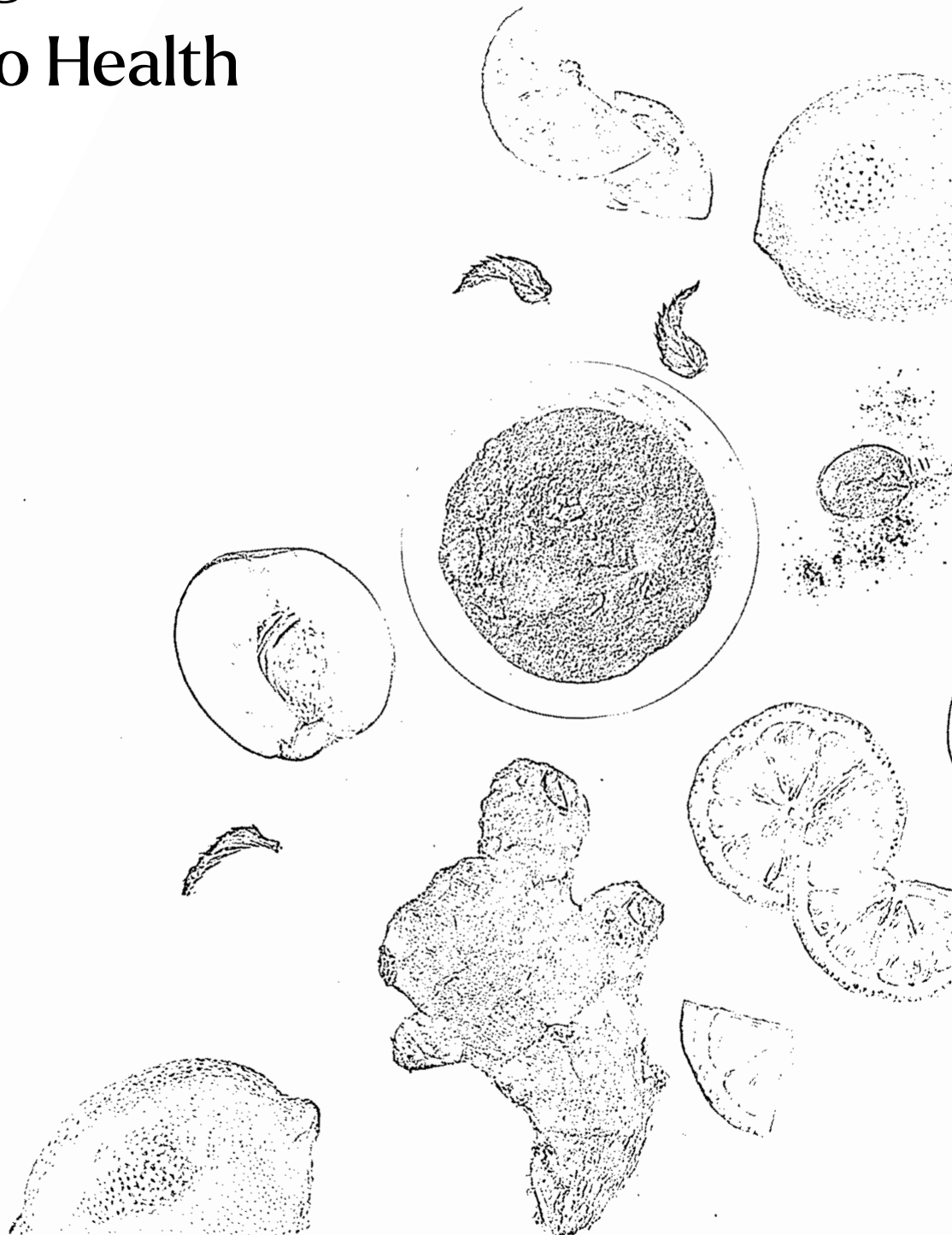
Choose an ingredient to study: look, listen (rub it close to your ear), smell, feel, and taste (on its own without added ingredients), noting your mindful observations. Does it have more than one taste? What is its texture, overall density, metabolic effect, and healing properties? If you cannot determine a specific attribute, research it in a reliable Ayurvedic resource.

Ingredient	Taste(s)	Qualities (texture, density, etc.)	Metabolic Effect (heating, cooling)	Healing Properties



1.5

Agni & Digestion, The Key to Health





Digestion: Your Precedent for Good or Bad Health

Ayurveda considers digestion to be the most essential process in our body because it sets the stage for either consistent good health or sickness. Anything that we ingest, including foods, liquids, herbs, medications, skin care products, viruses, and environmental pollutants, must go through the digestive process. In good working order, our digestion extracts the beneficial macro- and micronutrients from what we take in and eliminates the unwanted wastes, pathogens, etc.

Agni: the "cooking" or transformative power of digestion; it literally means, "that which engulfs a substance and transforms it into another." It can also directly translate to "fire," but it denotes more of a process than an element or thing.

Ayurveda describes **four states of agni** that correlate to four types of digestion: **balanced** (*sama-agni*), **sharp** (*tikshna-agni*), **slow** (*manda-agni*) and **irregular** (*vishama-agni*).

AGNI SERVES AS

- the enzymatic function that participates in all digestive and cellular processes
- our power to process food or life experiences
- our first line of defense against pathogens and toxins

BALANCED (SAMA-AGNI):

regular appetite (i.e., hungry at the same time each day); feel energized after each meal; daily bowel movements

SHARP (TIKSHNA-AGNI):

excessive hunger; malabsorption of nutrients; heartburn, hyperacidity, gout, or ulcers; loose stools

SLOW (MANDA-AGNI):

poor appetite (i.e., not hungry often, food moves slowly through the digestive tract); dullness in the stomach; fatigue after eating; sluggishness

IRREGULAR (VISHAMA-AGNI):

variable appetite (i.e., a mix of balanced, sharp, and slow digestion); gas, bloating, constipation

Reflective Question

1. For a few days, journal about the strength of your digestion (agni). In the morning, midday, and evening, rate it on a scale of 1 to 10:

1 = weak / no appetite / digestive discomfort

10 = strong / normal appetite / feel light and energized after a meal

Are there any patterns? Take the digestion questionnaire on [page 28](#) in your workbook. What recommendations would you give yourself?



AYURVEDIC DIGESTION QUESTIONNAIRE

In each section, mark or check the questions to which your answer is "yes." Tally up your responses.

The section with the most "yes" answers is likely an accurate indication of your current state of digestion.

IMBALANCED - Sharp/Pitta/Fiery



- Do you have uncontrollable hunger and need to eat immediately?
- Do you have frequent hyperacidity and heartburn?
- Do you have bad smelling breath?
- Do you have a tendency toward nausea?
- Do you have a craving for sweets or cold food?
- Do you frequently wake up around two in the morning feeling hungry?
- Do you experience night sweats or excessive sweating and heat?
- Do you experience frequent grief and sadness without a reason?
- Do you feel emotionally oversensitive?
- Do you tend to feel a burning sensation in your eyes and eyelids?
- Are your eyes red and easily irritated?
- Are your eyes sensitive to light?
- Do you have burning and itching on the skin and scalp?
- Are you prone to hives and rashes?
- Do you have frequent pimples, pustules, or skin infections?
- Do you get scaly, red lesions on your skin (e.g., eczema, psoriasis,...?)

IMBALANCED - Irregular/Vata/Airy



- Is your appetite up and down?
- Do you have frequent bloating, distention, or gas?
- Do you experience churning and gurgling in the stomach?
- Do you have low energy, especially in the afternoons?
- Do you have frequent hiccups or belching without acid after meals?
- Do you experience hoarseness or dryness in your mouth or in your speech?
- Do you often have the urge to pass stool but cannot?
- Do you have constipation or irregular, hard, dry stools?
- Do you retain urine or urinate too much?
- Do you have problems maintaining or gaining weight?
- Do you have cracking and loose joints?
- Do you have dry, scaly skin?
- Are your hands and feet frequently cold?

IMBALANCED - Slow/Kapha/Earthy



- Do you lack appetite, often feeling full and heavy in the stomach?
- Do you feel sluggish after eating?
- Do you have excessive or insufficient saliva?
- Do you have a lack of or distorted taste?
- Is your tongue coated with a white film in the morning?
- Do you have excessive phlegm?
- Do you have a feeling of heaviness in the head?
- Are you overweight, or do you gain weight easily?
- Do you have nausea with vomiting of mucus?
- Do you get frequent colds, cough, or congestion?
- Do you have swelling or stiffness of the joints?
- Do you have oily skin, a tendency toward sebaceous cysts, lipoma (fatty tumor), or skin buildup?

BALANCED - The Ideal

- Do you get hungry at regular times, about four hours after each meal?
- Do you feel satiated yet light and energized after eating?
- Do you maintain good energy throughout the day without caffeine?
- Is your tongue clear of a white coating in the morning?
- Do you have regular, well-shaped bowel movements, first thing in the morning and possibly again in the evening?
- Do you effortlessly maintain your optimal weight?
- Do you have clear, glowing skin?
- Do you often get compliments that you look much younger than your age?

REVIEW YOUR RESULTS

Apply the Golden Rule of Balance to determine which foods will be the most balancing for you right now:

If you have **irregular, Airy digestion** due to your high Vata, incorporate warm and moderately spicy foods.

If you have very **sharp, Fiery digestion** affected by your uncontrolled Pitta, eat heavier and less spicy foods.

If you have **slow, Earthy digestion** caused by your heavy Kapha, eat lighter and spicy foods.

If you have **balanced digestion**, keep doing what you're doing!



Semi-digested Food: The Root Cause of Inflammation

If your *agni* is low, it is likely that the protein and fat molecules from your food have not been fully digested and therefore cannot be fully absorbed. They will linger in the small intestine, irritating it and causing allergies to heavy foods, such as those containing gluten, lectins, or lactose. These unused food particles will end up in the lymphatic system, which acts as one of the "garbage disposals" in the body. In time, the lymphatic "drains" can become clogged. A congested lymphatic system can lead to fatigue, belly fat, bloat, brain fog, and more. Ayurveda calls this semi-digested, "unripe" food residue *ama*. It is the food that we've eaten but has not transformed to become a part of our body.

If you are looking for ways to reset your organism and live healthier, start paying attention to your *agni* and your digestion, and make genuine efforts to optimize it. When you're deciding what to eat, consider and give priority to your digestion rather than your cravings. Favor the foods that you can easily break down and assimilate, the ones that leave you feeling nourished and energized. Be willing to quit eating immune-compromising, clogging, and processed foods. Your body will reciprocate your efforts to be healthy! And you will be surprised how even small adjustments in these areas will give you quick results. It's worth the challenge.

"Less *agni* leads to more *ama*."

AMA:

- attaches to the coronary arteries, digestive tract, lungs, sinuses, and brain, becoming the main cause of inflammation;
- gradually builds over years of eating foods we did not fully digest;
- Is heavy and sticky, like phlegm or plaque.

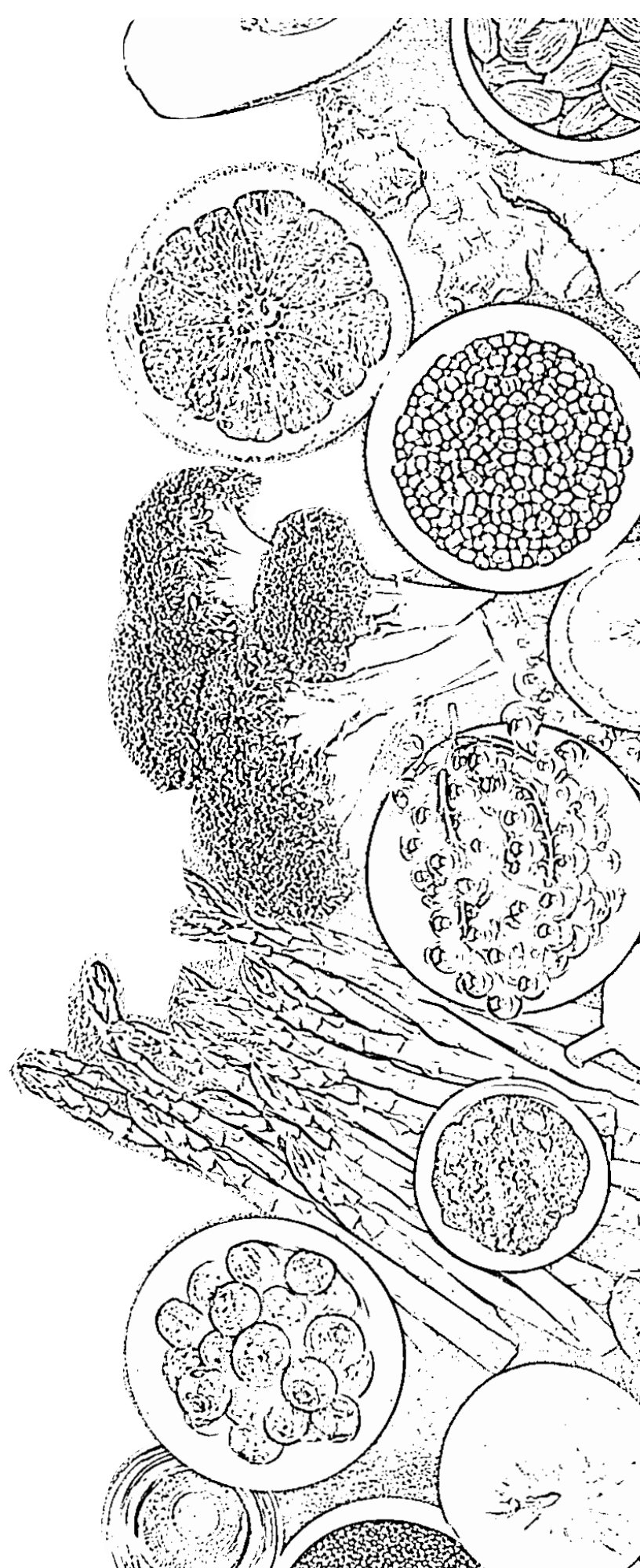
ACCUMULATED AMA CAN CAUSE:

- clogging of the pathways or channels in our body,
- weak *agni*,
- body stiffness and aches,
- mental fog,
- fat buildup in the belly and hip areas,
- chronic inflammation, and
- a weak immune system.



1.6

What is *Your* Healthy Food?





What Is *Your* Healthy Food?

An "Ayurvedic" diet does not consist of only Indian, vegetarian, or some kind of exotic cuisine. It is a customized way of eating that best supports your health at this time.

"Ayurvedic food = the food that is most suitable to support your health right now."

CONSIDERATIONS FOR APPLYING AYURVEDA TO YOUR FAVORITE DISHES

Dish as a concept

- A dish is more than just a recipe—identify the concept within it.
- Consider the recipe components (such as taste, color, texture, and purpose) as part of the recipe concept.
- Adjust the concept to make it more compatible for your current location and season.

Ingredients

- The essence is making them compatible for digestion—always keep digestion in mind.
- Consider the Ayurvedic food compatibility guidelines ([pages 41 - 43](#)).
- Replace unhealthy ingredients (e.g. very acidic, ultra-processed, canned, etc.) with their fresh, healthier equivalents.

Instructions

- Change the type of cooking vessel (e.g., muffin tin instead of bread loaf pan; cast-iron instead of nonstick).
- Adapt the cooking temperature (lower is healthier; e.g., simmer instead of boil) and/or the cooking method (e.g., bake instead of panfry).
- Use a preparation method that supports digestion (e.g., wash, soak, drain, and rinse grains and legumes instead of adding them directly in the recipe).

Reflective Questions

1. How does my definition of Ayurvedic food differ from your previous understanding of it?
2. What is the next change you'll make to your diet, cooking practices, or eating habits to make it Ayurvedic—that is, suitable for your optimal health?



1.7

Selecting the Right Ingredients & Cooking Methods

Favor Invigorating Foods

Use the space below to write
invigorating foods that you can eat to
balance your digestion on a daily basis.

Invigorating foods are:

- bright with a full charge of prana,
- seasonal and locally grown in nutrient-dense, toxin-free soil,
- freshly prepared,
- properly combined for good digestion,
- prepared in a positive, loving environment using a cooking method that preserves their vital nutrients,
- easy for you to digest,
- leaving you feeling energized and balanced—nourished down to a cellular level,
- suitable for good health and longevity, and
- making you happy.

Reflective Question

1. Look through your food pantry and refrigerator to identify the low-quality foods you wish to remove. What will you replace them with, if anything at all? You don't need to get rid of them right now, but if you're feeling ready, go ahead and throw them away!



RECOMMENDED PLANT-BASED INVIGORATING FOODS FOR DAILY CONSUMPTION

FOOD CATEGORY	INVIGORATING EXAMPLES <i>*Denotes in smaller amounts</i>		
VEGETABLES	All except nightshades (e.g., white potato, tomato, eggplant, pepper) and alliums (e.g., onion, leek, garlic) and mushrooms		
GRAINS	Amaranth Barley Black (Forbidden) rice* Buckwheat	Corn, fresh (non-GMO)* Millet Oat Pasta (lentil, quinoa, einkorn)*	Quinoa Red rice* White basmati rice Wild rice*
FRUITS	All sweet and juicy fruit	Coconut	Dried fruit (soaked)
SPICES & HERBS (organic, non-irradiated, whole - except turmeric)	All except nightshade-derived (e.g., cayenne, paprika)		
SWEETENERS	Cane sugar (raw) Coconut (palm) sugar Date sugar	Fructose Honey (raw) Jaggery	Maple syrup Sucanat
FATS & OILS	Black sesame oil Cultured butter	Cultured ghee Extra-virgin coconut oil	Extra-virgin olive oil Sesame oil
LEGUMES	Adzuki bean Black chickpea (<i>kala chana</i>) Black (beluga) lentil	Chana dal (split chickpea) French lentil Green lentil Kulthi lentil	Mung bean, whole Red lentil Yellow split mung dal
DAIRY	Cow's milk (organic, grass-fed, full-fat, non-homogenized or raw; boiled and spiced)*	Buttermilk	Yogurt
FLOURS (organic, whole-grain; freshly ground flour provides the highest nutrition, flavor, taste, and digestibility)	Amaranth Barley Besan (chana dal) Buckwheat	Einkorn Farro (emmer) Kamut Oat	Quinoa Rye Sorghum Spelt Teff
NUTS & SEEDS (raw, unsalted, soaked, or freshly toasted)	All except peanuts		



Dry Heat Cooking Methods

DRY HEAT METHODS

No extra water or liquid is added during cooking.

DRY HEAT METHODS ARE BEST FOR

Healthy: stir-frying
sautéing
roasting
panfrying

Kapha balancing and during the late winter and spring, when there is more humidity in the environment

Unhealthy: deep-frying
broiling
charring
barbecuing

These methods are heavy for digestion, and their excessive oil or temperature makes the food more acidic.

Reflective Question

1. Which dry-heat cooking methods do you regularly use? Are any of them among the not-so-healthy methods?



Moist Heat Cooking Methods

MOIST HEAT METHODS

Water or liquid is added during cooking.

MOIST HEAT METHODS ARE BEST FOR

Healthy:

boiling
simmering
stewing
steaming
braising
blanching
poaching

The summer, fall, and early winter, when we tend to get easily dehydrated, but also year-round

Unhealthy:

over-boiling
cooking the food too
slow or too fast



1.8

Foods for Daily Consumption vs. Medicinal Foods for Occasional Use





Understanding Ayurveda's Food Categories

Ayurveda categorizes food in different ways, and one of them is daily consumption versus occasional use. The foods in both of these categories are healing and nurturing, but their application is different.

Foods for daily consumption are meant for nourishment—they build the bulk tissues in our body and give us energy and strength. We can eat them regularly and in larger amounts with hardly any contraindications.

Medicinal foods have very strong effects on the body and/or mind. They are meant to be used as medicine—in small amounts, periodically, and only when you need their help to correct an imbalance.

