

# Balancing weight through Maharishi Ayurveda

*Balanced weight can be the automatic by-product of enjoying the state of good health that is our natural birthright.*

This is the message of Dr Donn Brennan, leading expert on Maharishi Ayur-Veda and founding president of the Ayurvedic Practitioners Association of Great Britain.

He explains that it's a question of attaining the balance of mind and body that comes when the innate inner intelligence of life is fully expressed.

Measured weight watching and straining to control food intake are not a part of the Ayurvedic approach to shedding a few extra inches. "The first thing you can do is throw away the scales", says Donn, pointing out that Maharishi Ayur-Veda offers solutions that are both natural and effortless. "It's not about counting the pounds", he says "but rather about achieving such a state of well-being that the pounds take care of themselves.

From the Ayurvedic perspective, weight problems are due to an imbalance in the different stages of taking in and processing the food that we eat: ingestion, digestion, metabolism and elimination. To correct imbalances in each of these areas we need to enliven the connection with the source of life, pure consciousness, at all levels of our existence: ego, feelings, intellect, mind, body and our relationship with the environment.

By way of analogy, Donn points out that the nervous system is like the hardware of a computer, the software is the biochemistry that includes the hormones and neurotransmitters, and the body is the print-out. Orchestrating all of these is the programmer - the individual mind with all of its thoughts and feelings. Beyond this is the programme upon which everything else depends - pure

consciousness. Thus Ayur-Veda sees us not as a body with thoughts, but rather as a spiritual entity, an inner silent reality of consciousness that is expressed in all the different faculties

of mind and body. To try and achieve the perfect weight without attention to this most sublime aspect of our nature will be a struggle and will never succeed, says Donn.

## **The number one strategy**

So the number one strategy is to take care of consciousness through the regular practice of Transcendental Meditation. Scientific research shows many benefits relevant to weight normalisation, such as improved emotional balance and greater resistance to stress, including more balanced production

of insulin and cholesterol - both factors that are implicated in weight gain. When someone is under stress, adrenaline production rises causing an increase in both hunger and blood sugar. This leads to more insulin being secreted which causes sugar to be absorbed into the cells where it is converted into fat. Transcendental Meditation is therefore invaluable for handling stress and its impact on weight.

*"Health is our most natural state and along with health comes balanced weight"*

- Dr Donn Brennan



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Regular meditation helps us to be more in touch with our inner Self. We become more aware of our body's needs in a way that supports good digestion, and more able to make appropriate choices with regard to food intake. The best foods in the world are no good if we don't properly digest them, says Donn, and Ayur-Veda has a wealth of tips for enhancing digestive power - simple guidelines that are easily lost sight of in today's world of rushed meals and eating on the go. Food is nature's intelligence - when we give our full attention to the process of eating then we draw that intelligence into the body. We draw prana - the life force - from the food to nourish us, and we create ojas, the finest product of a good digestion and the essence of perfect health that bestows immunity, strength, vitality, lightness and joy.

### **An individualised approach**

Ayur-Veda provides a sophisticated understanding of the cause of weight problems in terms of an imbalance of the three doshas - vata, pitta and kapha. We are all different combinations of these three and have within us a template of perfection to strive for - the state of balance which is our own unique prakriti or innate nature.

Since vata is associated with lightness and movement, it comes as no surprise to learn that an imbalance of this dosha is most commonly associated with thinness. But it can also be linked to excessive weight gain: the anxiety and over-activity that characterise vata when out of balance can lead to over-eating in an effort to become more grounded. In both cases, strategies which balance vata such as adequate rest, a balanced routine and the practice of Transcendental Meditation are especially helpful.



Someone who enjoys the strong digestion and love of food that goes with a predominantly pitta disposition can also gain weight through over-eating. As heaviness increases, kapha goes out of balance, and so the best remedy is to adopt a kapha-pacifying regime. On the other hand, for some people, too much fiery pitta can result in the digestive fire becoming so strong that it burns up the tissues - the person loses weight despite eating plentifully. The advice in this case is to follow a cooling pitta-pacifying diet and routine.

In the vast majority of cases where someone is overweight an imbalance of kapha is involved. Kapha gives structure, solidity and cohesion in the body, and when out of balance its qualities such as heaviness, slowness and oiliness lead to weight gain. There are many easily implemented solutions - daily and seasonal routines and dietary strategies that don't just help with weight loss but also increase well-being. Donn notes that he has seen people succeed in losing weight with just one simple change to their routine - taking their main meal at lunchtime.

### **Dealing with emotional eating**

When the doshas are balanced and ojas is flowing in the body, it becomes natural to desire the right kind of foods. The opposite tends to be true when we are out of balance. A good Ayurvedic routine, which includes Transcendental Meditation and early bedtime and early rising, helps to keep our biological rhythms in tune with the rhythms of nature thus enhancing well-being and contentment so that we are less vulnerable to emotional eating.

