

Swasthya - The Physical Body

Robust Gut Health to Build Robust Ojas

Ayurveda has stated for the last 5000 years that around 80% of all disease originates in the gut and Western science has now conclusively proven this to be the case. In fact, current evidence suggests that closer to a staggering 90% of all disease is a by-product of a dysfunction gut!

The reason for this is that the gut is home to the microbiome, arguably the most awe inspiring, health promoting and disease preventing component of the whole body! The microbiome is the massive colony of good bacteria in the gut that is responsible for digesting food, fighting infections, producing over 70% of our immune system, reducing inflammation, supporting optimal digestion and nutrient absorption, regulating hormones and much else besides.

But even more so, the health of the gut is integral to our mental and emotional health. Research unequivocally shows that individuals with a toxic gut and microbiome have higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress.

Conversely, those with a healthy microbiome have been shown to experience a clinically significant increase in positive emotional states such as contentment, happiness, joy, empowerment, optimism and emotional resilience.

One of the main reasons for this (amongst others) is that our gut is responsible for producing over 80% of our two key “happy hormones,” dopamine and serotonin. And we know that higher circulating levels of these are associated with enhanced emotional health.

As such, and given just how compelling this research is, if we are serious about cultivating deep and permanent states of Swasthya in our life, proactively attending to our gut health is essential.

And when it comes to doing so, digestion is key. If our digestion is poor then our body is unable to effectively and efficiently digest the food we eat. This in turn results in the putrefaction of rotting food in the gut that produces an overgrowth of bad bacteria and the destruction of the good bacteria. The upshot of this is that the health of the microbiome drops and with it the health of our body at large.

Furthermore, the cultivation of robust levels of Ojas in the physical body is wholly dependent upon a strong digestive system. If our digestion is strong it ensures the optimal assimilation and delivery of nutrients to all of the main tissues levels in the body (called Dhatus in Ayurveda), the end result of which is the production of high levels of Ojas in the physical body. Therefore to ensure high levels of Ojas, energy and vitality in our physical body, a strong digestive capacity is essential.

To address this issue, Ayurveda has a time-tested approach called Agni Deepana. These are simple but incredibly effective dietary and herbal approaches that help to ramp up our digestive function to keep our gut and microbiome clean and healthy and to ensure the daily production of robust levels of Ojas to help keep our physical body in tip-top condition.

Whilst there are many approaches that fall under the remit of Agni Deepana, the one we want to recommend here is a herbal infusion that takes only seconds to make, lasts all day and induces truly exceptional impacts upon keeping our gut and microbiome sparkly clean. This approach is also a fantastic way of ensuring optimal hydration levels as we know that sipping on hot water (especially hot herbal water), hydrates the cells of the body in a more efficient and effective manner.

The herbs used in the following remedy are all clinically proven in their capacity to optimise digestion, clear toxins, increase the absorption of nutrients, support optimal gut health, stimulate healthy bowel function and support a healthy appetite (and much else besides).

Agni Deepana Challenge 1:

To help you support optimal gut health as a precursor to the cultivation of robust levels of Ojas and Swasthya, your Challenge is to make up this simple flask-based herbal infusion and sip on it at least 3+ days each week (but ideally more); we recommend this approach heavily in our clinic and we have seen it induce discernible improvements in digestive and gut health, energy, mood and emotional wellbeing very quickly.

Herbal Challenge:

Ingredients:

- 1 tsp whole coriander seeds
- 1 tsp of whole cumin seeds
- 1 tsp of whole fennel seeds
- 1-2 inch piece of grated fresh ginger

Instructions

- Add all the herbs into a mixing bowl or pan and pour over 4-5 cups of boiling water.
- Cover the bowl or pan with a lid or plate and leave to infuse for 10-15 minutes.
- Then strain the mixture through a sieve into a thermos flask and sip on this throughout the day.

Natural Ayurvedic Prebiotics and Probiotics

In addition to supporting optimal digestion and toxin clearance via the above overviewed herbal infusion, there are two other key approaches that we need to consider to help cultivate robust gut health as a foundation to cultivating robust levels of Ojas in the physical body.

These two approaches are so essential because without them it is not possible to create the right environment in the gut for health to thrive. And the two approaches in question are the use of natural prebiotic and probiotic foods.

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So what exactly are prebiotics and probiotics?

Well, as we discussed previously, for the health promoting and disease preventing properties of the gut to be optimised, we need a robust gut microbiome. The microbiome is the massive colony of trillions of bacteria that are responsible for everything from regulating immune function to supporting the release of mood elevating hormones.