EXAMPLES OF FOODS FOR DAILY CONSUMPTION*:

- Rice, wheat, quinoa
- Dairy
- Most vegetables
- Most fruits
- Nuts and seeds
- Ghee, extra-virgin olive oil, coconut oil
- Unrefined sweeteners
- Spices (in small quantities)

EXAMPLES OF MEDICINAL FOODS FOR OCCASIONAL USE*:

- Millet
- Moringa
- Onion, garlic
- Flax
- Bitter melon
- Medicinal herbs
- Mushrooms
- Bone broth
- Amla (fruit)

**According to the Shaka Vansiya Ayurveda lineage*

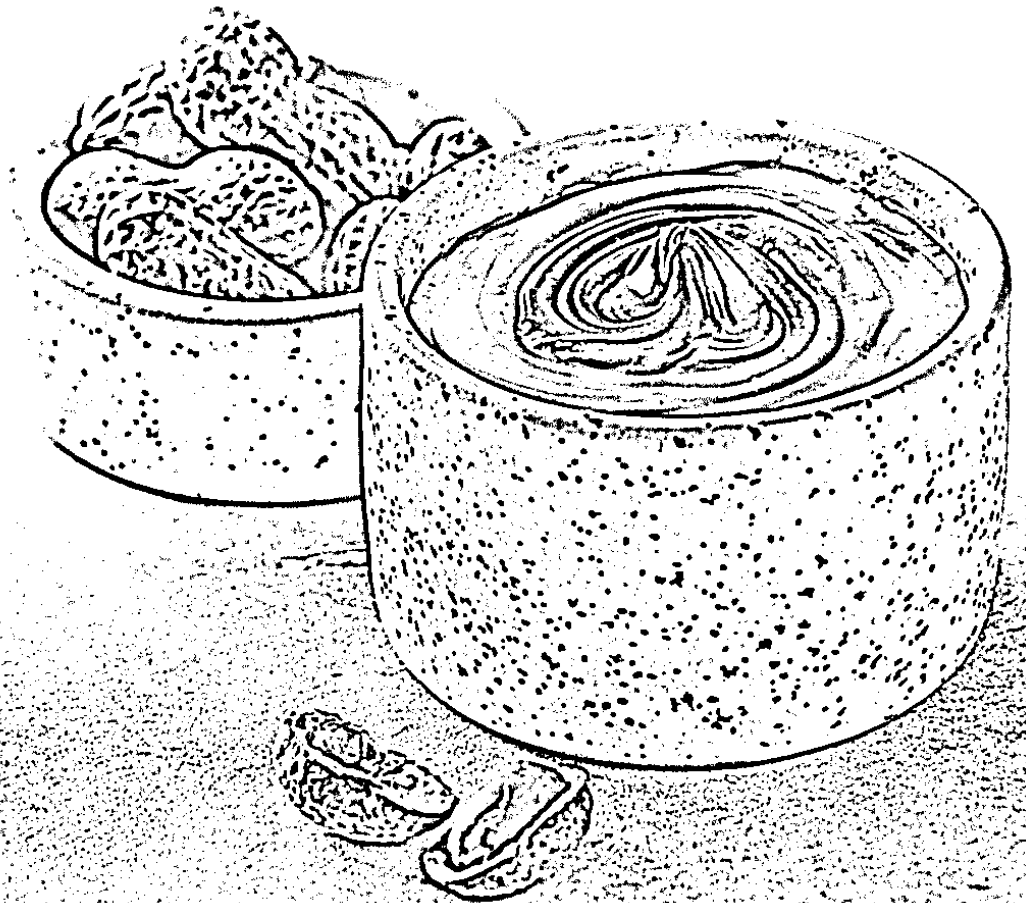
Reflective Questions

1. Which foods do you eat that are fit for daily consumption, according to SV Ayurveda? What overall effects do they have on you?
2. Which foods do you eat that are best for occasional, medicinal use, according to SV Ayurveda? What overall effects do they have on you?



1.9

Beware of Clogging Foods



Clogging Foods

Balanced health stems from an optimal flow of *prana*, meaning there are no obstructions or “traffic jams” in the physical and energetic pathways of our body. We also learned that *ama* (semi-digested food) is the substance that blocks these pathways and causes inflammation. The clogging buildup happens gradually, usually starting in the body's hard-to-detect microchannels (such as the tiny channels that transport nutrients to the cells)—that's why we may not notice it for quite some time.

Clogging foods are heavy for the average person to digest, and thus thicken the bile (which is essential for breaking down fats), and cause an accumulation of *ama* as well as gallstones, inflammation, and other digestive issues like hyperacidity and constipation.

As you incorporate the Ayurvedic principles of eating, find ways to either completely avoid clogging foods, eat them rarely, in small amounts, or replace them with their “clogging-free” alternatives.

EXAMPLES OF CLOGGING AND BILE-THICKENING FOODS:

- Frozen or ice-cold (including beverages)
- Deep-fried
- Cold dairy—especially Greek yogurt, cold milk, ice cream, frozen yogurt
- Aged cheese (typically the hard cheeses)
- Sheep's milk
- Leftovers
- Nut butter
- Red meat
- Chocolate
- Refined flour and sugar
- Processed oil: hydrogenated fat, margarine
- Fat-soluble vitamins and supplements: A, D, E, and K; fish oil pills

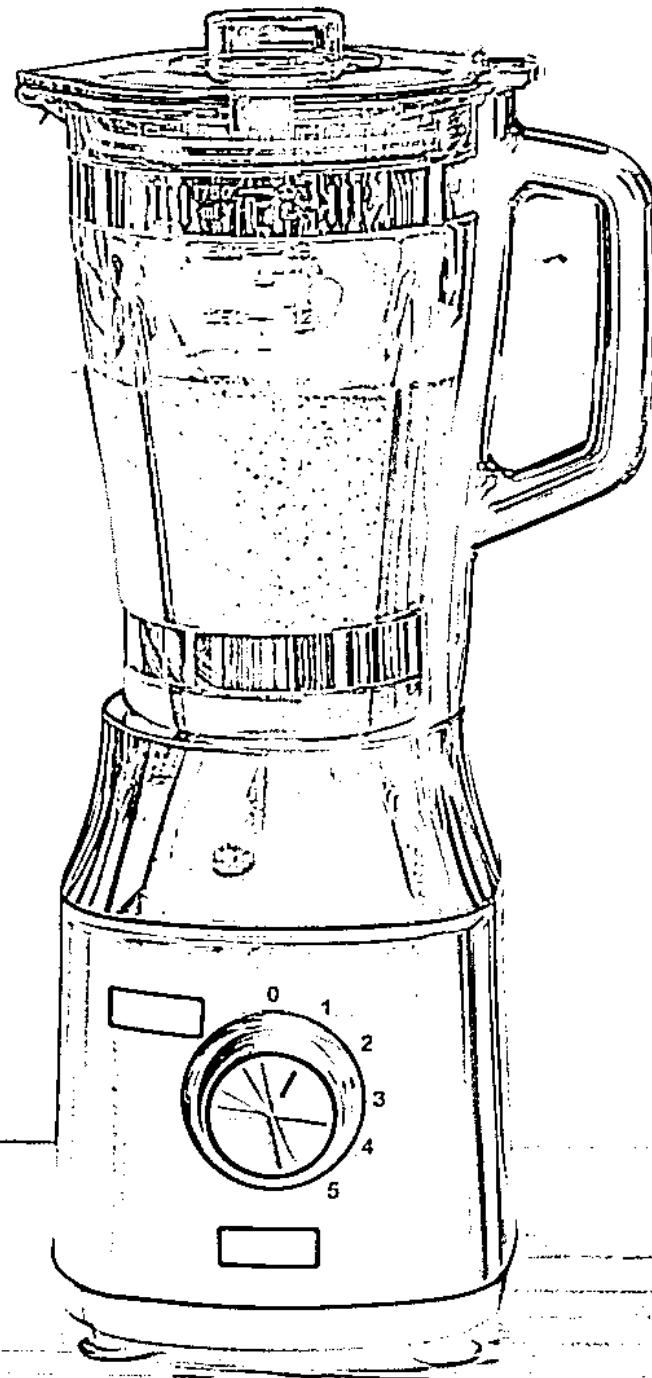
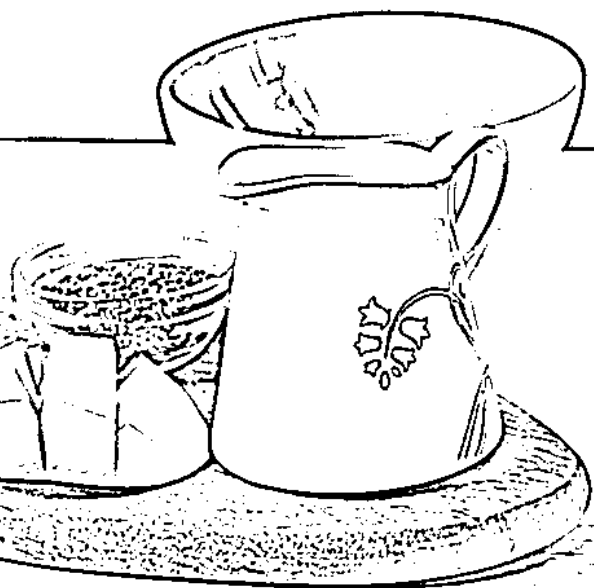
Reflective Questions

1. List some of the hard-to-digest (i.e., clogging) foods you regularly eat (or have in the past). What effects do they have on you? Are these effects consistent—and why do you think this is so? (Hint: think about the state of your agni, your activity level, the way it was cooked, what else it was eaten with, etc.)
2. Of the clogging foods I mentioned and that you eat, which one can begin to reduce or omit first? What forms of support would be helpful?



1.10

Compatible and Incompatible Foods





Compatible and Incompatible Foods List

MILK & HEAVY CREAM

OK to Combine with...

Grains: wheat, rice, oat, amaranth, quinoa, pearl or proso millet

Sweet dried fruits: date, soaked raisin

Ghee, butter

Nuts, sunflower and pumpkin seeds

Spices: turmeric, ginger, black pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, clove, saffron, vanilla, and more

Lentils: yellow split mung dal

Do NOT Combine in a Dish or a Meal with...

Vegetables: leafy greens, radish, nightshades (eggplant, white potato, pepper, tomato), onion, garlic

Egg, meat, fish/seafood, seaweed

Salt, sesame

Grains: foxtail (Italian) millet, barley, yeasted bread, alcohol

Fresh fruits: tree-ripened sweet mango and milk is an exception for a specific medicinal recipe

Sour/acidic taste: cheese, yogurt, buttermilk, citrus, alcohol, tomato, pickled food, certain types of jaggery

Lentils and beans: kulthi, urad, chana, chickpea, and more

MEAT, FISH, OR EGGS

OK to Combine with...

Non-starchy vegetables: summer squash, cauliflower, broccoli, fennel, and more

Leafy greens: Swiss chard, kale, collard greens, spinach

Light side dishes: salad

Do NOT Combine in a Dish or a Meal with...

Dairy: milk, cream, yogurt, cheese, butter

Heavy foods: potato, pasta, bread, tortilla, bean and lentil (especially urad dal)

Honey

Sprouted pulses or grains

Each other: for example, meat and egg

Alcohol (especially hard liquor)



YOGURT

OK to Combine with...	Do NOT Combine in a Dish or a Meal with...
<p>Grains: wheat, rice, oat, amaranth, quinoa, millet, barley</p> <p>Dried fruits: date, raisin, fig, apricot, cranberry, currant, and more</p> <p>Nuts, seeds</p> <p>Non-leafy vegetables: summer squash, cauliflower, broccoli, radish, cucumber</p> <p>Easy-to-digest lentils</p> <p>All natural sweeteners, especially honey</p>	<p>Nightshades: eggplant, white potato, pepper, tomato</p> <p>Egg, milk, heavy cream</p> <p>Leafy greens</p> <p>Fresh fruit, especially banana</p> <p>Heavy-to-digest beans and lentils: black, kidney, pinto, cannellini, lima, urad dal</p> <p>High heat: don't cook yogurt or buttermilk (exception in baking)</p>

HONEY

Do Not Combine with...
<p>Alcohol</p> <p>Water lily seed</p> <p>Radish</p> <p>Chana dal/chickpea</p> <p>Rainwater</p> <p>Ghee in equal weight proportions</p> <p>High heat: do not cook honey—allow food and tea to cool slightly before adding it</p>

CHEESE

OK to Combine with...	Do NOT Combine in a Dish or a Meal with...
<p>Non-starchy vegetables: zucchini, asparagus, broccoli, radish, string bean</p> <p>Leafy greens: Swiss chard, kale, collard greens, spinach</p> <p>Nothing: may be eaten alone</p> <p>Nuts</p> <p>Easy-to-digest lentils</p> <p>Bread, cracker, pasta (if digestion is strong)</p>	<p>Nightshades: eggplant, white potato, pepper, tomato (if digestion is weak)</p> <p>Egg, milk, heavy cream</p> <p>Meat, fish, seafood</p> <p>Fresh fruit</p> <p>Bread, cracker, pasta (if digestion is weak)</p> <p>Heavy-to-digest beans: black, kidney, pinto, cannellini, lima</p>



FRESH FRUIT

OK to Combine with...

Nothing: best eaten alone,* at least 30 minutes before or 3 to 4 hours after a meal (*always true for melons)

Nut and seed milk:

almond, cashew, sunflower, oat

A lunch of proper food-

combinations: pineapple and papaya are the only exceptions to eating raw fruit with a meal due to their high enzymatic properties

Nuts and seeds: only true for citrus and sour fruit

Fruits of the same kind and predominant

taste: different kinds of berries, stone fruit and berry, apple and pear

Date

Do NOT Combine in a Dish or a Meal with...

Dairy: milk, cream, yogurt, cheese, butter

Cooked foods

Grains, lentils, beans

Raw vegetables, leafy greens, salads

RADISH

Do Not Combine with...

Jaggery, honey, lotus stem, banana, raisin, milk, urad dal

CUCUMBER

Do Not Combine with...

Lemon (use lime instead)

Nightshades: white potato, eggplant, tomato, pepper

TAPIOCA

Do Not Combine with...

Fruits: especially banana, mango, raisin, jaggery

Heavy-to-digest beans:

black, kidney, pinto, cannellini Grains

Reflective Questions

1. Of the bad food combinations I discuss, which ones surprised you? Why?
2. What is your next step in eating more compatible foods?



1.11

Your Meal Portion





How to Determine Your Meal Portion

Overeating or not eating enough can weaken your health. Know your threshold of fullness. If you're in good health, by the end of your meal, your stomach should be:

- half-full with solid food
- a quarter-full with liquid (from a drink or water or soup, for example)
- a quarter empty

Fullness does not mean stuffed—it means full enough, content. You will feel satisfied but not heavy. This is the time to stop eating, even if you still have food on your plate. Leaving a quarter portion of your stomach empty provides space for the food to “churn” and transform into a nutritive juice that moves down your digestive tract in a timely manner, resulting in proper digestion.

“Fullness does not mean stuffed—it means full enough, content. You will feel satisfied but not heavy.”

Reflective Questions

1. Describe your meal portions for each meal. Do they shift often? Are they suitable for you or would you make changes?
2. Choose one meal to give your full attention to—remove any distraction from your eating environment (phone, computer, TV, book, music, conversation, etc.). Practice habits that support conscious cooking and eating, such as gratitude, giving a blessing, and mindful chewing. What was enjoyable, easy, and challenging about it?



Mindful Eating

One of the best ways to eat the right meal portions is to eat with self-awareness; some call it mindful eating. It means eating by focusing all of your senses on the food in front of you and not on other things—like your electronic devices, a book, or even a conversation. This will protect you from overeating because you will be solely focused on your food and will know when your body says, "Hey, we've had enough." The direct connection among your senses sends a signal to your brain to release the exact amount of necessary digestive enzymes. In the end, you might end up eating less and enjoying more.

"Focus all of your senses on the food in front of you and not on other things."

MINDFUL EATING PRACTICE

Make time to eat—put your meal times on your daily schedule so that you're not interrupted by phone calls or meetings, then perform this mindful practice.

1. Look at the food you're about to eat and say a little prayer of gratitude.
2. Move your face toward the dish and smell it.
3. Use your fingers on your right hand to touch it, feeling its temperature and texture, and then use your fingers to put it in your mouth.
4. Chew that morsel in silence until it has liquified.
5. Notice the tastes and flavors that unfold in your mouth.
6. Swallow with pleasure, and repeat with another bite.
7. When you get a nice feeling, let your body and mind pause and revel in pleasure, "Wow, this tastes amazing!"
8. Feeling joy with each bite, connect the beauty of the plant or herb with spirit and take that in.
9. At the end of your meal, remain seated for a couple of minutes and express gratitude. "I have enough. I am satisfied and content. I am grateful for the gift of food."



Conclusion

This concludes part one of *An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking* series. Thank you again for joining me. I understand that "General Principles of Ayurvedic Cooking" contained a lot of new information, so know that I appreciate your efforts to learn. Try incorporating one practice at a time into your daily life and feel the difference.

In part two, I will guide you through how to set up your Ayurvedic kitchen.

Reflective Questions

1. Name two important takeaways you gained from this class.
2. What food- or cooking-based action will you begin to take this week that will bring you closer to balance?



SOURCES

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An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking

Part 2

Setting Up Your Ayurvedic Kitchen

BY DIVYA ALTER



Contents

For easy navigation, click on the heading to bring you directly to that page

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How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is a companion to the video "Setting Up Your Ayurvedic Kitchen", module two of *An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking*. In it, you'll find a summary of the essential principles from each lesson, as well as handy lists and reference charts that will help align your kitchen with your needs.

Any text you see in [blue](#) is clickable—simply click on the text to be taken directly to that page in this workbook, or (if it is a reference to a company or organization) to the associated website. However, I encourage you to also print the entire workbook before starting class (or at least the pages you want to work with) and follow along as you watch the videos and complete the learning activities. It will also be handy to flip through the workbook pages later on as you review key concepts, take notes or reflect on various topics.

Setting up your ideal Ayurvedic kitchen will take some time. I offer plenty of tips and suggestions to get you started: types and sizes of cookware, cleaning supplies and tactics, equipment and ingredient storage and organization, as well as ways to find a flow, and thus joy, with your cooking. Use these as inspiration; try them out and make modifications based on what feels good to you.

On [page 14](#), you will find more information on my cookbooks, blog, culinary products, and special offers.

Now, let's get into it.

"Always postpone a bad habit, and never delay a good one."

-VAIDYA KAMLESH MISHRA

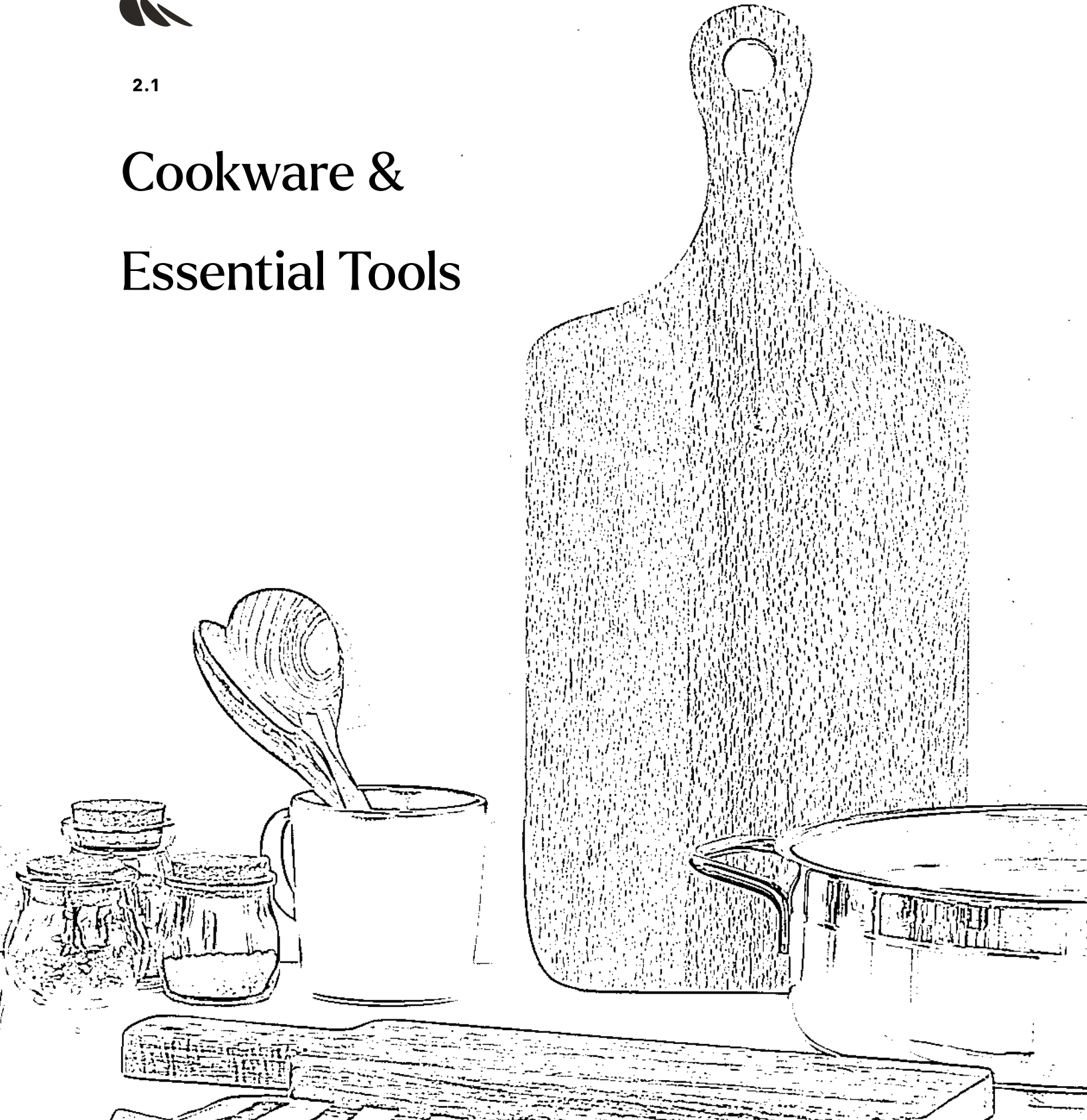
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2.1

Cookware & Essential Tools





Cookware Selection

MATERIALS

Just like we favor high quality ingredients, it is equally important to select high quality cookware—this means nontoxic cookware rather than the chemically reactive ones. In Ayurvedic cooking, not only do we always think about what and how to cook but also the material of what we cook our food in—all of these practices will affect the medicinal properties of the food, and thus our health.