To reduce food cravings, Donn recommends including all of the six tastes (sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent) in meals. Heeding such simple advice as sitting to eat and chewing well, helps stimulate the chemistry of digestion so that by the end of a meal we feel satisfied. Between meals, a drink of warm water with lemon and honey can satisfy cravings and is very good for balancing kapha.

Keeping the body free from toxins also contributes to the feel-good factor. But toxins don't just have an adverse effect on how we feel - they also block the channels in the body and prevent weight loss. Donn suggests various detoxification strategies including eating lightly (e.g. soups and fruit) one day a week and taking Maharishi Ayur-Veda herbal preparations such as Triphala with Rose. Best of all, Maharishi Panchakarma is a powerful detoxification therapy that has been shown to halve the level of toxins in the body.

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### Strengthening prana

The beauty of Maharishi Ayur-Veda is that it offers a natural approach to gaining balance. By following its precepts, we gain the ability to extract more vitality - prana - from food; nourished by a strong prana we enjoy the well-being that helps us to eat wisely. A virtuous circle is put in motion.

This positive cycle can be further strengthened by other lifestyle choices. Prana is not only taken in through food - it is also taken in through the breath and can be enlivened through the effortless Vedic breathing exercise, Pranayama. Furthermore, the Vedic texts teach that prana can be extracted from the five elements - space, air, fire, water and earth. Donn inspires us with a new appreciation for the health benefits of heeding the oft quoted advice to spend time with nature. Exposing our senses to the elements in the natural world - the vistas afforded by hills and mountains (space), breathing in fresh air, moderate exposure to sunlight (fire), swimming and sailing in the sea or lakes, or a day spent working the soil (earth) - are all natural and enjoyable ways to strengthen prana and create balance on all levels of our life.

The purpose of Maharishi Ayur-Veda goes far beyond such limited goals as achieving normal weight. Its purpose is to heal, to promote longevity, to enhance the quality of life and to create bliss by connecting us back to wholeness. Ultimately it takes us to the highest state of human evolution - enlightenment.

### Be in touch with the needs of the body

- Check hunger level before and after meals.
- Eat with hunger and stop fulfilled.
- When hungry the stomach is one quarter full.

- Fulfilled it is three quarters full.
- Leave room for the stomach to perform its functions of churning and secretion of digestive juices.
- Sit to eat in a settled atmosphere.
- Chew well with attention on the eating process - avoid listening to TV and radio, talking while chewing and eating when upset.
- Sit for five minutes afterwards.

### An ideal meal strategy

- Breakfast only if hungry.
- Main meal at lunchtime.
- Lighter evening meal.
- Only snack between meals if hungry.
- Snack lightly so as to be hungry at meal times.

### Digestive aids

- Sip hot water with a meal - but not too much as this dilutes the digestive juices.
- Favour freshly cooked foods, eaten warm (or at room temperature in summer).
- Use spices: ginger, pepper, turmeric, fenugreek, cinnamon, cumin and fennel.
- Kapha Churna is helpful for weight problems due to a kapha imbalance.
- Be Trim Tea contains herbs that support the digestive fire.

### Tips to balance kapha

- Take plenty of exercise. Vigorous sports such as jogging and weight training (with consideration for age, fitness level and medical conditions) are especially beneficial.
- Introduce variety and challenges into life to counter the slowness of kapha. This helps stimulate the physiology to burn up more calories.
- Take advantage of the cycles of the day: 6am - 10am and 6pm - 10pm are the times when kapha qualities are prevalent. Eating lightly at breakfast and supper is especially important for a slow kapha digestion. If not hungry, skip breakfast. Take the main meal at mid-day, during pitta time (10am - 2pm) when digestion is strongest.
- Counter the sluggishness of kapha by rising early before kapha time sets in at 6am.
- Favour foods that balance kapha, especially those with pungent, bitter and astringent tastes and with light, dry qualities.

- Favour warm, freshly cooked food. Grill, bake or steam rather than frying. Avoid restaurant and packaged foods as these tend to be salty, sweet and oily - all aggravating to kapha.

If you are ill or have a medical condition we recommend that you have a personal health evaluation with a practitioner

trained in Maharishi AyurVeda. The practitioner will identify any imbalance that is giving rise to your condition and will recommend specific changes in diet and routine and herbal AyurVeda products that will help you. Even if you are not ill you will find that a personal health evaluation is the ideal introduction to AyurVeda.

**For further information about our products or how to order or call 01695 51015 and for information about the Maharishi AyurVeda Health Centre see [maharishiyurvedaspa.co.uk](http://maharishiyurvedaspa.co.uk) or call 01695 51008.**

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