

Swasthya - The Mental Body

The Ayurvedic Optimal Morning Routine as a tool to Elevate Contentment, Happiness and Swasthya

In the short “Mental Body Introduction” video that introduces this part of the series, we overviewed a variety of behaviors and tools that can be used to optimise our biochemistry in a way that can profoundly elevate our levels of contentment, happiness and Swasthya in the Mental Body.

And the foundational approach for doing so is the famed and revered Ayurvedic optimal morning routine.

For me, the Ayurvedic optimal morning routine represents one of the greatest gifts that Ayurveda offers to the world.

The reason I believe this so strongly is that by practicing it, there is very clear evidence to show how it can drastically enhance our physical health, and reduce our disease risk factors, by elevating immunity, reducing inflammation and balancing our endocrine and nervous systems.

Even more so, the Ayurvedic optimal morning routine has the capacity to elevate our mental and emotional health and wellbeing in unparalleled ways. It can achieve this by altering the way three key areas of the brain – the limbic area, the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland – function. By directly impacting upon these three brain areas, the entire biochemistry of the body and brain is altered in a way that leaves us feeling optimistic, happy, safe, empowered, peaceful and contented; in other words, living in a state of deep Swasthya.

As such, the adoption of the Ayurvedic optimal morning routine is truly one of the most powerful self-care practices that can be integrated into our lives.

Personally speaking I can't imagine starting the day without integrating some or ideally all of these approaches into my morning. And from a professional perspective, I have seen the adoption of this approach transform people's health, energy, mood and overall wellbeing, a transformation that is almost always validated in improved blood and laboratory tests.

Below you will find a more detailed overview of the Ayurvedic optimal morning routine and the key practices that make it up.

However, it is incredibly important to emphasize that you don't need to practice all of the individual components every day. Nor do you need to do them in the order overviewed below.

The adoption of the Ayurvedic optimal morning routine needs to be fluid, enjoyable and effortless; on mornings where you have lots of time, perhaps experiment with practicing the full routine. On busy mornings when you have less time, perhaps just try to practice one

component of the routine for a shorter period of time, such as a 2-minute self-massage or a 5-minute meditation.

The key concept here is effortlessness; relinquish the need to practice the full routine perfectly and just enjoy what you can do on a day-by-day basis.

One final point; try and commit to engaging with the Ayurvedic optimal morning routine, in whatever way works for you, for 3-weeks. In my experience of teaching this to people, if you can do this, by the time the 3-weeks are up, the improvements in physical and emotional health are so noticeable that it is very unlikely that you will ever stop engaging and practicing this routine! Enjoy!

1. Waking UP

It is recommended to awaken somewhere between 6:00 – 7:00am. This period of the day is the time when all of nature awakens, and Vata Dosha is most enlivened in the environment. Vata controls the nervous system and our levels of alertness. Remember the principle of *"well begun is half done?"* If we start our day in Vata time, our mind will experience more of the qualities of balanced Vata throughout the day – increased contentment, happiness, energy, clarity, joy, creativity, and alertness.

On the other hand, if we sleep in much past 7.00am, we are sleeping into the Kapha time of day. Doing so will result in our mind, emotions and body experiencing the primary qualities of Kapha which can leave us feeling lethargic, slow, heavy and unmotivated. If this becomes the norm day after day, year after year, it can cause a Kapha imbalance to build up which can result in a reduction in positive emotional states such as contentment, happiness, vitality and creativity and the development of Kapha based physical symptoms such as congestion, fluid retention, weight gain, headaches, joint aches, and stiffness.

However, it is important to point out that there is a seasonal variation here. Virtually every diurnal mammal (except humans!) wakes with the sunrise and goes to sleep just after the sun sets. This means getting up earlier in the summer and later in the depths of winter.

This is a concept that I think we would do well to loosely follow; getting up slightly earlier in the summer months when there is more light and natural energy and slightly later in the winter months when it is darker and colder.

Also, getting up earlier in this way is not advised if you are recovering from an illness, are convalescing or have any kind of wasting disease; in these instances the body needs more sleep rather than less and as such, sleeping in later is beneficial.

One last point; in this context we are talking about *"waking"* up as opposed to *"getting"* up. Waking up at 7:00am, making a cup of tea and heading back to bed to read, day-dream, meditate etc is absolutely fine! Thus set a quiet and non-startling alarm that will gently awaken you somewhere between 6:00 and 7:00 so that you can tap into the many health benefits of this special time of the day.

2. Morning Bowel Movement: It is beneficial to the health and functioning of our gut, and thus to our entire body, to have a bowel movement in the morning. Doing so ensures the daily removal of waste and toxins, supports the optimal functioning of the gut and microbiome, ensures optimal digestive function and prevents common digestive symptoms such as bloating, cramping, wind and abdominal distension.

The simplest way of facilitating this if a morning bowel movement is not common for you is to consume 1000-2000mg of Triphala with warm water right before bed; for more information on the profound health benefits of this herb, please refer to the full Triphala herb profile here:

<https://www.mind-body-medical.co.uk/herb-profiles-blog-style/triphala?rq=triphala>

If you suffer from more stubborn constipation, then please refer to the full Constipation Ailment Management Plan here: <https://www.mind-body-medical.co.uk/mentor-ailment-plans/constipation>

3. Ayurvedic Oil Massage/Self-Abhyanga

Daily morning Ayurvedic oil massage is one of the most powerful rejuvenation regimens that you can add to your daily routine. The motion and pressure of the massage creates heat and friction on the skin which has been proven to stimulate immunity, reduce inflammation, loosen up impurities, improve circulation, increase the health and vitality of the skin and enliven the energy systems of the body.