QUALITY

Save yourself the unnecessary frustration, unhealthy side effects, and long term expense from buying poor-quality cookware. If you can't afford the highest quality equipment right now, identify your most needed piece and go for the medium grade. Keep a wish list of what you want, and slowly acquire the higher-quality ones over time.

SIZE

Select the size of your pots and pans according to the number of people you usually cook for.

COOKWARE SIZE GUIDE

Number of people	Pots and pans	Sauté/frying pan
1-2	1½- to 3-quart	8- to 10-inch
3-4	3- to 6-quart	8- to 12-inch
5-8	6- to 10-quart	12-inch (or larger)

COOKWARE MATERIALS

Healthy:

high-quality stainless steel
 lead-free clay
 glass
 seasoned cast-iron
 stone
 ceramic
 unchipped enamel
 food-grade silicone

Unhealthy:

aluminum
 chemically-coated nonstick surfaces
 lead-containing clay pots
 plastic
 rusty iron
 materials that mimic ceramic

Reflective Question

Look through your cookware and identify the low-quality/worn out items you wish to remove. What do you want to replace them with? You don't need to get rid of them right now, but if you're feeling ready, go ahead and throw or give them away!



Essential Tools

Here are the essential tools you need for preparing the recipes in this course and my cookbooks.

COOKING

- 1½-quart saucepan with a lid
- two 3- to 4-quart saucepans with lids
- 10- to 12-inch heavy sauté pan with a lid
- well-seasoned 10-inch cast-iron griddle
- one or two baking sheets: 9 x 13 inches, 13 x 18 inches
- baking dishes: cake pan, 8 x 8-inch dish
- steamer or steaming basket
- three mixing bowls: small, medium, large (stainless steel or glass)
- two or three mixing and serving spoons (wooden and stainless steel)
- soup ladle
- spatulas (silicone, wooden, and stainless steel)
- two-pronged fork (for fluffing grains)

CUTTING/SLICING/CRUSHING

- chef's knife
- paring knife
- serrated knife
- grater
- peeler
- mandolin slicer
- bench scraper
- mortar and pestle
- wooden cutting board

MEASURING

- set of stainless steel measuring spoons
- set of stainless steel measuring cups
- 4-cup measuring cup for liquids
- chef's thermometer (33-200°F)
- kitchen scale

STRAINING

- set of fine-mesh strainers (small, medium, large)
- colander
- cheesecloth (ideally unbleached)
- nut milk bag



Essential Appliances

Here are the essential appliances you need for preparing the recipes in this course and my cookbooks.

ELECTRIC APPLIANCES

These recommended appliances are for small-scale home cooking. Please select the size that is most appropriate for you and your family's needs.

- spice or coffee grinder (to grind spices and nuts)
- blender (to finely puree soups, desserts, and drinks; to make nut milks)
- food processor (to save time and energy chopping, grinding, and grating)
- Instant Pot (to make yogurt, slow cook, keep food warm)
- food warmer (to keep food warm between two meals and avoid reheating it)
- grain mill (if you bake frequently)

Reflective Questions

1. Examine the kitchen knife you use most often: are you happy with its quality, the way it feels in your hand, and its sharpness? If not, what can you do to make it work better for you?
2. Make your wish list of kitchen tools and appliances. Give away any tools and appliances you don't need or use.
3. Are you in the habit of using measuring tools? If so, what do you like about this? If not, how might this improve your dishes?



2.2

Kitchen Organization, Storage & Cleanliness





Preparing Your Kitchen

KITCHEN ORGANIZATION

Cooking in a well-organized kitchen will give you extra joy. When you know where everything is and it's easy to access, you don't waste time looking for an ingredient or a tool, and your preparation and cooking becomes a joyful dance. Organize your kitchen according to equipment and ingredient categories—this will help you (and those you live with) remember where things are and create a more pleasant and intuitive experience overall.

STORAGE

To maximize the freshness and potency of your food ingredients, as well as to keep them free from unwanted pathogens, practice the following habits:

- Cover all food to avoid insect and rodent infestation.
- Keep smaller amounts in kitchen-sized containers in your kitchen and the remaining ingredients appropriately stored in another pantry/area.
- Store food at least 6 inches above the floor (avoid direct contact with the floor).
- Protect stored ingredients from humidity, hot temperatures, and light.
- Monitor expiration dates.
- Utilize the "First In First Out" (FIFO) principle.
- Avoid cross-contamination when scooping ingredients.

THE BEST STORAGE CONTAINERS ARE

- made from glass and nontoxic materials,
- airtight, and
- labeled and dated.

CLEANLINESS

We all know that a dirty kitchen is not very motivating to be in. Kitchen cleanliness serves a few purposes: it ensures food safety, keeps your mind peaceful and focused, and establishes a pure and uplifting vibration that then imparts into your food. Choose cleaning supplies and equipment that make it easy to clean, that way you'll have little resistance to keeping your stove, sink, countertops, cabinets, drawers, and towels clean.

As you begin to reorganize your kitchen, you might want to do an initial detailed cleanup to really give it a fresh start, which will likely require the better part of a day. Going forward, it will be easier to maintain daily cleanliness. On that same principle, I recommend you wash dirty dishes as you prep and cook to keep your workstation tidy throughout your cooking routine.

TIPS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR KITCHEN

Organize by category, then by subcategory:

Eating	dish-/glassware, cutlery, napkins, place mats, coasters
Cooking	utensils, vessels, appliances, tools for cutting, measuring
Fridge	shelves and drawers for categories of food
Food	nonperishables, storage containers, baking supplies

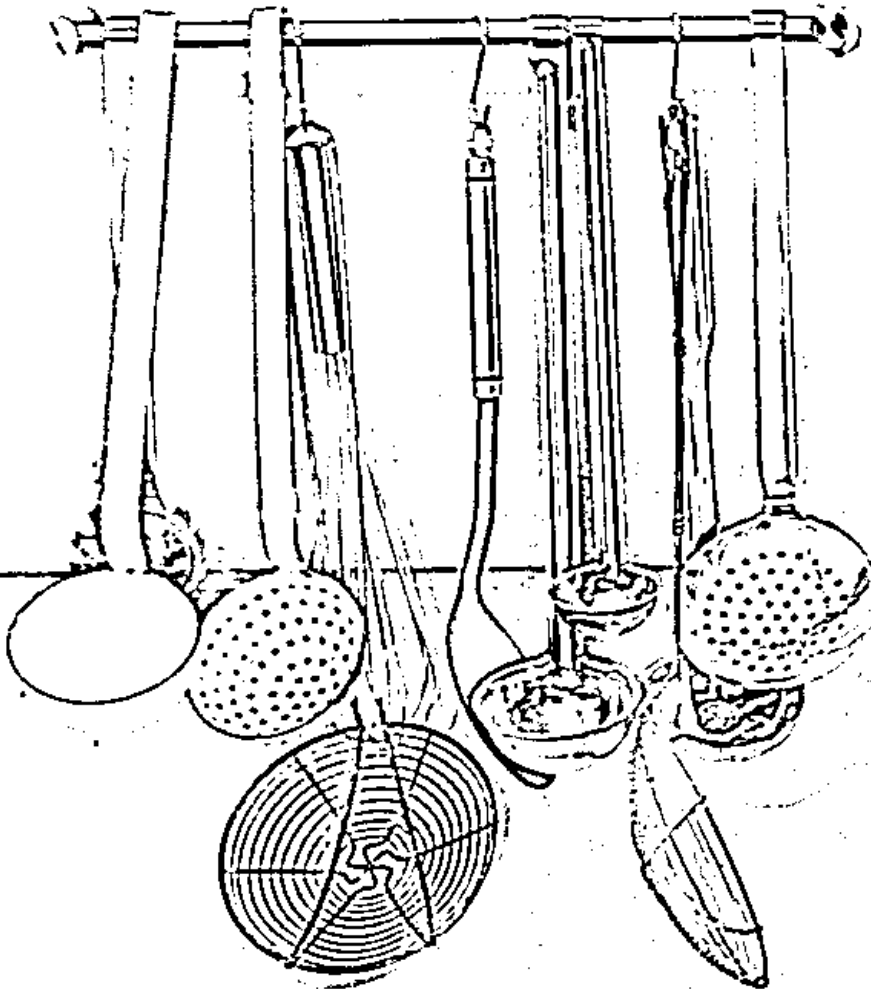
Reflective Questions

1. What organizational systems do you have in place in your kitchen? Do you flow with them?
2. List the tips you learned that you believe will most improve your kitchen organization.



2.3

Time-Saving Tips in the Kitchen





Time-Saving Tips

It all starts with planning. Just as you map out your route to get from your house to a new destination, doing a little preparation for your next meal will allow you to effortlessly make and fancy a quick, nutritious dish in minutes. It may take some trial and error to find the time-saving techniques that transform your cooking into an eloquent dance of creativity and exploration. On this page are some tips to inspire your dance.

PLAN

Become familiar with the recipes.

Decide on quantities.

Acquire the ingredients and equipment you need.

MY GO-TO RECIPES

MAKE STAPLES

Once a month, make ghee and spice blends.

Every two to three days, make fresh cheese, yogurt, and nut milk —whichever you need for the week.

MY STAPLES / FREQUENCY

SELECT

When you only have 15 minutes to fix a meal, choose quick-cooking vegetables that do not need peeling, such as zucchini, yellow squash, asparagus, fennel, cabbage, leafy greens, green beans, cauliflower, or broccoli.

MY QUICK VEGETABLES



Time-Saving Tips

SEQUENCE

Consider any required soaking times.

Slow before fast: Start with the dishes that take longer to cook (e.g., soups, stews, braises, roasts) and that need to cool down to be served at room temperature or chilled (e.g., desserts, chutneys). Then make the faster cooking dishes that are best served steamy hot (e.g., grains, vegetables).

The day before: If cooking an elaborate dinner, make desserts, broths, sauces, or beverages earlier in the day or the day before.

Use a slow cooker: Set up the slow cooker (on low, with cold water) in the evening to have either breakfast or lunch ready in the morning. If it's lunch, pack it in a thermos that you can take with you for a hot meal later in the day.

EXPEDITE

Use a pressure cooker: When you simply need a meal cooked in a short amount of time, use a pressure cooker set to low pressure. Although pressure-cooked food is harder to digest, it is better than eating leftovers or unwholesome food.

Have hot water ready: Boil a pot or kettle of water, and use it to expedite the cooking of your soups, grains, vegetables, and teas. It's also handy if you need to add more water throughout their cooking.

CLEAN AS YOU GO

There is always a minute or two during preparing or cooking to clean and organize your kitchen.

PREP

The Night Before:

Soak your lentils or beans overnight, then rinse, drain, and cover, keeping them refrigerated until you're ready to cook.

Take out and portion as many ingredients as possible (dry or perishable).

Earlier in the day:

Chop vegetables up to 12 hours before using them, especially the ones that need peeling. (Chopping vegetables in smaller pieces will speed up cooking time.)

While Cooking:

While your first step of cooking is underway, prepare other ingredients that appear in later steps.

My friend Sasha Hynes shares this

trick: If you are not able to grow your own herbs but have room in your refrigerator, consider sorting and washing store-bought herbs ahead of time, then store them all together in a salad spinner in the refrigerator for up to several days.

Reflective Questions

1. If you had all the time in the world, would you still use some of it to prepare fresh meals daily? Why or why not?
2. Name two time-saving tips from this class that you will implement this week.
3. What is your current perspective on cooking fresh meals? How would you like it to be different, if at all?



RECIPE PREP SHEET

Choose a recipe and use this space to fill in some time-saving tips to make cooking the recipe a breeze.

RECIPE: _____

MY PREP: DAY BEFORE

MY PREP: DAY OF

MY COOKING SEQUENCE



Conclusion

This concludes module two of *An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking*. Thank you again for joining me in our discussion of how to set up your Ayurvedic kitchen.

Module three of this series is dedicated to making essential cooking staples. We will finally get cooking in the kitchen and I will show you how to make the revered homemade cultured ghee, fresh paneer cheese, almond milk, and much more!

Reflective Questions

1. Name two important takeaways you gained from this class.
2. What kitchen-related action will you begin to take this week that will bring you closer to balance?



SOURCES

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An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking

Part 3

Essential Cooking Staples

BY DIVYA ALTER



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How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is a companion to the video "Essential Cooking Staples", Part three of *An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking*. In it, you'll find detailed recipes for each of the staples I teach in the video. Most of the recipes include additional information on the healing benefits of the featured ingredient.

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On [page 36](#), you will find more information on my cookbooks, blog, culinary products, and special offers. Now, let's get into it.

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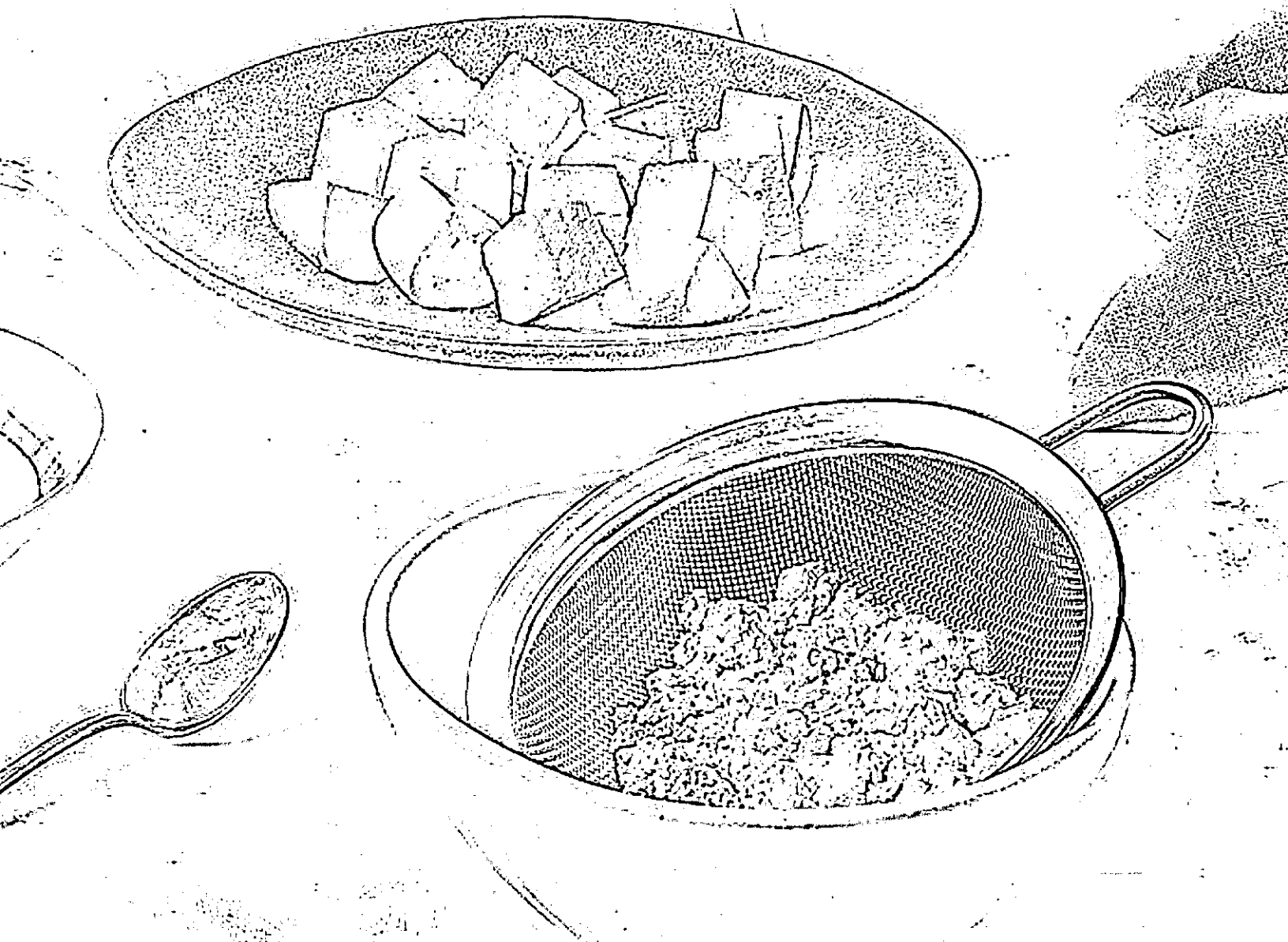
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3.1

Fresh Paneer Cheese





Fresh Paneer Cheese

FRESH VS. FERMENTED CHEESES

In Ayurveda, we rank foods in terms of freshness and digestion: the less fresh and harder to digest an ingredient is, the less healthy it is. Aged for months or even years, fermented cheeses are very acidic and lower the body's pH, creating a favorable environment for inflammation and unwanted bacteria or fungi to thrive. They are much heavier to digest and therefore can easily clog our microcirculatory channels.

Ayurvedic cheeses are always fresh. They are not ripened with bacteria, rennet, or enzymes, nor are they washed with alcohol, such as brandy or beer. Their aroma is sweet and heavenly, not stinky like a pair of dirty socks. They are delightful, light, and will not cause mucus or blockages when properly combined with other foods. The list below ranks cheese in terms of digestibility, with fresh homemade cheese being the most easily digested (and the only cheese I fully recommend using) and aged and hard cheeses being the most difficult to digest.

Reflective Questions

1. What is your past and current relationship with milk? What changes, if any, would you like to make to your milk consumption?
2. Identify a source of high-quality milk that you can purchase. In this process, research information such as fat content, A2 or A1 genes, the kind of food the cows eat, what the farm is like, etc.

CHEESE DIGESTABILITY

1. Fresh, homemade: *paneer*
2. Organic, soft, unripened: cottage cheese, ricotta, fresh mozzarella, goat cheese
3. Soft, rind-ripened: Brie, Camembert
4. Semisoft, aged up to 1 month: fresh feta, mozzarella
5. Hard, aged over 1 month: cheddar, Parmesan, blue cheese, dry Monterey Jack

THE HEALING BENEFITS OF FRESH CHEESE

Fresh cheese is sweet, heavy to digest, and aphrodisiac. Its fatty properties are superb for balancing Vata and Pitta; Kapha needs it in less quantity, less frequently, and with extra servings of pungent spices.

Fresh cheese is rich in animal protein, calcium, vitamin B₁₂, and omega fatty acids, and therefore is an important ingredient in a vegetarian diet. Since it is a heavy food, try the tips on [page 6](#) to make it easier to digest.



Fresh Paneer Cheese

In my cookbook *What to Eat for How You Feel*, I give great detail on the process and troubleshooting of making paneer cheese. Here is an abbreviated version of that recipe. It is always best to bring milk to a boil on a lower heat, as it allows the milk proteins to break down slowly, making them easier to digest.

DISH PAIRINGS

Salad
Leafy greens
Vegetables, especially the
non-starchy type





FRESH PANEER CHEESE

Yield 1½ cups
Cook 15 minutes

1. Add just enough water to cover the bottom of a 4-quart heavy-based saucepan (this will protect the milk from scorching). Pour in the milk and bring to a simmer over low heat.
2. As soon as the milk starts to rise, add the lime juice and stir gently until the milk forms clumpy curds and separates from the yellowish whey. Turn off the heat.
3. Strain the curds through a mesh strainer (if you need soft cheese) or through a strainer lined with a cheesecloth (if you need pressed cheese); discard the whey. Rinse briefly with cold water to wash away the acidity from the whey. If you're making soft cheese, it is ready at this point.

TO MAKE PRESSED CHEESE:

1. Gather the corners of the cheesecloth, making sure that the cheese is tightly enclosed within it, then gently twist the cloth to squeeze out the excess liquid.
2. Place the wrapped cheese on a smooth, flat surface and press the bundled curds with something heavy, like a cast-iron pan or pot. A tofu press works really well for making pressed cheese made from up to 2 gallons of milk. Press for 15 to 20 minutes, until the cheese is firm enough to hold itself together but is still soft and spongy.
3. Unwrap and use as directed in a recipe. Store (either version) in an airtight container and refrigerate for up to three days.

INGREDIENTS: GF

- ½ **gallon** Raw or whole non-homogenized milk 🌿
- 3-4 **tbsp** Lime juice (freshly squeezed) 🍋
- or
- ½ **cup** Plain buttermilk 🍋
or yogurt

TIPS FOR EASIER DIGESTION

- Eat it freshly made, while the protein molecules are not fully bound and hardened.
- Eat it at lunchtime, when digestive fire is strongest.
- Add digestive spices such as black pepper, cardamom (black or green), green chile, and ginger.
- Avoid combining it in a dish or a meal with contradictory foods such as fruit (see "Compatible and Incompatible Foods" on page 36 in the Part 1 workbook).
- Choose cow's or goat's milk cheeses. Sheep's dairy aggravates almost every digestive system, and buffalo dairy is very heavy (recommended only for sleeplessness and excessive hunger pangs).

