



ditch the diet way of thinking

Herbalist and CNM Lecturer Colleen Kennedy encourages you to think 'way of life' when it comes to your health.

Welcome to the age of diet overload! Everyone and anyone is becoming the latest 'expert' on food and fitness. It's a minefield out there in cyber world, on the bookshelves and in our health food shops and pharmacies. How do we know what to eat any more? Why are we not listening to our own instincts on what suits our bodies? Biochemically we are not all the same, so surely we shouldn't all be eating the same diet. Even a pre-conceived purist diet may support rather than counteract an imbalance in the body.

While the science of some of these diets can appeal to certain sectors of the population, a good start is to begin to understand your own unique biochemical makeup in an ever-changing environment: your 'constitution'. The art of being able to adapt to your surroundings and to use your foods to rebalance and support your essence, dates back to the Traditional Chinese and Indian Ayurvedic Medicine systems. Both of these cultures use a system of energetic and constitutional analysis.

How our body responds to particular foods, activities and emotions and how we interact with other living organisms, all play a role in determining the best way to bring balance back to our lives. And as we are constantly bombarded with what's bad or good, or every new fad and trend, we are removed from tuning in to our own signals. The Chinese work off a system of Yin, Yang and the five elements. The Ayurvedic

model is based on the tri-dosha (Vata, Pitta, Kapha). Both systems understand how food and herbs can interact with our physical and psychological processes.

To simplify this, I will focus on the Ayurvedic tri-dosha concept, and summarise the three types with food energetics.

1. Vata (Air): The Vata person is prone to neurological disorders, coldness and dryness. Foods and herbs that have a cold, dry and rough quality will aggravate Vata.

Dry crackers, raw vegetables, dried fruit and beans should be limited. Vata needs warm, moist nourishing food, with a sweet energy such as complex carbohydrates and root vegetables. Fruit like bananas, avocados and sweet fruit like peaches and berries are good, as are oils, nuts and seeds. Ginger, cinnamon, cumin and black pepper are all good herbs to use for Vata constitutions.

"True nourishment is both how we receive and how we transform our food."



2. Pitta (Fire): Pitta is prone to heat, inflammation, acidity and thirst. Foods that are warming, sour, spicy and salty are to be avoided in high Pitta conditions.

Cooling, sweet, bitter and astringent foods are beneficial to balance Pitta. White meat and fish are better than red meat. Sweet and bitter vegetables like leafy greens, cabbage, sprouts, cucumbers and asparagus and herbs like coriander, mint, fennel and turmeric are favourable.

3. Kapha (Earth): Kapha is prone to mucus-forming diseases; colds, congestion, oedema and arthritic disorders. Kapha can put on weight easily. Mucus-forming foods like dairy, fats, cold foods and excessive sweet and salty food will aggravate Kapha.

Warm, spicy, bitter, astringent foods that are dry in nature will benefit Kapha. Use rye and millet, all leafy green vegetables, stewed apples, white meat, all beans except kidney beans. Limit refined grains, white rice, wheat, beef, seafood, avocados, bananas, oranges, grapes and salt. Chill, ginger and pepper are useful to

disperse the dampness and congestion in Kapha.

Since people are a combination of these types (usually one is more predominant), and may have other considerations and sensitivities to contend with, it's a good idea to get a full consultation with a Naturopath, who can fine tune your plan to suit you. There is an art to adapting these energetic models with our functional medicine model, and this is where the true uniqueness of treatment lies.

Simple approaches to a better food life begins in simple preparation and combinations and in taking into consideration a few easy practices:

- * Eat moderately until you are almost full, then stop!
- * Avoid drinking large amounts during the meal, so as to enhance enzyme activity
- * Chew slowly and well
- * Reduce refined sugars which can cause fermentation and bloating
- * Avoid eating on the run or when

stressed
* Enjoy your food!
* Remember to move. Exercise is key to a happier food life.

True nourishment is both how we receive and how we transform our food. So we could be eating the 'best diet' but still not feeling great. Guilt about eating certain foods will do nothing to enhance the digestion of that food, and will probably make it worse. So it's a good start to try these simple approaches, tune into your constitution and start connecting to the types of food that suit you best. Visit a Naturopath, Herbalist or Nutritional Therapist for a full consultation to help get you back on track.

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