

PRACTICAL EXERCISES • NUTRITION • MINDFULNESS • LIFESTYLE & WELLNESS

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Manamaya
rosha
THE MIND FIELD



Vinyasa for
CAREGIVERS

IYENGAR YOGA FOR
MENOPAUSE

HEALING
with
yoga



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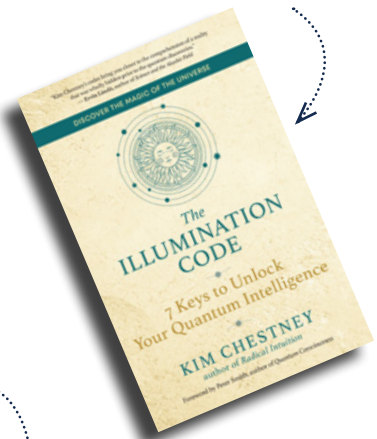
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UNLOCKING AYURVEDA WISDOM FOR MANAGING MENOPAUSE

Words and Photos: Brenda Ward, BWY Tutor and Ayurveda specialist



Menopause is one of the most significant transitions women go through and navigating the changes it brings can be challenging physically, psychologically and emotionally. Using the time-honoured wisdom of Ayurveda can offer us tools to restore balance and shift our perspective so that we see this transition as an invitation to prioritise our health and well-being.

What is Ayurveda?

Ayurveda is an ancient, holistic healing science. *Ayur* means life and *Veda* means sacred knowledge or wisdom so Ayurveda may be translated as the science or knowledge of life.

Ayurvedic wisdom originated more than 5,000 years ago in India. It complements Yoga by highlighting the importance of harmonising with nature's rhythms to nurture *swasthya*, or physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being. It offers a set of simple practices to restore or maintain this balance.

By understanding Ayurveda, we can deepen our Yoga practice and integrate both systems to support our health.

While Ayurveda is good for everyone, it is particularly useful for women as we can employ its wisdom to help us navigate the different stages of our lives – from menstruation and pregnancy to becoming a mother and menopause.

This not only includes the physical changes but also how we feel emotionally and mentally during these transitions. Ayurveda recognises the uniqueness of everyone, understanding that every woman's experience during these transitions varies. Therefore, the approach to restoring balance changes from woman to woman.

To provide insight into Ayurveda's perspective on menopause and how it can empower us to look after our health, please find a brief overview of some of the key principles it embodies.

The Five Great Elements theory

Ayurveda uses the theory of the Five Great Elements or *Pancha Mahabhuta* to explain how the external forces of nature and the internal forces within our bodies are linked together.

The Five Great Elements are space (*Akasha*), air (*Vayu*), fire (*Agni*), water (*Jala*) and earth (*Prithvi*).

The Tridoshic theory

The Five Great Elements then condense into the three *doshas* or energetic forces of *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha* to make up an individual's unique Ayurvedic constitution – their *Prakriti*.

Each of the *doshas* is made up of a combination of two of the five elements, *Vata* being made up of space and air, *Pitta* of fire and water, and *Kapha* of water and earth.

It is important to note that ALL three *doshas* are present within each of us, it is just the ratio that varies from one person to another.

The qualities of the doshas

The next important principle is that each *dosha* exhibits certain inherent qualities or *gunas*.

Vata, composed of space and air, embodies characteristics of lightness, dryness, coldness, and mobility, governing both the mind and nervous system.

Pitta, a blend of fire and water, manifests as hot, slightly oily, sharp, and pungent, and governs the endocrine system.

In contrast, *Kapha*, formed by water and earth, is heavy, dull, stable, and slow, and regulates our immune function.

Recognising these inherent qualities helps pinpoint which *dosha* influences peri/menopausal symptoms and guides our efforts to restore balance. For instance, women with *Pitta* imbalances may experience heat-related symptoms like hot flushes and excessive sweating.

Likewise, some women may experience *Vata*-type imbalances such as insomnia, anxiety and dryness, while those women with *Kapha*-type imbalances may experience weight gain and congestion.

The final principle is simple yet important - *like increases like and opposites balance*.

Managing your menopause

Let us now consider how you can apply this knowledge to identify and manage your own menopausal symptoms.



Vata-related symptoms

Anxiety, panic attacks, fearfulness, dry skin, difficulty focusing and concentrating, insomnia.

As *Vata* governs the mind and nervous system and has a tendency towards dryness, these symptoms indicate increased *Vata dosha*.

Balance

Focus on grounding, warming practices and simple dietary adjustments:

- ☼ Eat warm, liquid foods such as soups and dahls.
- ☼ Include warming spices in your cooking such as cinnamon and cardamon.
- ☼ Avoid cold, dry, uncooked foods.
- ☼ Avoid ice-cold drinks.
- ☼ Unplug from technology.
- ☼ Spend 30 minutes a day in nature walking mindfully and breathing consciously.
- ☼ *Massage your hands with warm sesame seed oil followed by a hand soak every evening.*
- ☼ Emphasise grounding asana practices such as Bridge Pose – lying on your back with legs bent and hips lifted off the floor, Easy Pose – sitting with your legs crossed, and *Savasana* – a relaxation pose typically lying on your back.
- ☼ Practise calming breathing techniques such as *Nadi Shodhana Pranayama*, which involves alternate nostril breathing to balance energy flow.