From *Joy of Balance: An Ayurvedic Guide to Cooking with Healing Ingredients*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2022)



3.2

Yogurt





Yogurt

Having grown up in Bulgaria, known for its exceptional yogurt, I am very attached to yogurt's taste, probiotic strength, and consistency—that's why I like to make it myself.

A good-quality yogurt is a trusted source of healing friendly bacteria, protein, calcium, essential digestive enzymes, and vitamin B₁₂. For a person with good digestion, the bioavailability of these nutrients is about 80 percent; in other words, small amounts of yogurt consumed regularly will deliver these essential nutrients.

In my studies of Ayurveda, I've learned that there are three types of yogurt, based on taste: sweet, sour, and very sour. The best quality yogurt is sweet with a slight sour and astringent aftertaste. This type of yogurt carries the many healing benefits listed below. Sour yogurt increases acidity and can be very aggravating for the Pitta and Kapha doshas.

Creamy throughout with a bliss-producing layer of cream on

"The best quality yogurt is sweet with a slight sour and astringent aftertaste."

THE HEALING BENEFITS OF YOGURT

The ancients describe yogurt as one of the most beneficial substances on earth. Here are some of its healing benefits (this describes the best quality yogurt):

- cleanses the taste buds and enhances our ability to taste food
- stimulates digestion (a great source of digestive enzymes)
- supports absorption of nutrients
- lubricates the body's channels
- increases stamina
- is a good body-builder
- is a diuretic



Yogurt

top, homemade yogurt is far superior to its commercial counterparts, which are often tangy or slimy and packed with unnecessary stabilizers or preservatives such as gelatin, carrageenan, cellulose, pectin, or cornstarch.

Many variables can affect the outcome of your homemade yogurt, including timing, temperature, humidity, drafts, and the quality of milk. Don't be discouraged if you don't get a firm-set yogurt the first time. Try again; it's worth the effort. For gourmet and therapeutic results, use the best quality milk and a thermometer with a temperature range of 0 to 220°F, which you can find at kitchenware stores, restaurant supplies stores, and online.



DO'S WITH YOGURT

- When mixing into cooked grains, vegetables, or soups, gradually stir in the yogurt after turning off the heat; otherwise it will break up and curdle.
- For most people, the best time of day to eat yogurt is between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when their digestive fire is strongest.
- Sprinkle yogurt with a pinch of nutmeg or cinnamon to aid digestion.

DONT'S WITH YOGURT

- Do not mix yogurt (in a dish or a meal) with fruit, nightshades, leafy greens, or milk—these combinations put a heavy load on your digestive fire and may lead to imbalances.
- Avoid eating yogurt at night—it might be heavy for your digestion, which naturally slows down in the evening.
- Discard any partially fermented yogurt (when it has the signs of fermentation but it's still quite liquid). This substance will aggravate everyone's physiology. It might break your heart to waste it, but better than increased toxins in your body.
- Refrain from eating old yogurt. It will not only increase acidity but may also cause flatulence, inflammation, water retention, or problems with urination.



YOGURT

Yield 1 quart (4 cups)

Cook 15 minutes

1. HEAT THE MILK:

Heat the milk in a heavy 3-quart pan to 180 to 190°F, and keep it at this temperature for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. This will make the yogurt sweeter, thicker, and creamier.

2. COOL THE MILK:

Set aside ½ cup milk in a bowl and let it cool to room temperature. Whisk in the yogurt (your starter) to a creamy consistency.


Let the rest of the milk cool to 115°F. The longer the milk cools, the thicker and tastier the finished product will be. If you are pressed for time, do a quick cool by placing the milk pan in a kitchen sink or a bowl half-full of cold water (be careful not to splash water into the milk). You may also stir the milk to accelerate the cooling process.


Use a thermometer to ensure proper temperature. A temperature of 110 to 112°F is important so that the bacteria will thrive and the yogurt will set properly.

3. ADD THE STARTER:

Gently stir the yogurt starter mixture into the milk and mix thoroughly. Now the milk temperature should be between 108 and 112°F, which is ideal for starting yogurt. Leave the milk in a covered pot or bowl, or transfer it to a jar or another container with a lid.

INGREDIENTS: GF

1 quart Whole unhomogenized milk 

¼ cup Plain full-fat yogurt 

or

1-2 tsp Natren yogurt starter
(see Sources, [page 37](#))

RECIPE NOTES

- Do not heat the milk in a microwave oven!
- If you do not have a thermometer and want to determine whether the milk is cool enough to add the starter, make your pinky finger a thermometer: if you can dip it in the cooling milk and comfortably keep it there for ten seconds, the temperature is about right.
- My favorite vessel for incubating yogurt is a non-glazed clay pot.
- If you make yogurt with a powdered starter, follow the product directions.
- If you're making yogurt with raw milk, when you heat the milk, bring it to a full boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 15 minutes.
- For your next batch of homemade yogurt, reserve 1/4 cup of your current batch in a small, labeled jar. This will be your starter.
- If you make yogurt from goat's milk, it may be more liquid because goat's milk's protein-to-fat ratio is different from that of cow's milk.



4. INCUBATE THE YOGURT:

Now it's time for the friendly bacteria to grow and transform the milk into yogurt. The key is to keep it warm (110 to 112°F) for 5 to 6 hours. There are many ways to do this:

- Wrap the container in a clean towel or blanket and keep it in a warm spot.
- Place the container in a food dehydrator set to 110°F.
- Keep it near a heater.
- Use a yogurt maker, following the manufacturer's instructions for incubation.
- Put it in a gas oven: Heat to 200°F for 1 to 2 minutes, turn it off, and place the container on the top shelf in the back.
- Put it in an electric oven: Heat to 200°F for 1 to 2 minutes and turn it off. Wrap the container in a towel and place it on any shelf. Leave the oven light on.
- Do not put yogurt in an oven that is above 120°F—Be careful, because if the environment is too hot, the yogurt will sour before it sets and become very watery.

5. KNOW WHEN IT HAS BECOME YOGURT:

Check the yogurt after 5 to 6 hours. If you are incubating overnight, stop the process as soon as you get up in the morning.

Yogurt is ready when it is thick and firm, with a custard-like appearance that separates from the edge of the container. If longer incubation is needed, continue and check every 30 minutes.

6. REFRIGERATE AND STORE:

It is best to refrigerate the yogurt and leave it undisturbed for several hours until thoroughly chilled. This will firm it up and preserve its sweetness. The yogurt will release a liquid whey, since it is 100 percent natural, free of stabilizers and preservatives. This whey is good stuff—unlike the whey that is produced from making fresh cheese, yogurt whey is rich in friendly bacteria and less acidic; you can either mix it into another (room temperature) liquid or pour it into a cup and drink it as a probiotic. I like to use a teaspoon of the yogurt whey for facial masks to enrich my skin with friendly bacteria.

To benefit from the fresh yogurt's sweet taste and strongest healthy bacteria, it is best to use it within 5 days. As the yogurt ages, its probiotic properties will weaken and its taste will become more sour.

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)

Reflective Questions

1. Think about all of the ingredients, equipment, and steps required to make yogurt at home. What do you already have and need to acquire?
2. What are your current feelings about making yogurt? If you're uncertain or intimidated, what do you need to feel confident and excited?

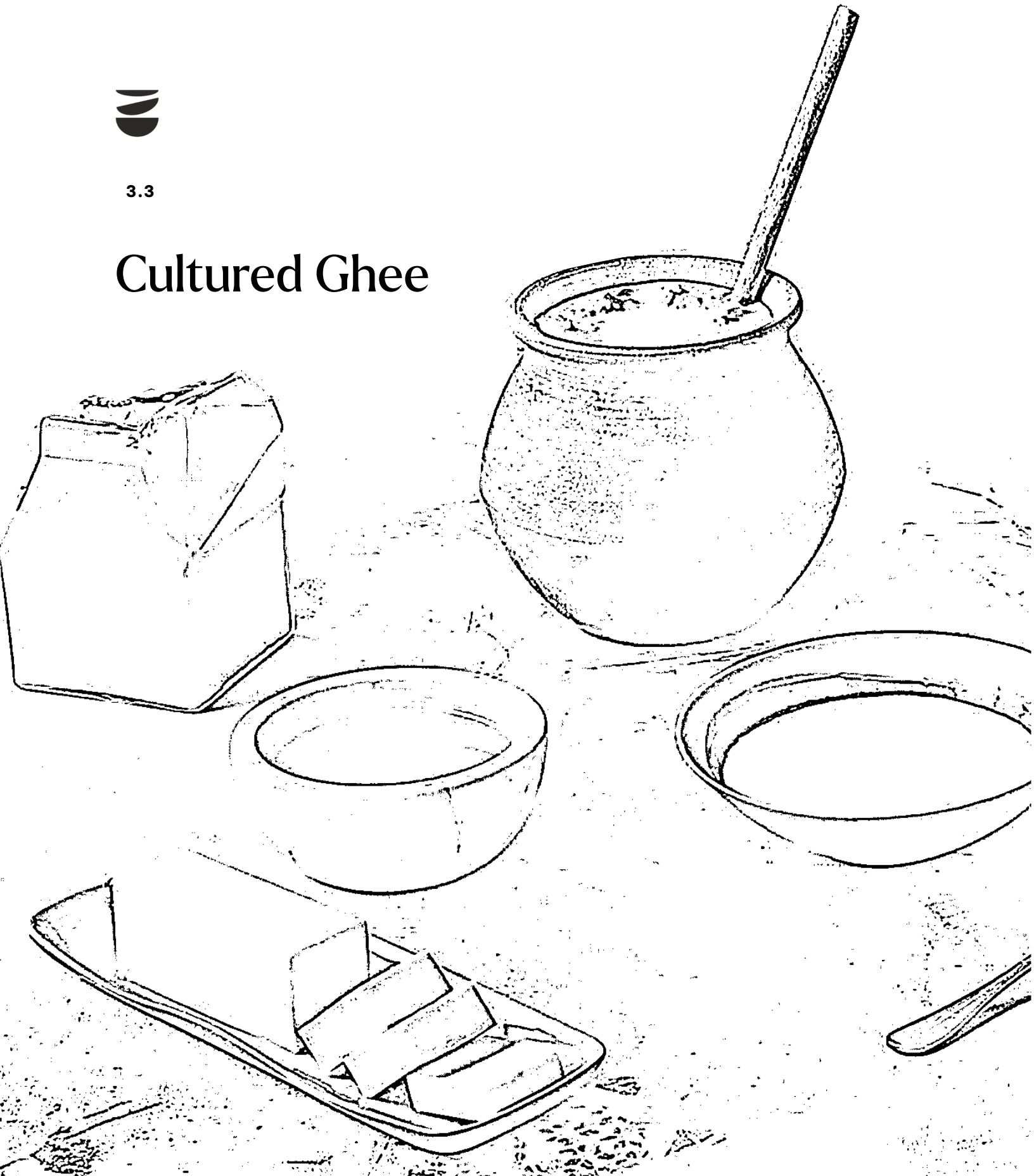


MY NOTES / QUESTIONS



3.3

Cultured Ghee





Cultured Ghee

If I had to choose one staple I couldn't go without, that would be ghee. It is the magical golden substance that makes everything cook well and taste better. Ghee has been glorified throughout the *Vedas*, used across centuries of cooking and yogic rituals, and included in numerous Ayurvedic remedies. I am so glad that more and more of today's nutritionists and naturopaths value ghee's nurturing properties and recommend it as an essential component of a healthy diet.

Ghee is the deeply nourishing core essence of milk. It has all the micronutrients and antioxidants of butter but without butter's water, milk protein (casein), and lactose. I've met many lactose-intolerant people who do not react negatively to ghee. In fact, cultured ghee helped them repair their gut damage.

There are two types of ghee, depending on how its starting ingredient—butter, is derived: 1) from sweet cream, and 2) from cultured cream. The first type I call "regular" ghee—it is higher in cholesterol and it increases body fat; it is the ghee widely sold and used today. The second type, known as "cultured" or "prebiotic" ghee, decreases bad cholesterol and regulates fat metabolism; it is really the best ghee to cook with, but it is harder to find. What distinguishes cultured ghee from "regular" ghee (even if it's organic) is the culturing of cream that takes place during the first step. The live cultures infuse the cream or butter with beneficial bacteria, making it easier to digest and thus promoting overall health.

The subtlest requirement for ghee making is a proper environment because ghee is highly absorbent, both physically and energetically. Make sure your "ghee kitchen" is a clean and peaceful space; you may even play a continuous recording of sacred music or chants. Make ghee when you feel happy and settled, free from negative thoughts. Some healers recommend making therapeutic ghee during a waxing moon or a few hours before the full moon, when nurturing energy in the environment is on the rise.

"Ghee is the deeply nourishing core essence of milk."

THE HEALING BENEFITS OF CULTURED GHEE

Here's what I have learned from the ancient Ayurvedic texts:

- enhances digestive fire while having a cooling and alkalizing effect on the whole body
- calms and rejuvenates the eyes
- promotes longevity
- binds fat-soluble toxins
- cools and lubricates the stomach wall
- pacifies the Vata and Pitta types of digestion
- enhances complexion and glow of the face and body
- increases physical and mental stamina
- supports the brain's functions of learning, retention, and recall



Cultured Ghee

In this recipe, I want to share the traditional secrets for making cultured ghee that I have learned from one of my Ayurvedic teachers, Vaidya R. K. Mishra. The process of churning your own butter and transforming it into "liquid gold" is not only alchemical; it is truly magical. Note that there are so many ways you can cut corners when making ghee, but if you want the best and most curative product, make it without compromise. If you are unable to make your own cultured butter, you can follow my "Quick Ghee Making" guidelines on [page 19](#), using store-bought cultured butter. Making ghee may seem intimidating at first, but with practice it becomes easy and enjoyable. Keep in mind that the larger the quantity, the longer the cooking time.

THE HEALING BENEFITS OF CULTURED GHEE

Findings from modern research:

- gives satiation
- provides sustaining energy
- supports healthy hormone production
- enhances mineral absorption
- helps the delivery and absorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K
- produces healthy bile by supporting the liver
- maintains anti-inflammatory processes and supports the body's healing intelligence





CULTURED GHEE

Yield about 20 ounces

1. CULTURE THE CREAM:

Follow the instructions for making yogurt ([page 9](#)), but substitute heavy whipping cream for the whole milk. Let the cultured cream chill completely.

2. CHURN CULTURED CREAM INTO BUTTER:

In a large bowl, chill about 4 cups of water with ice cubes (or the quantity that is half the capacity of your churning device).

Fill the churning appliance with cream-yogurt halfway and turn it onto one of the highest speeds. Within a minute (or a couple of minutes, depending on the volume you have in there), the cream-yogurt will transform into a thick whipped cream that will gradually loosen up and become sloshy. At this point, turn the machine to the lowest speed (if that's an option). As it keeps churning and looks more and more buttery, the cream will "break," and you will hear a splashing sound—at this point, the butter and buttermilk have fully separated. Keep churning on the lowest speed until the butter clusters into one or two balls, then turn off the churning device.

Strain the buttermilk through a sieve into a large bowl, leaving the butter in the churning device. Pour the ice water into the churning device and churn on the lowest speed for about 1 minute, until the water becomes a milky color. Strain this buttermilk through a sieve into the bowl with the first batch of buttermilk. Transfer the churned butter to a sieve over a mixing bowl. Press the butter between your hands and squeeze out as much of the buttermilk as possible. As the buttermilk collects in the bowl, place the fresh butter in the heavy-bottomed pot (off the heat). Add this buttermilk to the bowl with the rest of it; transfer to an airtight container and store in the fridge.

INGREDIENTS: GF

4 pints raw or pasteurized organic, grass-fed heavy whipping cream (do not use ultra-pasteurized)

1 cup plain, full-fat organic yogurt or 2 teaspoons Natren yogurt starter (see Sources, [page 37](#))

UTENSILS & EQUIPMENT

- Food processor fitted with the "S" blade or standing mixer set with the wire beaters (a blender does not work well for butter churning)
- Sieve
- 2 mixing bowls
- Rubber spatula/scrapper
- Heavy-bottomed 3- or 4-quart pan
- Wooden cooking spoon
- Dry cheesecloth or flour sack towel



3. COOK BUTTER INTO GHEE:

Heat the butter on the burner's lowest possible setting. Stir occasionally as the butter melts and starts to bubble. Notice how the three components of butter begin to separate: water will be on the bottom, butterfat will take up most of the pot, and milk fat solids will mostly rise to the top. As the temperature rises to 200°F, this separation will become more and more distinct; the water will bubble up, maybe with a few eruptions. Let the foam disappear naturally; do not skim it.

Use a wooden spoon to stir the pot occasionally to avoid sediment burning and to help the water evaporate.

When the milk fat solids have more or less settled to the bottom (as opposed to floating around), let them rest there by not stirring the bottom of the pot. Because the water is reduced, the temperature rises faster and the butterfat begins to lose its cloudiness; the large bubbles you saw earlier have turned into thin foam.

The ghee is ready when the butter oil is clear and amber in color. You should be able to clearly see the bottom of the pan. The solids on the bottom should be a consistent golden-brown color. If they are light tan or blackish, this is not a good sign. If the solids are mostly tan, keep the ghee in the refrigerator between uses. If the solids have become black, discard the ghee.

4. STRAIN THE GHEE:

Fold the cheesecloth into 8 layers (2 layers if you're using a flour sack towel) and place it in a dry sieve or strainer atop a mixing bowl. From now on, all utensils the ghee comes in contact with must be completely dry, as moisture will spoil the ghee. Carefully yet quickly pour or ladle the hot ghee through the cheesecloth. Discard the strained solids. Let the ghee cool for a few minutes, allowing any air molecules to dissipate.

To clean and reuse the cheesecloth, soak it in boiling hot water with soap; hand-wash it while the soapy water is still warm.

5. STORE THE GHEE:

Pour the ghee into glass jars and put the lids on only when the jars have cooled to room temperature in order to avoid condensation falling into the ghee. Transfer the closed jars to the refrigerator for a few hours—this will prevent the formation of layers. Once the ghee has solidified, move the jars to a dry and dark storage space, such as a cabinet. Here, it's shelf life will be good for a couple of months. Always be mindful to protect your ghee from any moisture—even one drop can spoil it.

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)

Reflective Question

1. Think about all of the ingredients, equipment, and steps required to make cultured ghee from scratch, at home. What do you already have and need to acquire?

**QUICK GHEE:**

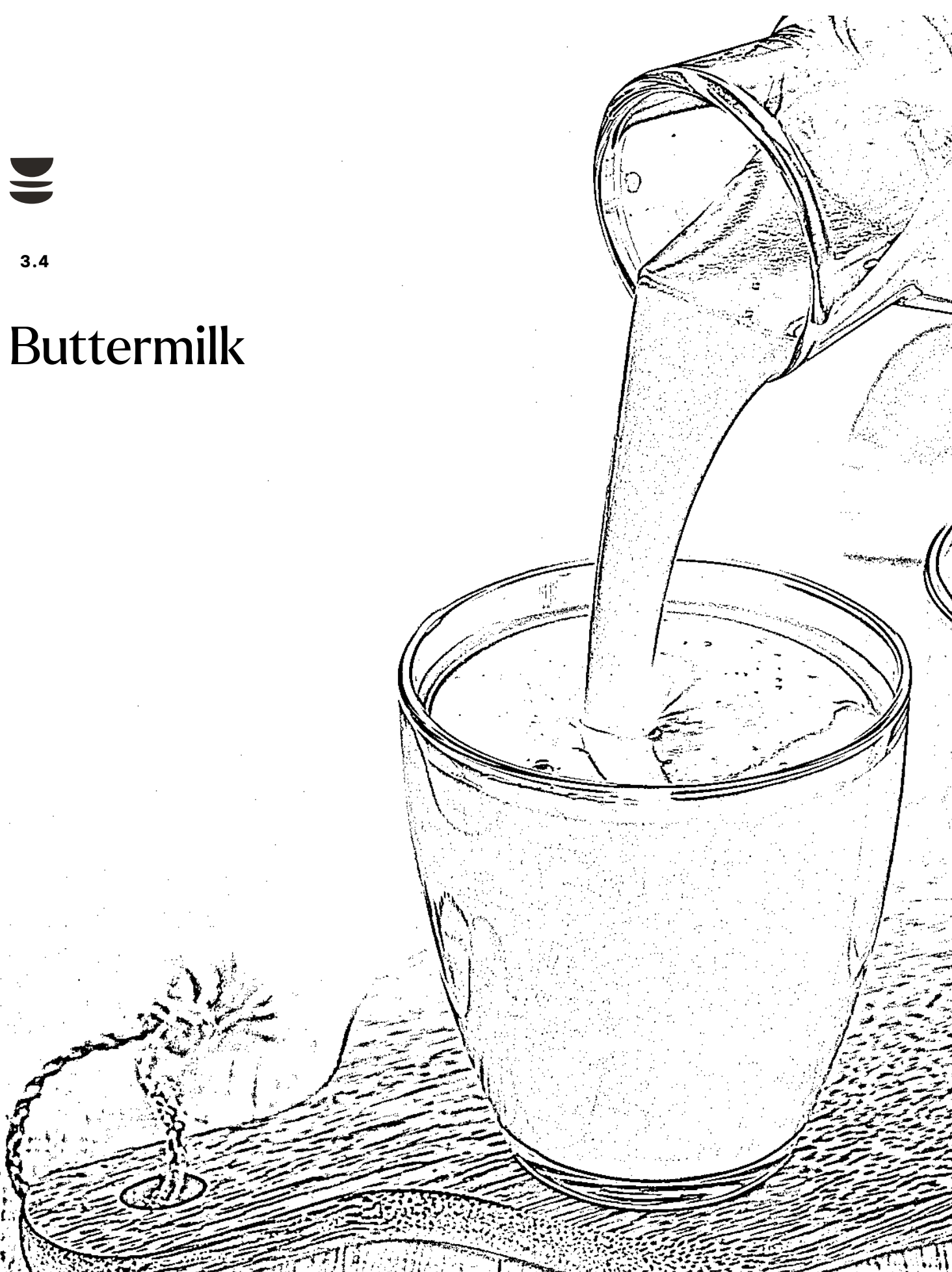
Quick ghee (as opposed to cultured ghee) is the next best option for when you have insufficient time, patience, or motivation. Unfortunately, it will not grant you the beneficial by-product of fresh buttermilk. Purchase organic, grass-fed, unsalted cultured butter (Organic Valley's is excellent) and follow the above instructions for cooking butter into ghee (steps 3 through 5). You can make ghee with regular sweet cream butter, but it will be lacking the prebiotic goodness, and it will be higher in cholesterol.