The healthier our microbiome, the healthier our body at both the physical and emotional level. However, many people exist with a less than healthy microbiome due to a variety of factors such as cyclical antibiotic use, high sugar diets, lots of processed foods, poor sleep and lots of stress.

To protect against this, it is absolutely essential that we support the functioning of our microbiome via the use of prebiotic and probiotic foods.

Prebiotic foods are foods that lay the foundation for the growth of healthy bacteria in the gut. In the metaphorical context of building a house, prebiotic foods are the foundations and the bricks and mortar are the probiotic foods. As such, it doesn't matter how well we build the house, if the foundations are weak, so to will the house be. It is for this reason that prebiotic foods are so essential as they lay the foundation for optimal gut health.

Unfortunately however, they are often overlooked in favour of their more famous friends, probiotics.

Probiotic foods are foods that physically contain high levels of gut health supporting bacteria. By regularly eating these foods, we help to continually repopulate the gut with the required bacteria needed to keep the microbiome functioning well.

But the key point here is that prebiotic and probiotic foods are both as essential as each other; without one, the other is doomed to fail.

Natural Prebiotic and Probiotic Support

With the exception of antibiotic use (after which the use of targeted probiotic supplements is essential), we can easily obtain all of the prebiotic and probiotic support we need from our diet without having to resort to supplements. Doing so is easier, cheaper, more natural and more sustainable. And Ayurveda has a fantastic means of facilitating this.

Prebiotic Support: Prebiotics are found in a variety of different foods, but arguably the most important of these fall within the “bitter” and “pungent” food groups, such as the bitter green vegetables (kale, chard, courgettes et cetera) and the pungent alliums (i.e. garlic, onions and leeks).

Agni Deepana Challenge 2:

To help you support optimal gut health as a precursor to the cultivation of robust levels of Ojas and Swasthya, your second gut health challenge is to proactively increase your daily intake of primarily bitter but also pungent foods. For more detailed information on these food groups, please refer to the full “Six-Tastes of Ayurveda” series. In this series we discuss in detail the collective health benefits of all of the six tastes of Ayurveda whilst providing some great tips for integrating each of the food groups into your diet.

Probiotic Support: Having taken care of the prebiotics, the next priority is to actually ensure that we are regularly repopulating the gut with healthy bacteria. To do so, the regular use of “live” products, such as live natural yogurt, sauerkraut, kefir, kombucha and sourdough is important.

Live natural yogurt generally provides some of the best probiotic support for the body but it can often be hard to digest for many people. Not only can this lead to digestive problems but it also means we won't be obtaining all of the full probiotic benefits of the yogurt.

To remedy this problem, Ayurveda uses a natural probiotic tonic called Takra. Takra is made by blending live yogurt with water, herbs and/or honey. Through the process of blending, the milk fats found in the yogurt “froth up;” these fats are then scooped off to leave a much lighter, healthier and easier to digest version of yogurt, whilst still containing all of its wonderful probiotic goodness. Takra also contains lots of key vitamins and minerals such as vitamin A, Bs and C and plenty of potassium and calcium, making it a real whole-body tonic!

If raw honey is added it becomes even more effective as raw honey is a powerful prebiotic, making Takra an all-in-one gut tonic that provides an abundant source of both prebiotic and probiotic goodness. I can't recommend Takra enough; drinking a cup 3-4 times a week can radically enhance our gut health and through doing so enhance the collective health of the whole body.

Takra is super easy and very quick to make, using the following recipe:

Ingredients:

- Live natural yogurt – ¼ cup
- Water – ¾ cup
- Raw honey - 1 to 2 teaspoons

Instructions:

- Simply add all of the ingredients into a bowl and blend with a stick or hand blender for around 2-3 minutes until lots of froth and bubbles have formed at the top.
- Take a spoon and gently scoop all the froth and bubbles off the top (this is the fat which is then churned to make butter!)
- Repeat the above process once more and then once the fat has been scooped off, pour into a glass and drink immediately at room temperature.
- Digestive spices such as powdered ginger or cumin can also be added to further enhance digestion.

Agni Deepana Challenge 3:

To help you support optimal gut health as a precursor to the cultivation of robust levels of Ojas and Swasthya, your third gut health challenge is have a go of making Takra and if you enjoy it, aim to drink 3-4 cups each week to provide an all-in-one tonic to support optimal gut health.