One more tip

Where there is insomnia, a small cup of warm milk with a little grated nutmeg sprinkled on top can be very helpful. Drink one hour before bedtime.

Pitta-related symptoms

Heavy bleeding, hot flushes, sweating, irritability, skin breakouts, angry outbursts

Dosha

These symptoms are hot and sharp indicating an excess of *Pitta dosha*.

Balance

Focus on cooling, calming practices and simple dietary adjustments:

- ☼ Drink room temperature water and cooling drinks such as coconut water and mint tea.
- ☼ Avoid spicy food.
- ☼ Avoid/limit foods in the nightshade family including tomatoes, aubergines, peppers and potatoes.
- ☼ Avoid raw onion and garlic.
- ☼ Limit/avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- ☼ Include cooling herbs in your cooking such as cumin, coriander and fennel.
- ☼ Focus on forward bends and restorative poses in your asana practice as they are energetically cooling and calming
- ☼ Practise *Sitali* pranayama regularly, a cooling breathing practice in which you curl the sides of your tongue like a straw and breathe in through your mouth.



- ☼ Practise daily meditation.
- ☼ Enjoy regular Yoga Nidra, a guided relaxation practice that invites you to scan and note subtle sensations in different parts of your body.
- ☼ Practise moon bathing preferably outside and especially at the time of the full moon. This ancient practice can have a cooling effect.

One more tip

There are also specific Ayurvedic herbs that can be very helpful in removing excess heat from the system such as *Guduchi*. However, these need to be taken on the advice of an Ayurvedic consultant.

Kapha-related symptoms

Weight gain, lethargy, lack of motivation, heaviness, congestion

Dosha

These symptoms are indicative of *Kapha's* heavy, dull and slow-moving qualities.

Balance

Focus on movement, cleansing and heating practices and make simple dietary adjustments:

- ☼ Drink a mug of warm/hot water every morning.
- ☼ Eat plenty of pungent, bitter and astringent foods especially green vegetables.
- ☼ Decrease/limit consumption of sweet, sour and salty foods.
- ☼ Only eat when hungry.
- ☼ Sip lemon and ginger tea throughout the day.
- ☼ Commit to a gentle Ayurvedic detox or midweek fast (under the guidance of an Ayurvedic consultant).
- ☼ Practise vigorous asana such as Sun Salutations, *strong lunges* and Warrior poses.

“
All three doshas are present within each of us, it is just the ratio that varies from one person to another.
”

- ☼ Practise stimulating and heating breathing practices such as *Kapalabhati pranayama* or skull-shining breath, a powerful breathing practice that consists of rapid, forceful exhales and passive inhales.

One more tip

A teaspoon of the Ayurvedic superfood *Chywanaprash* dissolved in hot water has a powerful detoxing effect and can support the cleansing that is required to mitigate excess *Kapha*.

Make it a daily ritual

Finally, it is important to highlight the significance of *dinacharya* or the daily routine advocated in Ayurveda for maintaining balance and good health.

Dinacharya will help you to reconnect to nature's circadian rhythms, balance your *doshas*, improve your *Agni* (digestion) and support the intelligence of your body.



It is recommended for everyone, irrespective of one's *dosha* or life stage. It serves as an excellent preparatory regime, particularly if you are not yet in the peri/menopausal phase, helping you make a smoother transition when the time comes. It also offers valuable support during the peri/menopause phase itself.

It includes:

- ✿ Getting up at or before sunrise.
- ✿ Tongue scraping using a copper tongue scraper to clean the tongue first thing every morning.
- ✿ Drinking a mug of comfortably hot water every morning on an empty stomach.
- ✿ Daily sun salutations.
- ✿ Daily *pranayama* or breathing practice.
- ✿ Daily meditation.
- ✿ Warm oil full body or foot massage.
- ✿ 30-minute walk each day in nature.

There is no need to do everything at once. Instead, choose two practices that you can easily integrate into your life and practice for one month. You can then add another practice when you are ready.

Do remember to take it easy and go at your own pace. These simple self-care tactics will help you navigate life's twists and turns with ease while keeping you feeling balanced and vibrant.

Want to find out more?

If you would like to learn more about Ayurveda, join our brand new online BWY module called *Beginning Your Ayurveda Journey* which starts on 14 September 2024. We meet one Saturday a month from September 2024 to February 2025 and cover all the tools you will need to be able to confidently integrate Ayurveda into your life. To book: <https://portal.bwy.org.uk/user/trainings/276>

Alternatively, if you would like a 1-1 Ayurvedic consultation (either online or in-person) or further information about the Menopause Support Package that I offer, please go to my website at www.brendayoga.co.uk/menopause-yoga or contact me at brendayoga@mail.com.

Brenda Ward is a BWY Foundation Course and Diploma Course Tutor with 20 years' experience. Alongside her private classes, Brenda runs the BWY Foundation Courses 1 and 2, the BWY Beginning Your Ayurveda Journey module and she will start her first BWY L4 Diploma course in September 2024.





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