MY NOTES / QUESTIONS



3.4

Buttermilk





Buttermilk

More than five thousand years ago the ancients considered buttermilk "nectar on earth," and so it remains today. It is a marvelous elixir, rich in highly intelligent bacteria, suited to making your digestive system healthy. "Health begins in the gut," Hippocrates wisely noted. The optimal digestive functions of absorption, assimilation, and elimination depend on the proper quality and quantity of friendly flora in the gut. How amazing it is that unassuming buttermilk can give us these vital pieces of health!

A lot of people nowadays take probiotic capsules, and they can be very helpful for a few months. But do not let your system depend on them on an ongoing basis. Once the probiotic supplements have won the battle over unfriendly bacteria (and even candida!), the battlefield of your gut is clear to be re-fertilized and grow an abundance of beneficial flora in a more natural way—by regularly consuming the best quality yogurt, buttermilk, and other cultured foods.

Let us welcome the probiotic wonderment of buttermilk in our diet and invite its little friendly constituents to be happy and thriving in the fields of our digestive system. All you need is a half to one cup of buttermilk a day, or even three to four times a week. As with yogurt, the best time to enjoy buttermilk is midday—during or right after lunch.

"The ancients considered buttermilk 'nectar on earth.' "

THE HEALING BENEFITS OF BUTTERMILK

These benefits described by the ancients must be true today too:

- supports absorption of nutrients
- restores healthy appetite
- balances fat metabolism and cholesterol
- supports weight reduction
- restores the intelligence of the colon
- alleviates hemorrhoids
- improves circulation
- is good for the spleen



Buttermilk

There are two main ways to produce homemade buttermilk:

1. Churn cultured cream into butter—the liquid that separates from the butter is called buttermilk.
2. Follow the recipe on the next page—that's faster.

I use buttermilk in several recipes—mostly for baking and making digestive beverages.

Reflective Question

1. What is your experience with buttermilk? How would you like to use it next—choose a digestive drink, a baked recipe, or use it as a curdling agent for making fresh cheese.



END YOUR MEAL

The astringent taste of buttermilk will signal your body that the end of your meal is here. Thus, for enhanced digestion, make the last taste you enjoy astringent—be it from a small amount of buttermilk (with lunch), black tea, or honey.



BUTTERMILK

Yield 1 cup
Prep 2 minutes

Blend the yogurt and water until a buttery froth forms on the surface (any kind of blender will work). Skim and discard the froth—this lowers the fat in the buttermilk and makes it lighter. Your staple buttermilk is ready to use in recipes!

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)

INGREDIENTS: GF

¼ cup Plain, full-fat yogurt (ideally homemade) 🍯
¾ cup Spring or filtered water

RECIPE NOTE

Blending is important, as it infuses the buttermilk with more Fiery energy, thus enhancing its digestive powers.

DIGESTIVE BUTTERMILK

Yield 1 cup
Prep 5 minutes

Dry-toast the cumin seeds in a small skillet over low heat until they darken a shade and release their aroma. Grind to a powder in a spice grinder. Pulse in a blender with the buttermilk, cilantro, and salt.

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)

INGREDIENTS: GF

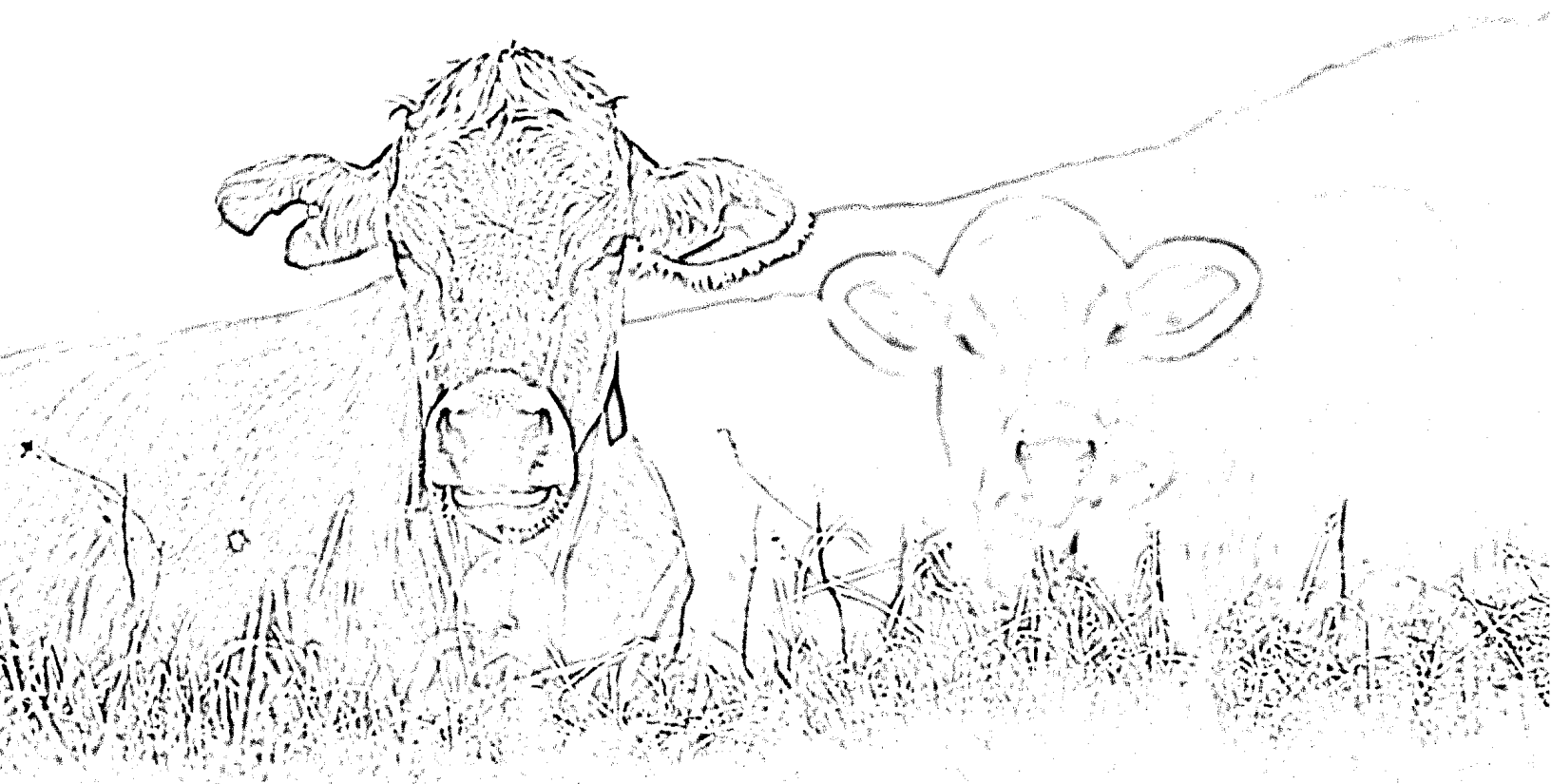
¼ tsp Cumin seeds 🌶️
1 cup Ayurvedic buttermilk 🍯
1 tbsp Chopped cilantro leaves 🌿
⅛ tsp Salt 🧂

*Ideal for acidic digestion
 or when you feel excessive
 hunger or heat.*



BONUS CONTENT

The Dairy Question





The Dairy Question

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)

The alarming increase of conditions associated with dairy consumption—allergies, inflammation, autoimmune disorders, osteoporosis, arthritis, heart disease, cancer—has stirred numerous discussions and produced research resulting in controversial and contradictory opinions. It is really confusing, especially when a strong theory is aggressively challenged a few years later. To me, the Ayurvedic perspective makes the most sense, and I will discuss this here since I do use dairy products in some of my recipes as a good vegetarian source of protein. Why? For a number of reasons.

Protein is built from amino acids found in two dietary categories: vegetable and animal. In terms of molecular structure, the three-dimensional shape of animal protein differs from that of vegetable protein; from a biochemical perspective, this means the two types of protein behave differently in the human body. Deficiency in even one of the essential amino acids results in degradation of the body's proteins (bone, muscle, enzymes, cells). Such deficiency often leads to high heat or an acidity imbalance, especially in the bones and muscles. Sensitive teeth and receding tooth enamel are symptoms of such imbalance.

Complete proteins are best supplied through food daily, and therefore we need to include both vegetable and animal protein in our daily meals. Legumes, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and certain vegetables are excellent sources of vegetable protein. The only source of animal protein for lacto-vegetarians is dairy products like milk, yogurt, and fresh cheese. Therefore, especially if you are a vegetarian, yes, you do need dairy in your diet. I followed a vegan diet for a while and can sympathize with the choice to abstain from any kind of animal products, be it because of allergies or ethical reasons. However, staying balanced on a vegan diet can be challenging, but it is achievable with effort.

"Ayurveda calls milk 'ambrosia,' the food of the gods."

WHY ARE DAIRY ALLERGIES SO COMMON TODAY?

(from an Ayurvedic perspective)

1. Poor practices in conventional dairy production
2. Weakened digestive system
3. Improper dairy consumption

To learn more nuances about milk, refer to the Milk Glossary on [page 38](#).



ARE HUMANS SUPPOSED TO DRINK THE MILK OF ANOTHER ANIMAL?

One of the eternal laws of nature is that one living being is food for another. We human beings are naturally omnivores, eating both plants and animals, and compared to other omnivorous species, we're even more versatile in what we can eat because of our ability to cook, which makes food easier to digest.

More than five thousand years ago, the Indian sages who wrote the *Vedas* stated that grains, fruits, vegetables, and milk are the recommended ingredients in the diet for an enlightened human. Today many people in India still consider the cow holy and take care of her as part of their family. In Vedic culture, the cow is regarded as our mother because she generously gives six to seven gallons of milk daily. That's a lot of milk, way more than her calf can drink! Once the calf has drunk to its heart's content, humans have to empty the cow's udder (or else she would die) and put the milk to use. That was the understanding and practice in cultures throughout the world (not only India) for centuries.

Now, whether consuming dairy is good for you personally is another question. For many people today, it isn't. In this case, we have to follow the law of common sense.

History has proven that milk can be safe to consume for millions of people; people have thrived with dairy products for thousands of years. We can't ignore this fact. But why are so many people today having problems with it? And why are dairy allergies so common today but were hardly spoken of fifty years ago?

From an Ayurvedic perspective, there are three main reasons: 1) poor practices in conventional dairy production, 2) our weakened digestive systems, and 3) improper dairy consumption.

Research supports the opinions of many holistic health practitioners: conventional milk produced in the last few decades has caused a rise in dairy intolerance. Even without the research, it is common sense to me. The living conditions at factory dairy farms are far different from the cow's natural habitat. Instead of happily grazing in the fields, the cows are forced to live in confinement and ingest pesticide-loaded

grains, antibiotics, and synthetic growth hormones; the cows are treated harshly and never have the space to properly bond with their calves—all these ways of mistreating a cow affect the quality of her milk. Such milk is certainly harmful, as is clearly evident from the numerous medical studies on conventional milk consumption. Please note that most, if not all, research on dairy consumption has been conducted on conventional milk only.

Many people turn to a vegan diet not only for health reasons but because they do not want to support the cruel and non-ecological practices of conventional farming. Unfortunately, wherever there is commercialization and a profit-based economy, unethical exploitation is inevitable. This holds true in almost every aspect of life, not just in cow's milk production.

Simply abstaining from cow's milk by a mere number of people is more of a reactive approach that will not likely have much impact in helping the suffering cows. A more effective and lasting solution would be to promote cow protection through positive education. Fortunately, compassionate farms do exist all over the world—even though small in number, they set a wonderful example of sustainable agriculture and the sought-after loving care that our animal friends and Mother Earth deserve.

Lactose intolerance also causes problems with dairy consumption. One is unable to digest lactose when their gut does not release a sufficient quantity of the lactase enzyme. If you are lactose intolerant by birth, there is not much you can do about it. Most people, however, develop this intolerance over time: the digestive system weakens because of so many reasons—consuming low-quality milk in the wrong way, stress, an unnatural lifestyle, to name a few; sometimes genetic predisposition plays a role. The large intestine gradually loses its ability to release enough lactase to fully digest the lactose; the semi-digested lactose begins to putrefy in the colon and turns into toxins that then are reabsorbed in the body, harming the immune system. I was able to clear this type of lactose intolerance with consistent SV Ayurvedic and Nambudripad's Allergy Elimination Techniques (NAET) treatments.



Three Rules for Proper Milk Consumption

Milk is the starting form of dairy from which all other forms of dairy are transformed, such as yogurt, cheese, butter, buttermilk, or ghee. Here I will focus on milk.

Ayurveda calls milk "ambrosia," but when consumed in the wrong way, it can turn into poison for the body. Drinking milk in the wrong way will sooner or later lead to allergies or inflammation. To make milk the least harmful and get its ambrosial benefits, there are three factors to consider: quality, compatibility, and consumption.

"When consumed in the wrong way, milk can turn into poison for the body."

QUALITY: Not All Milk Is the Same

Choose the best quality dairy whenever possible: *Ahimsa*, raw, whole, organic, from grass-fed cows. Since this quality is rather difficult to find, you can always search for the next best: organic, whole, nonhomogenized; try to stick to organic and whole milk at all costs. Many of us get negative reactions from eating conventional dairy. Honestly, if I had to choose between consuming conventional dairy and avoiding dairy completely, I'd choose the latter. Conventional dairy is just too unnatural for our bodies.

COMPATIBILITY: Mixing Milk with Other Foods

Milk only combines well with foods of sweet taste, such as grains, nuts, and dates. To protect your digestion, avoid mixing milk or cream in either an individual dish or in a meal with any of the following: sour foods, salt, meat, fish, radishes, bananas, other raw fruits, nightshade vegetables, sesame seeds, cheese, or yogurt.

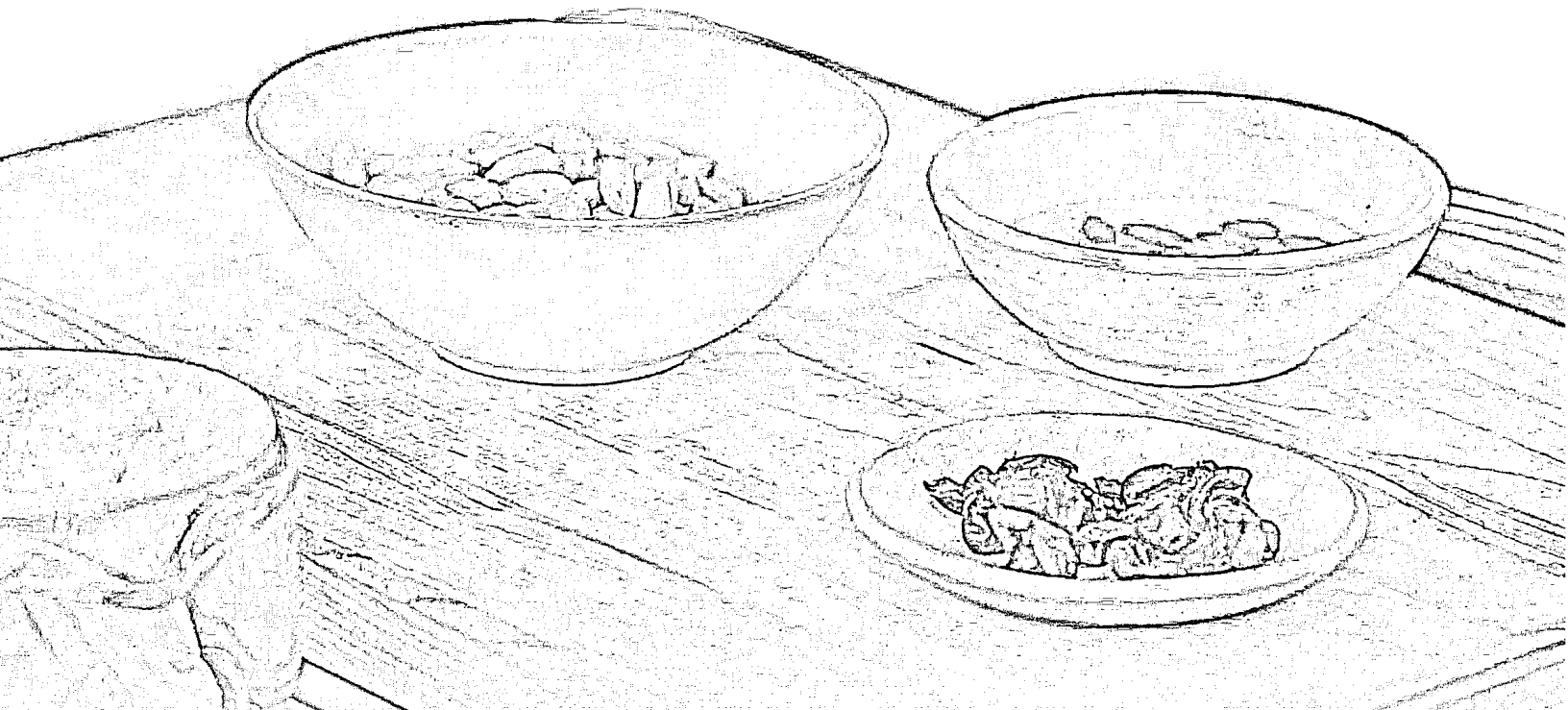
CONSUMPTION: How and When You Eat It

By nature, milk is heavy to digest and therefore more likely to cause congestion and phlegm. Drinking cold-out-of-the-fridge milk makes it extra clogging. If you wish to drink cool milk, boil it first and then cool it to room temperature. You can further limit milk's phlegm-increasing tendencies by boiling it for five minutes with appropriate whole spices, such as fennel, cloves, green cardamom, and cinnamon.



3.5

Almond Milk





Almond Milk

I've taught this recipe to thousands of people and not a single student could restrain their amusement and joy: "Wow! Really, it's that easy?"

Making almond milk is quick and uncomplicated. It takes less time to make it at home than to go buy it at the store. If you have been drinking boxed almond milk, you'll taste a big difference with your fresh, homemade version. It's simple; don't panic at the lengthy directions below. I just want to give you all the practical, time-saving tips I can. I guarantee that after milking your almonds a couple of times, making your own almond milk will become second nature, and you will never need to look at the recipe again.

"Wow! Really, it's
that easy?"

NUT AND SEED MILK PROPORTIONS TABLE

1 cup Raw Nuts or Seeds	Soak in 3 cups of water for	Blend with water	Strain Through a Bag
Almonds	8 hours	3 cups	Yes
Cashews	8 hours	3½ cups	No
Hazelnuts	6 hours	3 cups	Yes
Walnuts	6 hours	3 cups	Yes
Sunflower seeds	4 hours	3 cups	Yes
Pumpkin seeds	4 hours	3 cups	Yes



Almond Milk

Use only raw almonds (ideally unpasteurized), not roasted or salted. Soaking is essential because it releases the digestive enzymes and makes the rich protein and fats of the almonds much easier to digest. You do not need a high-power blender for this recipe; even the cheapest blender works. Once I had no other option but to make almond milk with an immersion blender and it worked; it just took longer.

