

# Ayurvedic Support for a Clear Complexion

by Shannon Mooney, The Ayurvedic Insight newsletter, August 2009

Acne is one of the most common skin disorders. Adolescent acne typically begins at puberty, when there is a rise in testosterone combined with teenage angst. This time period is a major milestone, marking the end of the kapha stage of life, childhood, and the beginning of the pitta stage of life, adulthood. The hormonal changes and emotional energies of adolescence result in a rise in pitta dosha, creating pitta-type imbalances, such as acne. Acne can also happen later in adulthood and is typically caused by hormonal shifts, ama or toxins in the body, and/or emotional stress.

The skin works as an organ of elimination, naturally seeking to remove the excess pitta and toxins from the body. Psychologically, acne can have devastating effects on one's self-image, negatively affecting self-esteem and often leading to depression. Ayurveda offers simple remedies and a natural approach combining a healthful diet, herbs, lifestyle recommendations, pranayama, and meditation to help soothe the body and promote clear, healthy skin.

## Diet

Following a diet that consists of plenty of fresh organic fruits, vegetables, and grains and eliminating substances that increase pitta and ama formation are the most important ways to balance pitta dosha.

- Favor foods that are intrinsically cooling such as green vegetables, basmati rice, coconut, cucumber, and cilantro.
- Aloe vera juice is a cooling bitter tonic for eliminating excess pitta from the body; try a half cup twice daily.
- Drink plenty of fresh water.
- Avoid hot spices, chili peppers, oily, fried, processed, or fermented foods.
- Limit alcohol, tobacco, and caffeine.

## Lifestyle

Here are some daily practices that can minimize the aggravation of pitta dosha and bring balance to the skin:

- Cleanse the skin twice daily - once in the morning and once before bed - with a gentle cleanser like our homemade one listed in the Herb section below. Be mindful not to over-cleanse or scrub too hard. This can lead to an over-production of oil.
- Exercise regularly. Adopt a cooling practice of yoga or swimming. During warm months, try not to exercise during the pitta time of day (10am-2pm).
- Limit sun exposure. Try moon bathing to cool pitta's intense fire.
- Avoid hostile environments. Surround yourself with nice people who love you.
- Minimize emotions of anger and criticism. Find a way to release these emotions, such as yoga or meditation.
- Cultivate peace, patience, and tolerance to bring more joy into your life and help cool your temperament.

## Herbs

Include Triphala to support elimination, detoxification, and tonification of the gastrointestinal tract.

When there is excess heat in the GI tract, amalaki can be used to help cleanse natural toxins and eliminate

excess pitta.

Ayurvedic herbs can also be used externally to support healthy skin. Neem is renowned for its actions as "antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, and antifungal", as noted by Sebastian Pole in his book *Ayurvedic Medicine, the Principles of Traditional Practice*. It is extremely cooling in nature, making it "most effective in inflammatory skin conditions". Washing with neem soap is ideal for oily skin, while neem oil can be used for dry, inflamed skin.

Nicole Hinterstocker, skin expert and owner of [Ajara Ayurveda](http://stores.homestead.com/AjaraAyurvedicBeauty/StoreFront.bok) (<http://stores.homestead.com/AjaraAyurvedicBeauty/StoreFront.bok>), recommends using a gentle formula to cleanse skin that can be made at home as opposed to harsh commercial cleansers. The following recipe can be made for a 14 day supply:

4 Tbsp colloidal oatmeal (Aveeno brand works well)  
1 tsp arrowroot  
1 tsp neem  
1 tsp licorice  
1/8 tsp turmeric

Mix all ingredients together and store in an airtight jar, away from direct sunlight. Each time you wash your face, use one teaspoon of cleanser, and add enough whole milk to make a creamy paste. If the acne has a dry, flaky quality, half-and-half may be used instead of milk. Note, cow's milk or goat's milk works best, but if using a vegan substitute, coconut milk is acceptable. If an added fragrance is desired, two drops of lavender essential oil can be mixed in each time you prepare to wash your face. Splash skin several times with plain water before applying the cleanser. Apply cleanser in a circular motion for two minutes, lightly using fingertips to scrub and lift away unwanted dirt and excess oil. Rinse skin well with plain water until all cleanser is removed.

## **Yoga**

Yoga helps to keep the channels of the body open to help move toxins out. Moon salutations can be a most beneficial exercise for calming and cooling pitta dosha. Boat and Bow asanas target the small intestine, an important seat of pitta dosha. Including a spinal twist in your practice massages the liver and spleen, organs of pitta. Forward bends are cooling in nature and bring a sensation of peace to the mind.

## **Meditation**

Sitting for meditation once or twice daily can ease anxiety about physical appearance, reduce emotional stress, and combat depression. The negative emotional factors associated with acne can lead to more ama in the body, creating a positive feedback system producing more acne. Meditation is a method of shifting those thoughts, by getting in touch with your true essence where beauty is more than skin-deep.

Dr. Vasant Lad, in his book *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies*, suggests the powerful tool of visualization. "Close your eyes and visualize that the acne is clearing up and going away - as if you are communicating with the tissues in your skin that are bursting out with acne." This is a practice in positive thinking that can help to shift negative thoughts that may be stuck in your mind, preventing the skin from healing.

## **Pranayama**

Shitali pranayama, the cooling breath, is excellent for eliminating pitta from the body. The practice is as follows:

- Sit comfortably.
- Curl or roll the sides of your tongue upward into a tube or "straw" for sucking in air.
- Inhale slowly through the rolled tongue, and then close the mouth and exhale through the nose. If you are unable to roll your tongue into a tube, lightly clench the jaw with tongue pressed against the teeth. Then, inhale through the mouth.
- Notice the instantly cooler temperature of the air, upon inhalation.
- Practice for 15-20 rounds of breath.