

# How To Use Ayurveda To Balance Your Hormones In A Way You Can Actually Stick To

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In everyday conversations, we often blame things on our hormones, yet most people have only a vague idea of what these actually are. In short, hormones are chemical messengers our bodies produce through the glands in our endocrine system (i.e., thyroid, pancreas, testes, ovaries, etc.). These hormones have powerful effects on many of our bodies' basic processes, from regulating hunger to influencing our reproductive systems. They affect our moods, our weight, our sleep patterns—you name it.

Not so incidentally, ayurveda (a 5,000-year-old holistic health system that originated in India) is concerned with all of these functions of our mind-body as well: Together, they amount to our overall well-being. Shijoe Mathew, M.D., a qualified ayurvedic doctor, tells us that these messengers

form what ayurveda calls “Dhatu Agni” (or cellular fire), which categorises hormones and enzymes into groups by function, such as digestion or reproduction, rather than chemical classification like in modern medicine. It understands that “the control and functioning of each hormone in our body is regulated by an equal and opposite hormone produced from a completely different anatomical location,” according to Mathew, so unlike modern science, ayurveda seldom treats the affected gland alone.

Instead, the ayurvedic guidelines are concerned with overall balance. With the combined knowledge of ayurveda and your personal system, you can intuitively learn how to remedy any ills caused by both choices and situations out of your control. To use the wisdom of ayurveda to bring yourself into balance is not about a diet or a quick-fix solution—which is always the more popular approach in a time-poor, fast-moving world of instant gratification—but a lifestyle overhaul.

Instead of spot-treating the symptoms that arrive once we already feel ill or out of balance, through ayurveda we are able to recognise, read, and respond to our symptoms, or signals, from a 360-degree approach. “Treating the Dhatu Agni treats the issue by balancing the feedback mechanism, not by introducing more of a particular hormone externally,” Mathew says. “The effect of various foods and herbs on these functions are the basis of ayurvedic treatment, not their effect on a particular hormone.” Ayurveda offers us effective tools not only to begin to reverse problems, but even more helpfully, to avoid going off balance in any significant way in the first place. Prevention is better than cure.

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Essentially, ayurveda teaches us that in order to regulate our hormones we need to bring balance into our lives—and that means mind, body, and spirit. We should understand our hormones do not go out of balance in a vacuum. They merely respond to our experiences: our relationships, emotions, reactions, thoughts, and environment. ‘Thought and experience create biology’. “Hormones will come into balance when our lives come into balance.”

In short, the West seeks to rebalance our hormones externally to promote well-being, but often addressing the symptom is a short-term fix, which may lead to further complications. As Mathew points out, “In the modern world, we are currently experiencing a lot of hormone dependency issues as it leaves less room for our system to learn and rebalance. Introducing a synthetic hormone might be a requirement in certain medical conditions, but it destroys the delicate feedback mechanism that helps the balance of hormones within our body.” On the other hand, the ayurvedic philosophy is a manual on how to assess ourselves holistically, how to look after ourselves properly, and how to troubleshoot if something goes wrong, thereby directly sorting the imbalances that lead to hormonal issues that often arise from leading a life out of balance. Mathew summarises, “Since the effect of the opposing hormones are not ignored in ayurvedic treatment methods, the body learns from the recovery process.”

So what can we do for ourselves? The first point of call is to rethink our attitude and lifestyle, coming back to nature: following the circadian rhythm of the Earth for restorative sleep, eating, breathing, and moving mindfully, while reducing excessive stimuli and hormone-disrupting blue light during the evenings and getting adequate daylight during the day. Then we need to look at what, how, and when we eat, as this has a huge bearing on our well-being and affects our agni, or digestive fire. Kindling our digestive fire is perhaps one of the most valuable things you can do to feel at your best. In practice,

this also means privileging well-cooked foods made with fresh, local, seasonal, responsibly sourced ingredients and getting familiar with the combinations that can upset your stomach (e.g., dairy with fruit).

In a less global sense, balancing your hormones is necessarily related to both your natural and your current constitution, that is your dosha type in its resting state (prakriti) and your dosha type in your environment and individual circumstances (vikriti). Your dosha type is your ayurvedic mind-body type, which can be described through three doshas: vata (air), pitta (fire), and kapha (earth). Each dosha has a set of characteristics, and each person is made up of a unique combination of all three, typically with one dominant one. Feeling in balance is more of an awareness of the dominant doshas or your unique body type, and considering this uniqueness when making diet and lifestyle choices. For example, if you're feeling stressed, stretched thin by the demands of your busy life, which are flighty vata characteristics, you should choose grounding foods and practices, like eating a warm bowl of soup or meditating. It is a very intuitive system; it just takes a bit of familiarisation.

If you feel an imbalance in a certain area of your life, the next thing to do is to look into remedies you can introduce at home and observe how they make you feel. Adaptogens, an ayurvedic remedy, are gaining traction in the West as a way to balance our hormones by adapting to your body and its needs and can help get us through a sticky patch while we get our lives in order. The important thing to note here again is that this isn't the fix-all that we may want it to be, because holistic medicine is not a one-size-fits-all approach, but more a means of understanding yourself as complex, ever-changing, and one with the world. Start by researching adaptogens that might help you with something specific you're experiencing. You could try shatavari tea for balancing pitta

or supporting your reproductive system (including periods or menopause) or amla powder for a vitamin C boost or if you're feeling dehydrated.

Finally, although it's OK to take adaptogens in small doses of your own accord, it is always better to work with an ayurvedic doctor for specific tinctures and more potent herbal remedies. And if you're feeling particularly out of whack, it may be time to consider a panchakarma (ayurvedic detox) in conjunction with a vaidya (practitioner). This is a faster route to unraveling the actions that have brought us out of balance than just integrating ayurveda slowly.