Reflective Question

1. In what ways do you usually eat almonds (i.e., alone, in a recipe, skins peeled, the milk, the pulp/meal?) Are they roasted, pasteurized, or truly raw?



THE HEALING BENEFITS OF ALMONDS

Ayurveda lists almonds as the best of all nuts and describes them as sweet, heating, and Vata alleviating. Soaking the almonds makes them tridoshic. Almonds help

- nourish the brain,
- support the male reproductive system,
- restore energy and vitality,
- nourish deeply during pregnancy, and
- strengthen the bones.





ALMOND MILK

Yield 3 cups **Prep** 5 minutes
Soak 8 hours

1. Place the almonds in a bowl, jar, or other container and cover with cold water, making sure there is at least 2 to 3 inches of water above the almonds. Refrigerate and soak for 8-12 hours. Refrigerating the almonds protects them from fermenting; you may keep soaking the almonds in the fridge for up to 4 days; just make sure to change the water every day.
2. Drain the nuts and rinse them well. (Peeling the almonds at this point is optional; see Notes below.) Place them in a blender. Add the water and optional salt. (The salt brings out the almond flavor but you may omit it.)
3. Blend on high until the nuts are completely broken down; the amount of time this takes depends on the blender, but it should take no more than 1 minute.
4. Place the nut milk bag over a bowl, pour the mixture through a corner of the bag (layered cheesecloth also works, but it's harder to clean), and squeeze out as much milk as possible. It's a good exercise for your hands!
5. To store, place the milk in an airtight container and refrigerate for up to 3 days. Shake well before use.

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)

INGREDIENTS: GF, DF

1 cup Raw almonds 
3 cups Spring or filtered water
pinch Salt (optional) 

NOTES

The remaining almond pulp is good stuff; do not discard it. But how should you use it? Be creative: mix into oatmeal, supplement or substitute in a cookie dough, sprinkle atop a salad, or whisk into a dressing. If you don't need it immediately, here are some ways to store it:

- Cover and refrigerate for up to 2 days.
- Freeze for up to 1 month.
- Right away, dehydrate at 95°F until completely dry, and store in an airtight container. This method gives it a long shelf life. You can use it to make sprouted almond meal or almond flour.



3.6

Coconut Milk



Coconut Milk

In my earlier years of cooking, I never bought coconuts from the grocery store because I didn't know how to handle them. Opening a can of coconut milk seemed so much easier. But once I tasted freshly made coconut milk, I could not believe the difference—its bursting sweet aroma filled the room, and its white creaminess emanated vitality. I was converted. Not only does fresh coconut milk taste better but all its vitamins and minerals are intact—something canned coconut milk lacks.

**"Coconut is
considered a fruit."**



THE HEALING BENEFITS OF COCONUT

Coconut is highly nutritious and rich in fiber, good fats, vitamins, and minerals. From an Ayurvedic point of view, coconut is sweet, heavy, fatty, and cooling and is most balancing for the Pitta and Vata doshas (in the summer).

If you experience symptoms of Kapha imbalance, such as weight gain, congestion, bronchitis, or poor circulation, then it is best to reduce the consumption of coconut products until you restore your balance.



Coconut Milk

You can make coconut milk from mature coconuts (with the brown hard shell), but my preference is to use young (Thai) coconuts (with the green shell) because their "meat" makes a creamier and stronger flavored milk. The basic method is this: open the coconut, drain and reserve the water, scoop out the meat, and blend it with water. This process is a bit tricky because each coconut is different, and you never know how much coconut meat you will get until you open it. That's why I usually buy at least one extra coconut, just in case the other is a bit short on meat.

Reflective Question

1. Which coconut product do you use the most in your cooking, and how?



THE HEALING BENEFITS OF COCONUT

These are just a few of the benefits of coconut described by ancient and modern researchers:

- prevents heart disease
- nourishes the brain
- balances blood sugar
- enhances the immune system,
- promotes healthy hair and complexion
- has antibacterial and antiviral properties
- relieves and eliminates hemorrhoids



COCONUT MILK

Yield 1½ cups per young coconut (varies depending on how meaty the coconut is)

Prep 10 minutes

INGREDIENTS: GF, DF

1 Young (Thai) coconut 🌴
1 cup Spring or filtered water

OPENING THE COCONUT:

1. Tilt the coconut to one side (with the pointed tip up), and using a sharp knife, shave off the top husk, exposing the inner shell.
2. With the square corner of the knife's blade (by the handle), pierce the exposed coconut shell and begin tapping and going around in a circle—almost like opening a can—until you're able to open the "lid."
3. Strain the coconut water into a bowl. Save the water and drink it as soon as you can! It is the best electrolyte drink on earth!
4. Gently scoop out the coconut meat with a metal spoon or a scooper. Clean off any small bits of brown fibrous skin or coconut shell that remain attached to the meat.

MAKING THE COCONUT MILK:

1. Blend the coconut meat with the water until smooth. Check the consistency; if it's too thick, add more water. Your coconut milk is now ready to use in recipes.
2. Coconut milk will stay fresh for up to 3 days when it is stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)

NOTES

Make sure the coconut is not moldy and its water does not taste sour.

Do not cook with coconut water or coconut milk made with coconut water—it turns sour and becomes unhealthy.

A COOLING SUMMER FOOD

Because coconut is so cooling, summer is the best season to enjoy it. Drinking a glass of fresh coconut water in the morning will help your body withstand the day's heat.



Conclusion

This concludes Part three of *An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking*. Thank you again for joining me and learning how to prepare essential cooking staples at home. Their applications are countless—be creative and have fun as you incorporate them into a variety of recipes.

In Part four of this series, I will discuss the importance of cooking with spices. I will also show you different ways to cook with them using some of the staples from this class. See you there.

Reflective Question

1. Name two important takeaways you gained from this class.



SOURCES

INGREDIENTS AND PRODUCTS

See also under Divya's

[Chandika](#)

Vaidya R. K. Mishra's high-quality herbal formulations, skin care products, spice blends, and other culinary ingredients

[Pure Indian Foods](#)

Organic yellow split mung dal, chana dal, besan, cultured ghee, rose water, spices, and more

[High Vibe](#)

Organic Irish moss, high-quality olive oil, coconut oil, seaweed, and more

[Fandango Olive Oil](#)

Divya's favorite US brand of high-quality olive oil

[Jedwards International](#)

Yacon syrup, oils, and more

[Jovial Foods](#)

Organic einkorn (berries, flour, pasta), gluten-free flour blends

[Pratima Skin Care and Spa](#)

Ayurvedic skin care and spa treatments

[Life Spa](#)

Herbal supplements, articles, podcasts, and consultations by Dr. John Douillard, DC

[Gita Nagari Eco Farm and Sanctuary](#)

Cruelty-free dairy products and adopt-a-cow and organic CSA programs

[Real Milk](#) A source for finding places to purchase raw milk in the US and other countries

[Natren](#) High-quality yogurt starter and probiotics

[Home Grown Almonds](#) fresh, truly raw and unpasteurized almonds from a small farm in California

EQUIPMENT

[Ancient Cookware](#)

Traditional Ayurvedic clay pots and nontoxic natural cookware (such as tagine pots)

[Pleasant Hill Grain](#)

KoMo grain mills and flakers, spice grinders, and other kitchen appliances

BODY TYPE/DOSHA QUIZZES

[By Jai Dev Singh](#) or [By Dr. John Douillard, DC](#)

AYURVEDA KNOWLEDGE AND TRAINING

[Divya's](#)

Divya's classes, videos, certification program, recipes, and more

[SV Ayurveda](#)

Archived articles by Vaidya R.K. Mishra, recorded and live courses, recipes, and more

[The DINacharya Institute](#)

Masterclasses and training with Dr. Bhaswati Bhattacharya and other Ayurveda experts

[Dr. Marianne Teitelbaum](#)

Ten free 1+ hour-long classes and other videos on various health topics from the perspective of SV Ayurveda

[Life-Force Academy](#)

Classes and courses on yoga, dharmic business, Ayurveda for beginners, and more, led by Jai Dev Singh

AYURVEDIC CONSULTATIONS AND INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

[Dr. Marianne Teitelbaum, DC](#)

[Dr. Bhaswati Bhattacharya, MD](#)

[Dr. Gulnara Pugliese, MD](#)

[Dr. Robert E. Graham, MD](#)



APPENDIX: MILK GLOSSARY

Ahimsa: “Ahimsa” is a Sanskrit word with many connotations, but its root meaning is basically “nonviolence” or “without harm.” It is used to refer to milk from cows that are happy and loved and will never be killed. Such milk is rather rare to find because even the organic dairy farms send their cows to slaughter when they grow too old to produce milk. Nevertheless, throughout the world there are compassionate no-kill farms with Adopt-a-Cow programs.

Organic: Refers to milk from cows that are not treated with synthetic hormones and antibiotics nor fed GMO and pesticide-loaded grains.

Grass-fed/pasture-raised: Refers to milk from cows that are fed their natural food—grass and hay. A study conducted by the USDA has determined that grass-fed cows produce milk containing as much as five times the level of conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), a known anti-carcinogen, as cows managed in confined dairy housing.

Conventional: Refers to milk produced in factory farms where the cows are often mistreated, fed unnatural GMO grains (and even chicken beaks, junk food, or sawdust!), injected with hormones and antibiotics, and brutally slaughtered as soon as they stop giving milk.

Raw: Refers to unprocessed milk with all its nutrients, bacteria, and proteins preserved. Currently, ten US states allow the retail sale of raw milk. In the rest of the states, sales regulations vary. Check www.farmtoconsumer.org for details. Make sure the farm you’re getting your raw milk from follows proper farming and hygiene standards. Uncooked raw milk is best digested when it is still warm and frothy, its natural state immediately after milking the cow. Refrigerated raw milk is best digested when boiled, ideally with spices.

Pasteurized: Pasteurization is a process of heating milk at a high temperature to reduce its risk of contamination with pathogens and to extend its shelf

life. The process denatures milk proteins and makes casein (milk’s primary protein) difficult to digest. It also destroys lactase (the enzyme that helps us digest lactose), reduces the vitamin content in the milk, and makes its calcium difficult for a human body to absorb. Avoid the ultra-pasteurized milk.

Homogenized: Homogenization a process that breaks down (and damages) milk’s fat molecules and distributes them throughout the milk so that the cream is permanently mixed in, which ultimately extends its shelf life. These smaller fat globules make for a faster absorption in the gut, which shocks the digestive system and can lead to a greater chance of lactose intolerance and inflammation. Contrastingly, raw milk’s larger and differentiated fat globules hold nutrients and lactose, which causes a slower absorption in the gut because they’re more complex to break down.

Nonhomogenized: Also labeled as “cream on top” or “creamline”; refers to milk that is pasteurized but not homogenized; available in health food stores across the country.

Fortified: Refers to pasteurized milk with added vitamins A and D. These vitamins are often synthetic, and according to some natural health practitioners, the body treats them as toxins.

Whole: Refers to full-fat milk, closest to the way it comes from the cow.

Low-fat or skim (nonfat): Refers to milk that is processed to reduce or eliminate fat. Such milk is much harder to digest. A lot of the milk’s nutrients are lipid-soluble, so removing the fat from the milk also lowers its essential nutrient content. Regular consumption of low-fat milk is associated with osteopenia (thin bones) and osteoporosis (very frail bones).

ADDITIONAL NOTES:



An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking

Part 4

Cooking with Spices

BY DIVYA ALTER



Contents

For easy navigation, click on the heading to bring you directly to that page

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How to Use This Workbook

This workbook is a companion to the video "Cooking with Spices", Part four of *An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking*. In it, you'll find a summary of the essential principles from each lesson. You'll also find detailed recipes for spice blends (masalas), condiments, and dishes that utilize various methods of cooking with spices.

Any text you see in [blue](#) is clickable—simply click on the text to be taken directly to that page in this workbook, or (if it is a reference to a company or organization) to the associated website. However, I encourage you to print the entire workbook before starting the class and follow along as you watch the videos and complete the learning activities. Alternatively, you can print the recipes individually as you plan to make them. It will also be handy to flip through the workbook pages later on as you review key concepts, take notes or reflect on various topics.

Many people are unfamiliar with the diverse world of herbs and spices that are frequently used in Ayurvedic cooking. From smelling to grinding to tasting to receiving their healing properties, herbs and spices can be quite the welcomed sensory experience. Learning all of their properties can feel like a lot, but you don't have to memorize it all at once. I encourage you to start by becoming familiar with the four super-spices, or whichever ones intrigue you most right now. Use the information in these lessons and this workbook to propel you into deeper learning and knowing.

On [page 30](#), you will find more information on my cookbooks, blog, culinary products, and special offers.

Now, let's get into it.

"Always postpone a bad habit, and never delay a good one."

-VAIDYA KAMLESH MISHRA

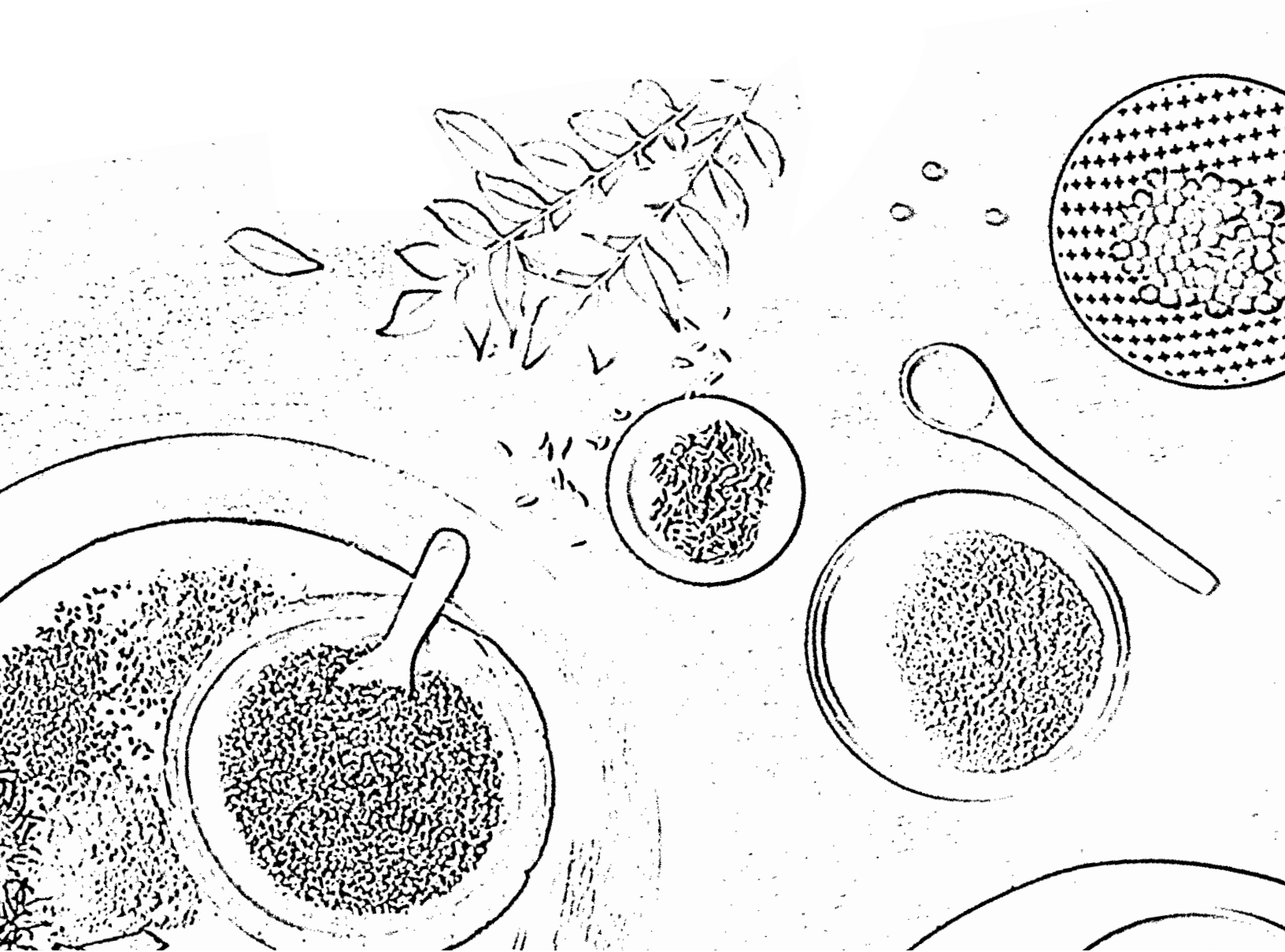
Reflective Questions

Scattered throughout the workbook are Reflective Questions, which appear in boxes (like this one). These questions prompt you to integrate a lesson or concept into your personal experience, thereby making it more applicable to you. They are optional, and you may answer them to any degree and in a variety of ways: mentally, typed in the "Notes" tab on the masterclass portal, or handwritten in a journal. They also make a great discussion prompts for conversation with friends and family.



4.1

Why Cook with Spices?





Spices

In regard to the categorization of foods for daily consumption versus medicinal occasional use, spices fall in-between the two. They are very medicinal and potent, but we can use them daily in small amounts.

Spices and herbs don't just contribute flavor to our palate; they are a necessary part of a healthy diet. Their chemical makeup can enhance or slow down our metabolic processes. Therefore, in Ayurvedic cooking, we cook with spices to maintain our optimal metabolic rate, as well as to pacify our emotions and clear mental fog. And, of course, to make our food delicious!

The ancient doctors called spices and herbs "vehicles" equipped with blueprints for healing. The minute they enter the body, they start to clean up the digestive tract, paving the way for nutrients to reach their final destination. Spices also help the body eliminate unwanted wastes in a timely manner. If you're experiencing symptoms of imbalance in any of the above-mentioned areas of your health, one reason could be that you are not eating food with sufficient spices.

SPICE DEFICIENT SYMPTOMS

You might be spice deficient if you experience any of the following:

- feeling tired or bloated after finishing a meal
- get constipated
- crave sweets at the end of a meal
- overeat because you don't feel satiated
- feel sluggish

Try cooking with spices in the ways I demonstrate in this course to see if that helps.

Reflective Question

1. Are you spice deficient? What symptoms do you have that lead you to believe this?



Spice Selection

HIGH QUALITY SPICES

Select high-quality spices so that you can benefit from their medicinal effects. Purchase non-irradiated and, if possible, organically grown herbs and spices. You can find them in health food stores, Indian grocery stores, and specialty spice shops. See some suggestions for online stores on [page 31](#).

WHOLE SPICES

Buy whole spices as much as possible because they retain the greatest amount of flavorful essential oils in this form. Whole spices also ensure purity (many ground spices are mixed with unwanted powdered "fillers"). If you need ground spices, grind the whole spices in a mortar and pestle or a small electric grinder just before cooking with them.

Spice Storage

PROTECT YOUR SPICES

Herbs and spices are sensitive to fluctuations in temperature, moisture, and light.

Purchase herbs and spices in small quantities, and store them in airtight containers (glass is better than plastic) in a cool and dry pantry, cupboard, or closet. Don't keep them on the kitchen counter or on an open shelf above or next to the stove.

IDEAL SPICE STORAGE CONDITIONS

- temperatures that are not too high and not too low
- lower humidity
- away from light (indoor or natural)



Spice Shelf Life

WHOLE SPICES

If you store your herbs and whole spices properly, they will stay good and potent for up to one year.

GROUND SPICES

Store your freshly ground spice blends properly and enjoy them within a month or two from grinding. One exception is black peppercorns—because they quickly oxidize and become acidic upon grinding, it's best to grind them using a peppermill just before you cook or garnish with them.