Furthermore, daily self-massage can also induce profound gains upon the our emotional and mental wellbeing. The skin is the single biggest regulator of hormones in the body and gently massaging the body every morning helps optimise our hormone profile. This results in an increased secretion of our mood boosting “feel-good” hormones such as dopamine and serotonin whilst also helping to reduce our stress hormone levels. And the power of this is that by practising it in the morning we have optimised our biochemistry in a way that will induce higher levels of Swasthya and contentment in the body before we have even begun the day. This in turn increases our ability to maintain high levels of contentment into and through the rest of the day and personally I can’t think of a more empowering way to start the day than this!

Ayurvedic oil massage is especially good at removing Vata imbalances which are a common cause of weakness, stress, anxiety, and fatigue. Most people report feeling much stronger, happier, more contented and more emotionally balanced throughout the day as a result of their morning self-massage.

Performing a self-massage is super easy and the best bit is that we only need to practice it for 4-5 minutes to obtain all of these wonderful benefits.

To perform your self-massage, take a small amount of warm oil (a simple way to warm the oil is to just leave the bottle in a bowl/sink of hot water whilst you are making your tea or having a shower) and gently rub this over your whole body. Then using slow rhythmic strokes, massage your right foot, right low leg and right upper leg; it is helpful to use long flowing strokes over your long bones and round circular strokes on your joints. Then repeat on your left leg. Then gently massage your tummy using clockwise strokes before moving to your right hand, right

lower arm and right upper arm. Repeat on your left arm. Then massage both shoulders (spend more time here as this is where we hold lots of tension), your neck and face and try to be present and mindful during these precious 5 minutes!

If you are doing the self-massage before you shower, then simply hop in and wash your body as per usual.

If you are doing it after you shower, then just gently pat down your body with a dry towel to remove any excess oil and get dressed; if you find there is still too much oil on your skin, just use a little less next time.

4. Meditation

It is essential to emphasise how important daily meditation is to optimising overall health and wellbeing. Daily meditation de-activates the stress response and activates the opposite relaxation response, the impact of which is an optimally regulated endocrine system, an upregulated immune system, lower levels of inflammation, lower levels of stress and anxiety and an enhanced state of being centred and in control.

More specifically, when it comes to the cultivation of robust levels of contentment and Swasthya in the mental body, meditation is perhaps the most important tool of all. This is because of its clinically proven ability to radically enhance our biochemistry in a way that supports significantly higher levels of happiness and contentment. It is also one of the most effective ways of balancing the Doshas and through doing so installing a state of homeostasis within the body and mind.

If you are new to meditation then there are lots of resources to help you get started; a few that we recommend include:

- Headspace
- Insight Timer
- Calm

Alternatively, check out the revered and incredibly powerful Kriya Meditation in Episode 2 of the Emotional Mastery series in the Ayurvedic Mentor: <https://www.mind-body-medical.co.uk/ayurvedic-mentor-emotionalmastery>

Whilst even 1-2 minutes of breathing or meditation is beneficial, it is recommended to aim for 10-15+ minutes a day as this is the duration that has been shown to induce the most significant gains in the optimisation of our mental and emotional health and wellbeing.

5. Sun salutations

Whilst of less importance than the above points, performing several rounds of Sun Salutations each morning (which takes less than 5-minutes) can induce discernible gains upon the levels of energy and vitality we experience in both mind and body.

The health benefits of regular Sun Salutation practice are profound, helping to remove stiffness and heaviness in the body, optimise circulation and flexibility, stimulate the lymphatic

and immune systems whilst also helping to elevate mood and increase the secretion of our “feel-good” hormones.

Please refer to the following link for a great and easy to follow guide on how to perform the Sun Salutation regime:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1C0rD_DIUE

6. Oil Pulling

Almost everyone brushes their teeth each morning and adding in a minute or so of oil pulling, ideally using coconut or sesame oil, can reap huge rewards in terms of oral health. These oils have powerful anti-bacterial benefits which prevent bacterial overgrowth, they help to absorb oil-soluble toxins and impurities in the mouth, prevent gum disease and bad breath and nourishes gum tissue. Furthermore, there is clear evidence to show that regular oil pulling can help reduce our risk factors for a variety of serious heart and neurological diseases due to its ability to inhibit a dangerous form of bacteria called *S. Mutans*; for more information on this please refer to the Oil Pulling Weekly Wisdom session here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nL_xyW5bPc8

Your Ayurvedic Optimal Morning Routine Challenge

To help bring optimal biochemical balance into your body to help induce higher levels of Swasthya and contentment into your mental and emotional self, please begin to explore how you can effortlessly integrate one or more of the above self-care practices into your daily morning routine. Remember, this is a fluid process – perform more of the rituals on days when you have more time and are less rushed and fewer rituals on the days when you have less time, as discussed above.