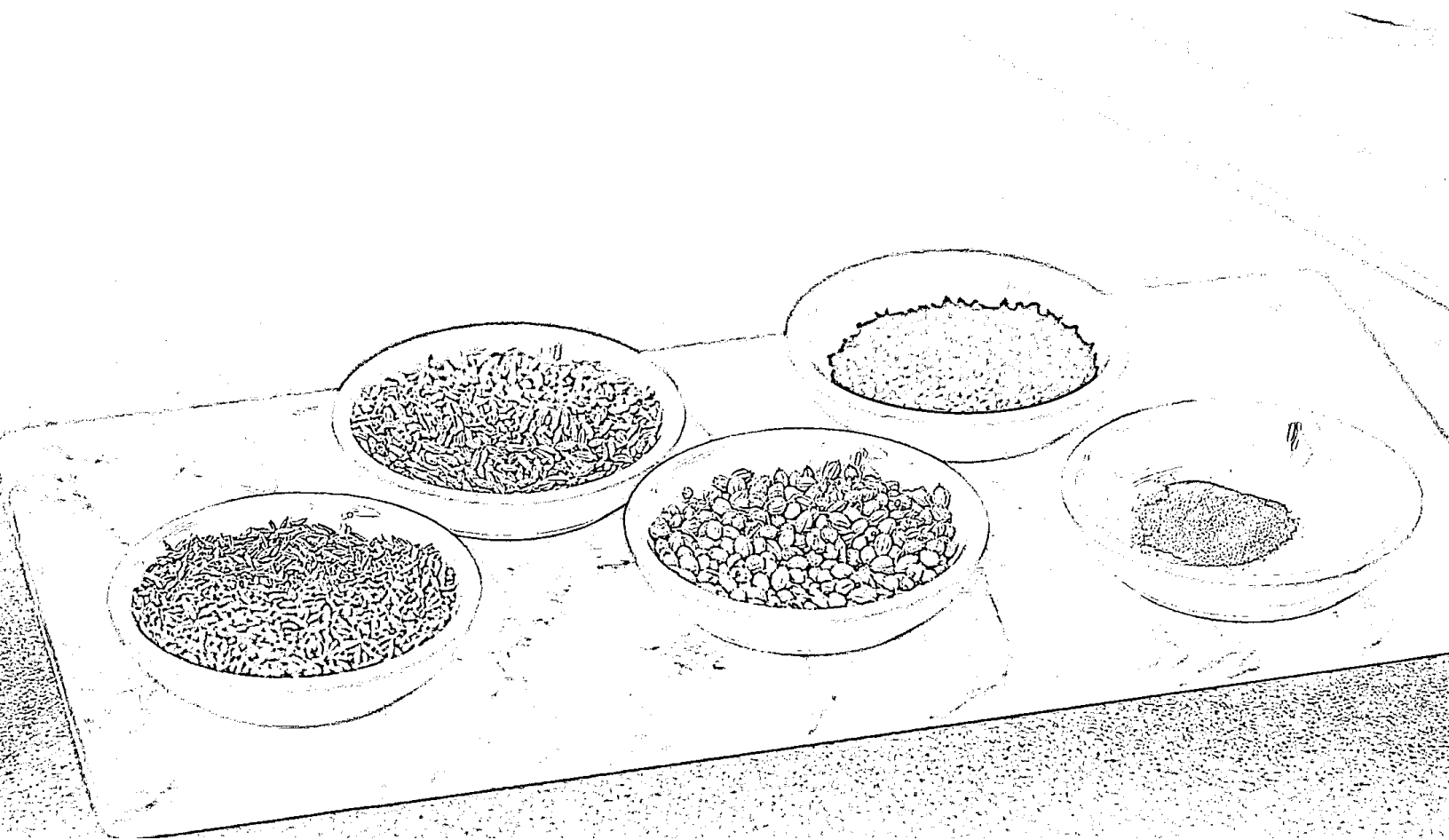
Reflective Questions

1. Do you pay attention to the quality and origin of a spice when buying it? If yes, why is this important to you? If no, what benefits do you think you'd gain by doing so?
2. Do an inventory of your spice cabinet. Compost or throw away any that have expired or you know you will never use. Then set aside any that you wish to transfer to a better storage container (and do that soon!). Finally, make a list of ones you wish to purchase in the near future (new-to-you or higher quality of one you already have).



4.2

Spice Blends (Masalas)





Spice Blend Preparation

Preparing your own spice blends is fun and very healing. It's pretty easy, too. A spice blend, also known as "masala" in Hindi, is a mix of two or more ground spices. You can use different types of grinding tools to make your masalas. Hand tools, such as a mortar and pestle or the traditional Indian stone block and rolling pin (*til patra* in Hindi) are the best choices because grinding with them does not overheat the spices, thus preserving their *prana* and medicinal effects.

In our modern life, many of us use electric spice or coffee grinders. I use both—hand and electric—but when grinding with a fast-rotating electric machine, I pulse the spices in four to five second intervals rather than grinding nonstop for one minute—this protects the spices from overheating.

See [page 31](#) for a source to purchase traditional hand grinding tools.

"A spice blend, also known as 'masala' in Hindi, is a mix of two or more ground spices."

Reflective Questions

1. Choose a spice I described in the video lesson that you are unfamiliar with, and list some of its healing benefits. Is it a cooling or a heating spice? What foods or dishes will it go well with?
2. Select five spices from your spice cabinet (some ground and some whole). One at a time, open the lid, close your eyes, and smell deeply. Do this a few times and note your experience—how would you describe its aroma, the feeling it gives, any memories it evokes?
3. Which style of spice grinding equipment intrigues you most? Which one will you try first?



AN OVERVIEW OF THE METABOLIC EFFECTS AND HEALING PROPERTIES OF SPICES & HERBS

These are the herbs and spices I commonly use in my cooking. This is not an inclusive list of their many healing properties, but it will give you a great idea of how to begin using them medicinally.

Spice or Herb	Predominant Taste(s)	Metabolic Effect	Healing Properties
Ajwain	Pungent	Very heating	Increases appetite, stimulates digestion, eliminates toxins, relieves congestion, clears the taste buds, "fertilizes" (for friendly bacteria growth)
Asafoetida	Pungent	Very heating	Increases appetite, aids digestion, decreases abdominal pain and bloating
Basil	Sweet, pungent, astringent	Slightly heating	Relieves coughs, colds, headaches, fevers; improves immunity; opens circulatory channels
Bay leaf	Sweet, pungent, astringent	Slightly Heating	Improves digestion, decreases abdominal pain and bloating, diuretic
Black pepper	Pungent	Heating	Improves digestion, opens circulatory channels, eliminates toxins, liquefies hard mucus, enhances oxygenation in the channels of the brain
Black seed (kalonji)	Pungent	Heating	Supports digestion, enhances flavor and absorption, reduces mucus and bloating, antibacterial, purifies uterus, regulates hormonal system
Cardamom (black)	Pungent	Heating	Improves sluggish digestion, enhances protein metabolism, eliminates toxins
Cardamom (green)	Sweet, pungent	Cooling	Calms nerves, aids digestion, freshens mouth, helps with protein metabolism and chronic cough
Cassia leaf (<i>tej patta</i>)	Sweet, pungent	Slightly heating	Improves circulation, relieves coughs and colds, helps with glucose and carbohydrate metabolism
Chile, green Thai	Pungent	Very heating	Improves circulation, decreases congestion, burns toxins
Cilantro	Sweet, astringent	Cooling	Reduces acidity, improves digestion, heavy-metal detoxifier, diuretic
Cinnamon	Sweet, pungent	Heating	Improves circulation, relieves coughs and colds, helps with glucose and carbohydrate metabolism
Clove	Pungent	Slightly heating	Improves digestion, reduces toxins and congestion, soothes coughs, opens circulatory channels



Spice or Herb	Predominant Taste(s)	Metabolic Effect	Healing Properties
Coriander	Sweet, astringent	Cooling	Improves digestion, offsets spicy foods, relieves gas, is a diuretic, calms the mind, binds toxins in the blood, protects from acidity
Cumin	Pungent, astringent	Slightly heating	Stimulates digestion, eliminates toxins, relieves congestion, helps with absorption of nutrients, "fertilizes" (for friendly bacteria growth)
Curry leaf	Sweet, astringent	Cooling	Supports liver detox, purifies the blood, manages cholesterol and blood sugar, cleanses the cellular system
Dill	Bitter, astringent	Cooling	Relieves spasms; stops growth of various bacteria, yeast, and mold; soothes colic in babies
Fennel	Sweet, astringent	Cooling (in smaller amounts; heating in large amounts)	Regulates digestive fire—increases weak fire and decreases overly strong fire, promotes breast milk flow, estrogenic
Fenugreek	Pungent, bitter	Heating	Promotes breast milk flow, strengthens bones, regulates sugar and fat metabolism, supports the stamina of the liver and pancreas
Ginger	Pungent	Very Heating	Improves digestion and circulation, breaks down fat in the stomach, relieves constipation, reduces mucus and inflammation, antiviral, antibacterial
Mace	Pungent, astringent, sour	Heating	Kindles digestive fire
Mint	Sweet	Cooling	Soothes the stomach, improves digestion
Mustard seed	Pungent	Very heating	Improves sluggish digestion, clears sinuses
Nutmeg	Sweet, astringent, pungent	Slightly heating	Calms the mind, promotes sleep, relieves coughs and colds, decreases morning sickness, stops diarrhea, supports men's energy, increases absorption in the colon
Oregano	Pungent	Very heating	Antibacterial, antifungal, antiviral, calms the nervous system
Parsley	Astringent, pungent	Slightly heating	Blood purifier, stimulates the bowels, is a diuretic, reduces inflammation in kidneys, antifungal, builds blood, stimulates brain activity



Spice or Herb	Predominant Taste(s)	Metabolic Effect	Healing Properties
Rose buds/ petals	Sweet	Cooling	Soothes the heart, balances the mind, slows down aging, promotes glowing skin, rejuvenates the digestive tract, liver, and colon
Rosemary	Astringent, Sweet	Slightly Heating	Beneficial for headaches, eases menstruation, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, boosts immune system, improves blood circulation, helps digestion, prevents brain aging
Saffron	Sweet, astringent, bitter	Heating	Purifies blood, improves digestion, calms nerves, helps prevent Parkinson's disease, supports the heart
Thyme	Pungent	Heating	Soothes coughs, improves digestion, decreases gas
Turmeric	Bitter, pungent, astringent	Heating	Cleanses the liver, breaks down fat in the liver, improves digestion and immunity, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, adds luster to the skin, stops bleeding
Vanilla	Sweet, astringent	Cooling	Aphrodisiac, improves appetite



MY BALANCING SPICES

1. Circle your current state of digestion:

(if necessary, refer to Digestion Questionnaire on

[page 28](#) in Part 1 workbook)

Irregular | Sharp | Slow | Balanced

2. Circle the Corresponding Balancing Tastes:



Sweet



Sour



Salty



Pungent



Bitter



Astringent

Based on your answers above, fill in the table with the spices that will be balancing for you right now. Since the type of your digestion may change frequently, we recommend that you print several copies of this page so you can complete it as often as you feel a shift and need for clarity.

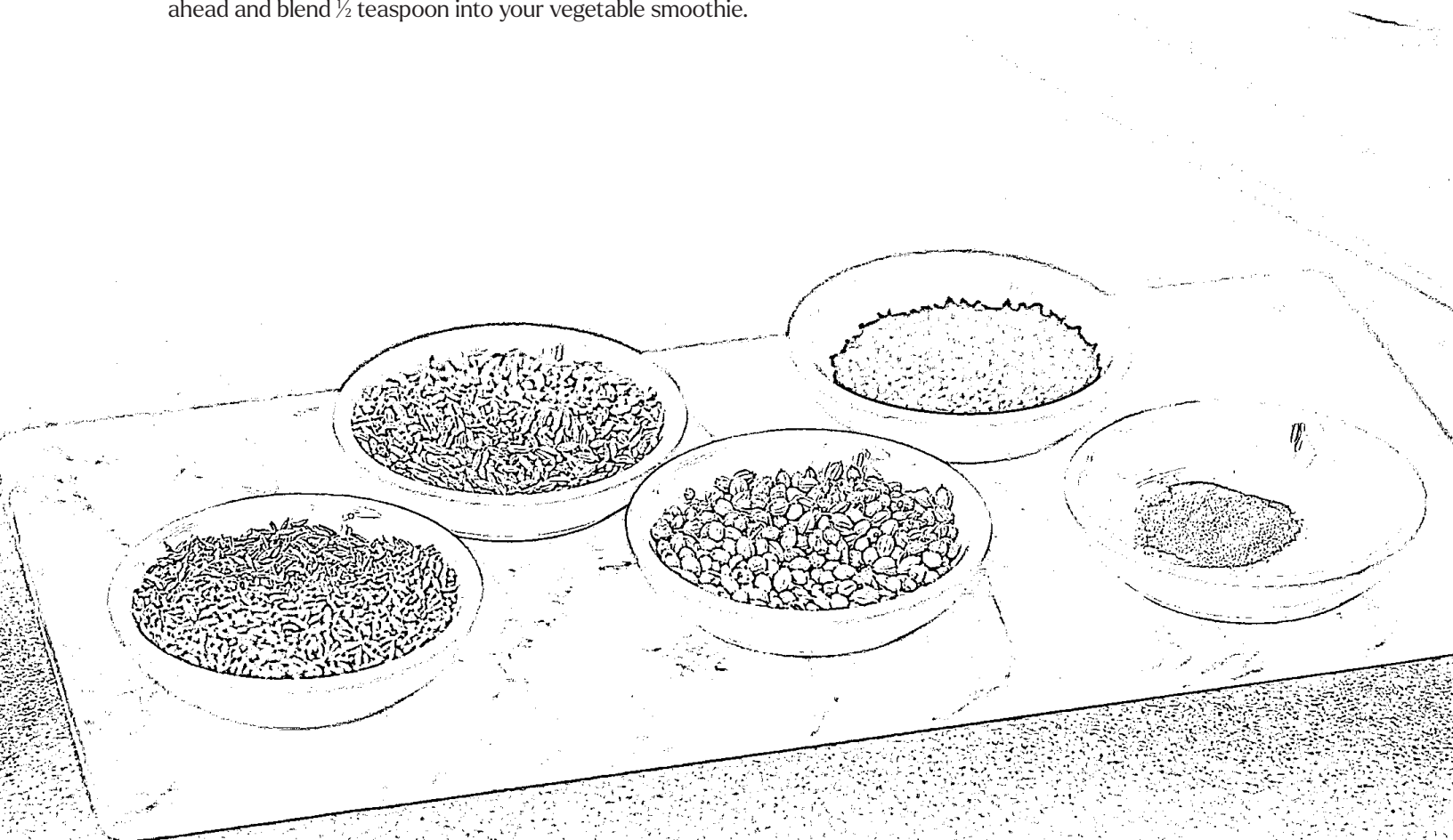
Spice or Herb	Predominant Taste(s)	Metabolic Effect	Healing Properties



4.3

Super Spice Masala

This masala is a good way to combine and cook with the four superspices. With its mild flavor and yellowish color, it is superb for gently incorporating more spices into your food. If you've never cooked or eaten with these four spices, start by adding a pinch or two of this masala in each meal. Gradually increase to $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon per person per meal. I like to take a small stash of the Superspice Masala when I travel and cannot cook for myself—I sprinkle a couple of pinches of it as a digestive aid on whatever savory food I eat. This blend goes well with any salty dish, such as soups, grains, vegetables, salads, legumes, kitchari, and buttermilk. If you are a kitchen adventurer, go ahead and blend $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon into your vegetable smoothie.



SUPER SPICE MASALA

Yield about ½ cup

1. Separately dry-toast each spice in a heavy skillet (cast-iron works well). The key is to keep the pan on low heat and to stir or shake almost constantly—this will toast the little seeds evenly without burning them. If you burn a spice, discard it and start again.
2. Start with the coriander seeds because they take longer to toast. The seeds will begin to darken and release their aroma; they are done when they darken to a golden brown color—this could take up to 5 minutes. Immediately transfer the toasted coriander to a dry bowl; repeat the same technique with the fennel seeds and then with the cumin seeds. Enjoy the aromatherapy as you toast.
3. Before you proceed with the turmeric, turn off the heat and let the pan cool for a minute. Turmeric is a very fine powder that can burn within seconds, so you need to toast it at an even lower heat. Add the turmeric to the slightly cooled pan and stir constantly. Within seconds, its color will turn deep orange—this is when it's done. Transfer immediately to the bowl of toasted spices. If the turmeric turned brown, you have burned it and all of its great properties—just discard it and start again.
4. Let the toasted spices cool down; transfer them to an electric grinder or spice mill and grind to a fine powder. Store in an airtight jar away from light.

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)



INGREDIENTS: GF. DF

- 2 tbsp** Coriander seeds 🌿
- 2 tbsp** Fennel seeds 🌿
- 1 tsp** Cumin seeds 🌿
- 1 tsp** Ground turmeric 🌿



4.4



Sweet Masala

The aroma of this spice blend is most charming—you'll probably find yourself opening the lid of its jar once in a while just to smell it. The fragrant yet not overpowering ingredients are excellent for breaking down carbs, sugars, and milk. Use this heavenly masala as the "secret ingredient" in sweet dishes such as cakes, muffins, cookies, smoothies, and oatmeal.

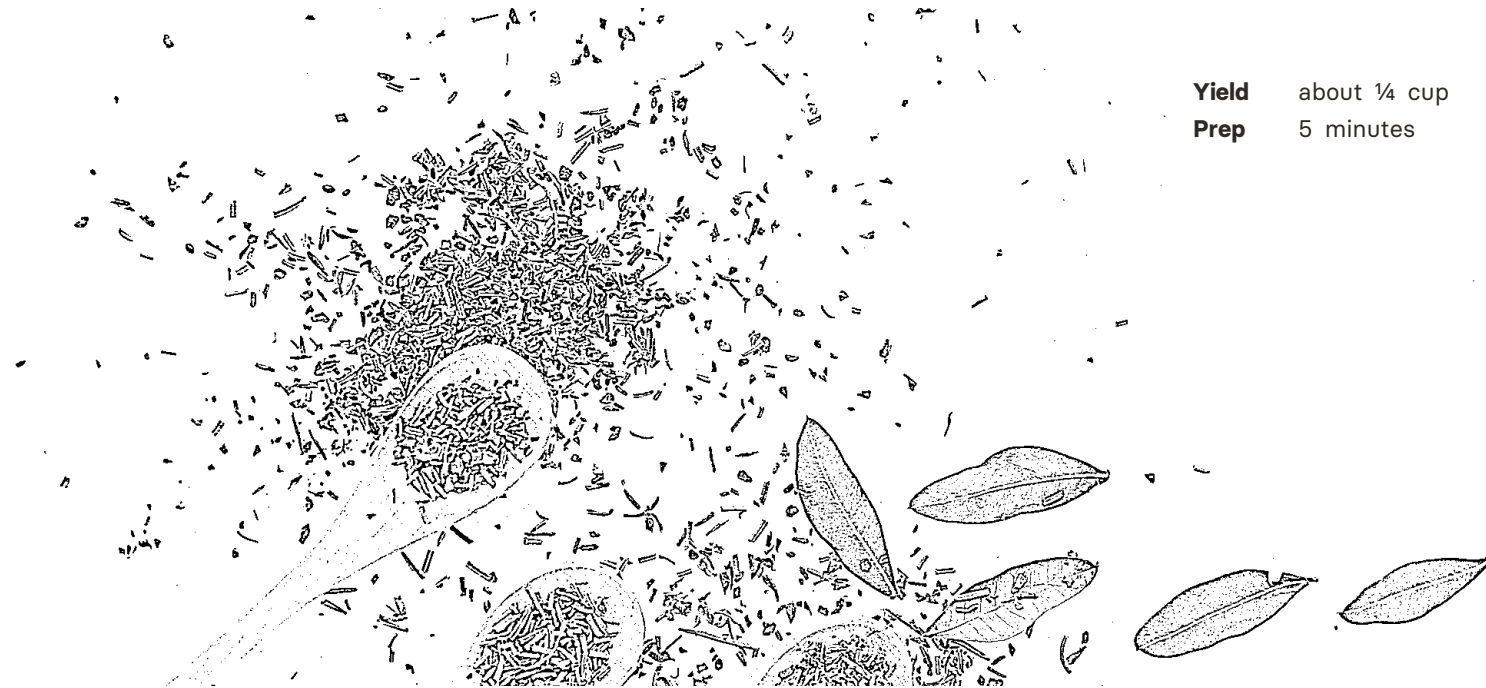
Place all the ingredients in an electric grinder or spice mill and grind to a fine powder. Store in an airtight jar away from light.

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)

INGREDIENTS: GF. DF

- 1 tbsp Coriander seeds
- 1 tbsp Fennel seeds
- 1 tbsp Dried rose petals or buds
- 1½ tsp Cinnamon granules or crushed cinnamon bark
- ¾ tsp Cardamom seeds (not pods)
- ¾ tsp Vanilla extract powder

Yield about ¼ cup
Prep 5 minutes





4.5








Digestive Masala

This masala will not only invigorate a savory dish with its captivating aroma but it will also make sure that no undigested residue is left behind in your gut. Kalonji seed, called "black seed" in the West, is one of the most researched spices today because it is highly effective and safe in addressing numerous chronic ailments such as hypertension, fungal infection, diabetes, and ulcers. Kalonji alone could be too hot for some people to handle; for this reason Vaidya R. K. Mishra created this synergistic blend to ensure a balance between the spices' cleansing and calming effects on digestion. Add Digestive Masala at the beginning of cooking savory dishes like soups, vegetables, or leafy greens.

Place all the ingredients in an electric grinder or spice mill and grind to a fine powder. Store in an airtight jar away from light.

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)

INGREDIENTS: GF. DF

- 2 **tbsp** Coriander seeds 
- 2 **tbsp** Fennel seeds 
- 2 **tsp** Cumin seeds 
- 2 **tsp** Kalonji seeds (a.k.a. black seed) 
- 1 **tsp** Ground turmeric 

Yield ¼ cup

Prep 5 minutes



Methods for Cooking with Spices

PASTE

(e.g., Creamy Spinach with Fresh Cheese, [page 14](#))

DRY TOASTING

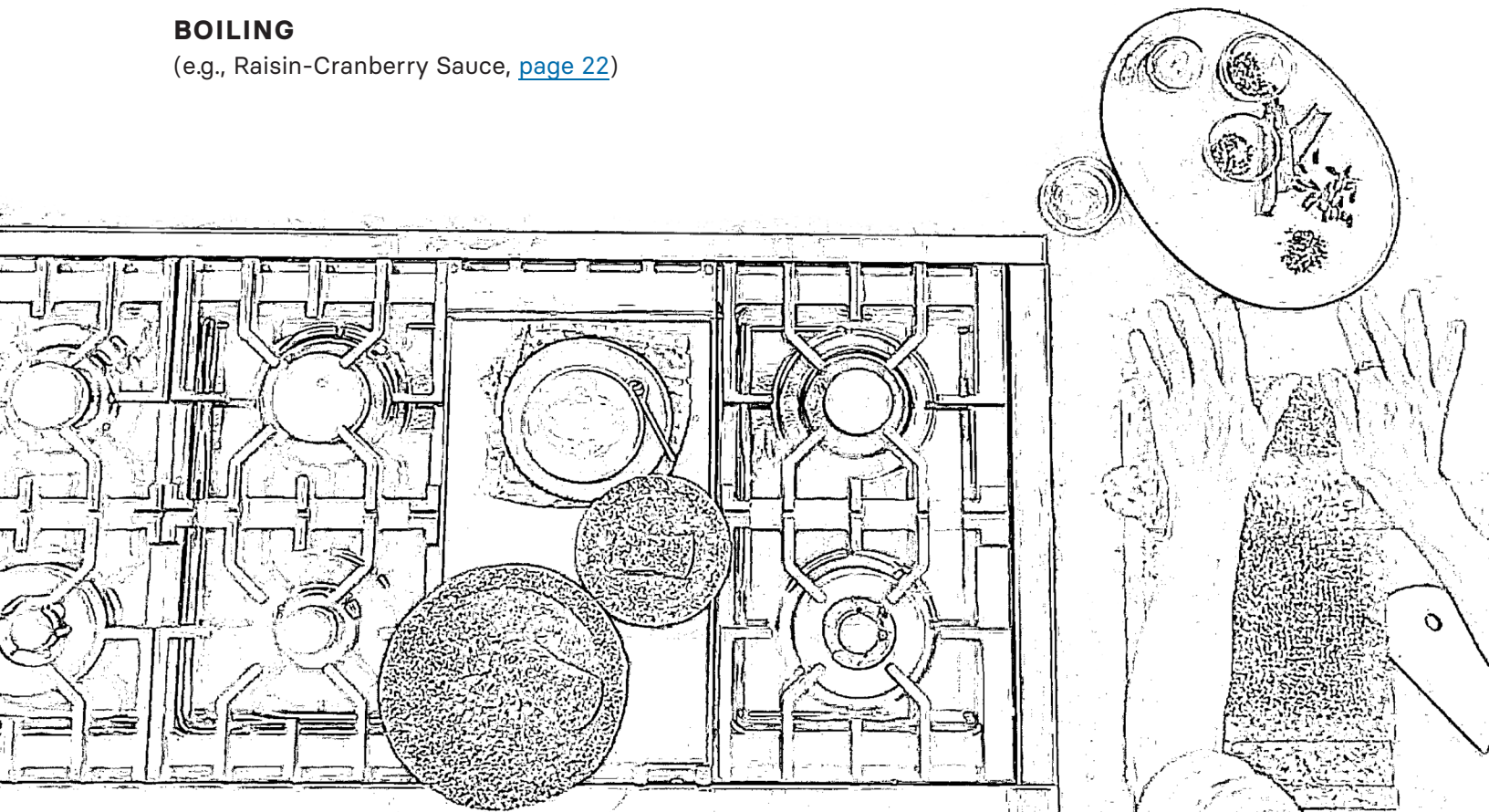
(e.g., Superspice Masala, [page 9](#) and Spiced Rice Pilaf [page 16](#))

TOASTING IN FAT

(e.g., Adzuki Bean & Red Lentil Patties, [page 18](#))

BOILING

(e.g., Raisin-Cranberry Sauce, [page 22](#))



Cooking with Spices

As with food, when we use herbs and spices, we have to consider two things:

PROPER COMBINATION

Which spices properly combine with others, and in what proportions?

This essential principle is based not only on layering flavors but on balancing one spice's action with another. For example, the cooling effect of fennel, coriander, cumin, cilantro, and green cardamom balances the heating energy of turmeric, ginger, or chiles, and vice versa. Get familiar with the spice combinations I use in my recipes. Once you grasp the principle, you can easily create your own signature spice blends.

PROPER PREPARATION

How should they be cooked, and in what medium?

Cooking makes the spices and herbs more easily available to our digestive system. Every spice has volatile organic compounds (VOCs)—they create the spices' different aromas. One secret of cooking with spices is to use cooking methods that protect their aroma and infuse their flavor into the food. The special nutrients of spices are mostly fat-soluble and water-soluble, which means it is important to use some oil or water in whatever you cook. The oil and water become the effective carriers for the spices' compounds. Additionally, exposing the spices to heat activates their inherent chemical properties, creating a molecular interaction between the spice and its medium (oil and water).

When you want to substitute dried herbs with fresh herbs, or vice versa, use this ratio:

1 teaspoon of
crumbled, dried herbs
=
3 teaspoons (1 tablespoon)
of minced, fresh herbs

Reflective Questions

1. Try following and making at least one of the meals I demonstrate cooking, and pay attention to:
 - the spices used
 - a new fact you learned about one of its spices
 - your experience of the overall seasoning, noting these adjustments for next time
2. Do you regularly garnish your meals? If so, with what and in what way do you prepare it? If no, does it intrigue you? Choose and prepare a garnish on your next meal



4.6

Creamy Spinach with Fresh Cheese

PALAK PANEER

Spinach (*palak*) with fresh cheese (*paneer*) is perhaps one of the most beloved North Indian dishes, served at practically every Indian restaurant. What many people don't notice is the heavy cream that is used in a lot of the common recipes for this dish. Ayurveda warns us that milk or heavy cream are incompatible with salt or sour foods—eating such combinations can cause skin disorders. That's why I replace the heavy cream in this recipe with "*paneer* cream," which I make by blending the leftover bits and pieces from cubing the *paneer* with a little water. This *paneer* cream lends this classic dish the comforting creamy consistency we all love so much, but without the side effects from the food incompatibility.

In this recipe, I also show you a different method of cooking with spices: toasting a spice paste in ghee. I use this method whenever I want the whole seeds and spices to remain "invisible" in the presentation of the final dish.














CREAMY SPINACH WITH FRESH CHEESE (PASTE METHOD)

Yield 2 servings **Cook** 10 minutes
Prep 10 minutes (with
 already made paneer)


- Using a spice grinder, powder the coriander, cumin, fenugreek, and turmeric. Add the ginger and 2 tablespoons of water and grind briefly, turning the spices into a paste.
- Heat the ghee in a 12-inch sauté pan over medium-low heat. Add the spice paste and toast for about 15 seconds, until it mixes well with the ghee. Fold in the spinach and gently turn it around (salad tongs are very convenient for turning greens), until most of the spinach wilts yet remains vibrant green, about 3 minutes. Add the paneer cubes and gently stir. If the ingredients look too dry, add a tablespoon of water. Continue to simmer uncovered for 2 to 3 minutes; the spinach should remain vibrant green.
- In the meantime, place the bits and pieces of paneer, the salt, and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup water in the spice grinder (no need to wash from Step 1) or a small blender. Blend until you achieve a smooth, heavy cream-like consistency.
- Fold the paneer cream into the cooking spinach and cheese and continue to simmer for another 5 minutes, allowing the cream to blend well with the ingredients and the paneer cubes to become very soft.
- Turn off the heat and leave the pan uncovered for a couple of minutes. Just take a moment and let your eyes bathe in the sight of the dark leafy greens and white paneer cubes smothered in a velvety pale-yellow cream while your nose enjoys the exuding and most captivating aroma!
- Fold in the lime juice. Serve hot, garnishing each serving with a pinch of black pepper.

From *Joy of Balance: An Ayurvedic Guide to Cooking with Healing Ingredients*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2022)

INGREDIENTS: GF

- 2 tsp** Coriander seeds 
- ¼ tsp** Cumin seeds 
- ¼ tsp** Fenugreek seeds 
- ¼ tsp** Ground turmeric 
- 1 tsp** Finely grated fresh ginger 
- 1 tbsp** Ghee or olive oil 
- 8 oz. (about 7 ½ cups)** Fresh spinach (washed, stemmed, and drained) 
- 6 oz.** Pressed paneer cheese (made from 6 cups of milk, page 9 in Part 3 workbook), cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cubes 
- 1 oz. (about 2 tbsp)** Paneer bits and pieces (the remains of cutting the paneer block into cubes) 
- ¾ tsp** Salt 
- 1 tsp** Lime juice (freshly squeezed) 

GARNISH

- pinch** Freshly ground black pepper, per serving 

NOTES

For Vata and Pitta Balancing: Enjoy as is.

For Kapha Balancing: Add 1 seeded and minced green Thai chile with the ginger in Step 1. Reduce the ghee or olive oil to 2 teaspoons.

Enjoy Creamy Spinach with Fresh Cheese in the cold season and in the summer; it might be too heavy for you in the spring.

DISH PAIRINGS

Rice, Flatbreads or Dal soup



4.7

Spiced Rice Pilaf

Pilaf (a.k.a. *pulao*) is a term that means fancy rice cooked with added ingredients, such as spices, vegetables, dried fruit, or nuts. It is delicious and flavorful enough to be eaten on its own, although I usually serve it with other dishes. For variety, try different types of nuts as a garnish.

This beautiful and aromatic yellow grain dish feels incredibly nourishing and satisfying. Cooking it will brighten your kitchen and uplift your mind.

Caution: Cooked rice grows spores within 30 minutes of cooling down, so it is important to serve it as soon as you prepare it. And don't reheat rice, as it can become a major cause for indigestion or food poisoning.






SPICED RICE PILAF (DRY TOASTING METHOD)


Yield 4 servings **Prep** 5 minutes
Cook 15 minutes

1. In a small sauté pan, boil 2 cups of water, then add the rice, 1 teaspoon of the ghee, salt, turmeric, and cloves. Once boiling again, cover, lower the heat to low, and simmer for 15 minutes.
2. In the meantime, heat a small frying pan over medium-low and add the remaining 2 teaspoons of ghee. Add the curry leaves and toast them until they are crispy. Add the almonds and toast them for a minute or so, until the almonds turn lightly golden in color. Fold in the masala, then turn off the heat.
3. Remove the whole cloves from the cooked rice and pour on the seasoned almonds. Cover the rice to let it set for 5 minutes. Before serving, fluff the pilaf with a fork. Garnish each serving with dill. Serve immediately.

INGREDIENTS: GF, DF

- 1 cup** Basmati or baby basmati rice (rinsed and well drained) 
- 1 tbsp** Ghee or coconut oil, divided 
- 1 tsp** Salt 
- ¼ tsp** Ground turmeric   
- 4** Whole cloves 
- 6** Fresh curry leaves 
- ¼ cup** Slivered almonds, pistachios, pine nuts or other chopped nuts 
- ½ tsp** Superspice Masala      
([page 9](#))

GARNISH

- 1 tbsp** Fresh chopped dill 

DISH PAIRINGS

Cooked vegetables
Lentil soups
Salads
Sauces

NOTES

For Vata and Pitta Balancing:

Enjoy as is.

For Kapha Balancing: Substitute red rice or quinoa for the basmati rice.



4.8

Adzuki Bean and Red Lentil Patties

As part of our Ayurvedic Nutrition and Culinary Training, Annie Mymokhod created this tasty recipe for her final project. When I first met Annie's family of two well-behaved teenagers and her kind and supportive husband, I was astonished by their love for healthy home-cooked food and family meals. Annie is very resourceful in creating appealing vegetarian versions of common "American" foods, keeping the familiar names yet following the Ayurvedic principles of compatibility and preparation. In her words, "My kids were my toughest judges, and when I presented them with this version of burgers, they were pleasantly surprised by how good they tasted! These burgers became an instant success with my family, and I am excited to share this recipe with you."

This recipe may seem time-consuming, but you could stage the steps over a few hours, have the mix ready, and panfry right before mealtime.







ADZUKI BEAN AND RED LENTIL PATTIES (TOASTING IN FAT METHOD)



Yield ten 2½-inch patties **Prep** 15 minutes
Soak 8 hours **Cook** about 90 minutes

- Place the adzuki in a small saucepan, add enough water to cover them by an inch, and bring to a boil over high heat. Cover with a tight-fitting lid, reduce the heat to low, and simmer for about 1 hour, until the beans are tender and fully cooked. Drain and set aside to cool.
- Meanwhile, place the red lentils and beets in another small saucepan and add ½ cups of water. Bring to a boil over high heat. Cover with a tight-fitting lid, reduce heat to low, and simmer for about 10 minutes, until the lentils start to break down and most of the water has been absorbed. Drain and set aside to cool, uncovered.
- Using a spice grinder, grind the coriander, cumin, peppercorns, and asafoetida to a fine powder. Heat the ghee in a medium pan over medium-low heat. Add the ginger and the spice blend, toast for about 10 seconds, then stir in the zucchini. Sauté for 5 minutes, until the zucchini softens and mixes well with the spices. Set aside uncovered.
- To make the patty mix: Add the cooked adzuki beans, red lentils and beets, spiced zucchini, quinoa flakes, parsley, dill, lime juice, and salt to a food processor. Pulse for 1 to 2 minutes, until all the ingredients are mixed well. The mixture should be fairly soft but not runny. If it is runny, add a little more quinoa flakes to firm it up. Keep in mind that the mix will continue to thicken as it rests on the counter or in the refrigerator.
- Heat a large cast-iron griddle over medium heat; brush the surface of the pan with a thin layer of ghee. Fill a ¼-cup measuring cup or scoop with the patty mix, quickly flop it onto the hot skillet, and shape it into a patty. Repeat with the remaining mix, fitting about 3 or 4 patties on the griddle at a time and adding more ghee as needed. Watch the ghee to make sure it does not smoke;

INGREDIENTS: GF, DF

- ½ cup** Adzuki beans  (soaked at least 8 hours, drained, and rinsed)
- ½ cup** Red lentils (washed and drained) 
- 1 small** Red beet  (peeled and very thinly sliced; about ½ cup)
- 1 tsp** Coriander seeds 
- ½ tsp** Cumin seeds 
- ¼ tsp** Black peppercorns 
- ⅛ tsp** Asafoetida 
- 2 tbsp** Ghee or olive oil 
- 2 tsp** Slivered fresh ginger 
- 1 medium** Zucchini  (cut into ¼-inch-thick half-moons; 1½ to 2 cups)
- 1 cup** Quinoa flakes (or a little more if batter is too soft) 
- 1 tbsp** Finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley 
- 1 tbsp** Finely chopped fresh dill 
- 1 tbsp** Lime juice (freshly squeezed) 
- ¼ tsp** Salt 
- About ¼ cup** Ghee or coconut oil for panfrying 

GARNISHES

- 2** Avocados (sliced into thin wedges; optional) 
- A few** Cilantro leaves 



ADZUKI BEAN AND RED LENTIL PATTIES (TOASTING IN FAT METHOD)

if it does, lower the heat or turn it off for a few seconds to cool down the pan a bit. Panfry the patties until their bottom side turns golden and crusty, 2 to 3 minutes. Brush the top, uncooked sides with a thin layer of ghee and then flip them, allowing the second side to cook until golden and firm, another 1 to 2 minutes. The patties should be soft yet holding together. They will firm up as they cool down.

6. Transfer the cooked patties onto a platter but do not stack them (otherwise they will lose their crispy exterior). Serve hot, with a side of sliced avocado and a sauce.

NOTES

For Vata Balancing: Enjoy as is.

For Pitta Balancing: Omit or reduce the asafoetida and black pepper.

For Kapha Balancing: In Step 3, reduce the ghee or olive oil to 1 tablespoon; increase asafoetida to ¼ teaspoon; add 1 seeded and minced green Thai chile with the other ingredients in Step 3.

DISH PAIRINGS

Goes well with Raisin-Cranberry Sauce ([page 28](#)) or a green tahini or carrot tahini sauce and a nice salad on the side.

You could also use them as party food by shaping smaller patties (1½- to 2-inches in diameter), topping them with a sauce and arranging them on a platter, or using them in a slider sandwich.

You can even prepare them as travel food!



Toasting Spices in Fat, The Sequence

First heat the fat on low to a temperature conducive to frying (but not smoking), then add spices in this sequence:

1. **largest pieces** (cinnamon stick or bark, cardamom pods, dried bay leaves)
2. **ground turmeric**—Vaidya R. K. Mishra taught me to add turmeric earlier than other ground spices because it needs a few extra seconds to activate
3. **whole seeds** (cumin, kalonji, ajwain, mustard)
4. **fresh spices** (ginger, chile, curry leaves)
5. **ground spices** (coriander, fennel, masalas)
6. **salt** (exception is when cooking leafy greens or zucchini—for them, add salt at the end because salt draws out water and can make your vegetables soggy)

Reflective Question

1. In what ways have you cooked with spices? Which of the methods that I show are new to you?



4.9

Raisin-Cranberry Sauce

This sauce looks and tastes like barbecue sauce (or even better), and it does not have any tomato in it! When blended together, the underlying smoky flavor of black cardamom and the supporting flavors of the rest of the spices perfectly round out the tart and astringent cranberries and sweet raisins. You can enjoy a color, consistency, and taste similar to that of tomato ketchup, making this sauce a nice substitute for those of us who prefer to avoid tomatoes in our diet.



RAISIN-CRANBERRY SAUCE (BOILING METHOD)

Yield 1½ cups
Prep 25 minutes

Cook 25 minutes

1. Grind the cumin seeds and peppercorns to a powder—a mortar and pestle will work well here, or use an electric spice grinder.
2. In a small saucepan, combine 1½ cups water, the ground cumin and pepper, the cranberries, olive oil, black cardamom, chiles, bay leaf, salt, and masala. Place over medium-high heat, bring to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat and cook uncovered for 10 minutes. Add both types of raisins and continue to simmer for another 10 to 15 minutes, until the cranberries become mushy and the raisins are soft and plump. Set aside uncovered to cool a bit.
3. Transfer to a blender and blend until smooth.
4. Strain through a fine-mesh strainer while transferring to a serving dish and stir in the lime juice. Transfer to a serving dish and stir in the lime juice. Serve warm or at room temperature. The sauce will keep in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

From *What to Eat for How You Feel: The New Ayurvedic Kitchen*, by Divya Alter (Rizzoli, 2017)

DISH PAIRINGS

As piquant as this sauce is, I do not advise eating it every day because of the heavy acid content of the cranberries. With its deep red color and medley of all six tastes, Raisin-Cranberry Sauce goes well with a number of grain, legume, and vegetable-based dishes.

INGREDIENTS: GF, DF

- ½ tsp Cumin seeds
- ⅛ tsp Black peppercorns
- ¾ cup Dried cranberries
- 1 tbsp Olive oil
- 4 Black cardamom pods, slightly crushed on one end but not fully opened
- 2 Green Thai chiles, seeded (no need to chop)
- 1 Bay leaf
- or
- 4 Curry leaves
- ¾ tsp Salt (or to taste)
- ½ tsp Digestive masala
- ½ cup Golden raisins
- ¼ cup Thompson raisins
- or
- 5 Dried pitted prunes
- 1 tsp Lime juice (freshly squeezed)

NOTES

For Vata Balancing: Enjoy as is.

For Pitta Balancing: Avoid this sauce, especially if you have acidic digestion—the cranberries will be too sour for you. If you don't have hyperacidity, then enjoy a tablespoon of this sauce without the chiles.

For Kapha Balancing: Enjoy as is, or add one more chile for extra pungency.



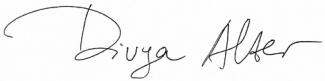
Conclusion

This concludes Part four of *An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking*. Thank you again for joining me and learning more about spices, what they can do for you, how to blend them, and how to cook with them.

We've covered a lot of ground throughout An Introduction to Ayurvedic Cooking. And yet, we've barely scratched the surface of the vast Ayurvedic and food wisdom that's available to us. I hope my presentation has inspired you, and that you continue learning how to use food to support your health and to make delicious and diverse plant-based meals.

I am thrilled that you participated in this series. Take good care of yourself, and I look forward to seeing you again soon.

Wishing you lots of health and happiness,



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Online Store: our line of ready-to-go meal packets, cultured ghee, Soma salt, spices, Divya's cookbooks, and more

Education: single classes, certified culinary and nutrition training, videos

Community: events, blog, recipes, and more

Reflective Questions

1. Name two important takeaways you gained from this class.
2. What spice or spice cooking method will you try this week?

As a thank you for your participation in this course, I would like to offer you a one-time 15% discount at Divya's online shop. Use code:

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SOURCES

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See also under Divya's

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Organic yellow split mung dal, chana dal, besan, cultured ghee, rose water, spices, and more

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Traditional Ayurvedic clay pots and nontoxic natural cookware (such as tagine pots)

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