



By Leah Collmer



It's summertime in the northern hemisphere and staying cool is a priority for all. While summer can bring a host of fun, exciting, outdoor activities, it is easy to forget the intensity and hazards of summer's heat. In Ayurveda, summer correlates to the Pitta dosha. Pitta dominantly symbolizes the fire element in combination with the water element. Even if Pitta isn't one's primary prakruti (nature or constitution), it is important to keep this dosha in balance in our bodies and minds so we don't get overheated or dehydrated.

When Pitta is imbalanced in the body and mind there is an excess of heat that builds up in our systems, causing discomfort and ultimately disease. Unbalanced Pitta emotionally and mentally represents itself as impatience, aggression, rage, being judgmental, demanding, critical or argumentative, hate, anger, irritability and jealousy. Physically, unbalanced Pitta reveals itself as inflammation, hyperacidity, rashes, red eyes, ulcers, hemorrhoids and burning sensations. The good news is a balanced Pitta is energetic, decisive, funny, confident, charming, charismatic, sharp, and motivating – all qualities to enjoy a fantastic summer.

Pitta Hours

During the day, 10 AM – 2 PM is Pitta time. Being in the sun during this time in summer is not advisable. Early morning, leisurely walks and evening walks at or after sunset in nature



are ideal times of the day for doing some non-strenuous exercise. Walks are relaxing and cooling for both the mind and body. To keep your Pitta content and user-friendly, it is best to scale down on intense, competitive, physical activity during the heat of the summer. Equally important is falling asleep with ease and going to bed by 10 PM. 10 PM – 2 AM is also Pitta time, and it is necessary to wind down prior to this time to have the mind calm, cool and ready for sleep. Pitta generates upward movement in the body and mind, so disengaging from any stimulating, intense activities is required for sound sleep. This includes the use of all and any electronic devices.

Pranayama for Pitta

Pranayama and yoga are two modalities that can be used with ease and comfort to facilitate feeling cool in the summer. *Shitali Pranayama* is a breathing method that cools the body internally. It is practiced by curling or rolling the sides of your tongue inward towards each other, making a tube shape, and then extending your tongue out through your lips. Next, inhale through your tongue in this curled position, similar to sucking through a straw, and exhale through the nostrils. Repeat up to 20 times. If this technique with the tongue is difficult, two modifications are available in its place: 1. Puckering your lips and inhaling in that position or 2. Having your upper and bottom teeth gently touching while inhaling through the teeth is a great, alternative option.

A second pranayama technique is *Single-Nostril Breathing* which involves breathing through one nostril only. Since the right nostril is associated with heating energy and our left nostril with cooling energy, we can cool ourselves by exclusively breathing through the left nostril for a few breaths when summer heat is high. Sitting with your back straight, gently plug the right nostril near the base just enough to block air flow, careful not to press too hard or push your nose toward the left side. With your eyes closed, inhale long and deeply through the left nostril and then exhale without holding any breath. The inhale and exhale should be slow, steady and smooth. This can be repeated up to 20 times.

Ayurveda, Yoga & Aromatherapy for Pitta

There are many yoga poses that are good for Pitta and reducing summer heat. Any asanas that involve twists while sitting or laying on your mat are very good for Pitta as they are calming, balancing, and steady. Doing daily self-abhyanga (Ayurvedic oil massage), for 20 minutes with a cooling oil like coconut or sunflower will also be soothing to the skin, body and mind. Ideally this should be done before a meal or a few hours after. Essential oils like sandalwood and lavender can be placed in a diffuser or bowl of hot water to give a peaceful, cooling feeling to any room.



Foods for Pitta

During summer it is important to pay attention to what you eat and when. Because our digestive fire (agni), is weaker during summer months, it is essential to have breakfast and lunch earlier in the day, and only a light dinner close to sundown. Having meals when it is cooler in the day during hot, summer months facilitates digestion, assimilation and absorption. Eating three meals a day, in a timely fashion, helps your Pitta stay calm. Caffeine and alcohol are big no-no's, dehydrating the body further and adding unnecessary fuel to the fire. Reduce or avoid foods that are fried, fermented, sour, salty, spicy, sharp, pungent and oily, as these will all aggravate Pitta. Foods that are astringent, cool, heavy, dry, bitter and sweet in nature are best for Pitta and summer, and will keep you cool. In Ayurveda, foods sweet in nature are fresh dairy products (not hard or salted cheese), whole grains, squashes, yams, and fruits.

Since fruits are a big hit in the summer, they are a great way to keep cool and satiated when weather is sweltering. Because fruits digest at a different rate than other foods, Ayurveda states that they should be eaten alone, and not combined with other foods so as not hinder the digestive process. The best time to have fruit is before a meal, a few hours after a meal, or as a late morning or afternoon snack. Here's a list of Pitta pacifying fruits to favor for summer: avocado (in moderation), apple (not sour), sweet berries, sweet cherries, coconut, dates, figs, grapes (purple and red), honeydew, lime, mango, melons, sweet orange, pears, sweet pineapple, sweet plums, pomegranate, prunes, raisins.

Best oils for summer foods are coconut, ghee, olive and sunflower. Leafy greens, cucumbers and a funny vegetable called bitter melon are great for summer. The benefits of this unusual vegetable are endless. Recipes abound on the internet with this peculiar vegetable, so find a recipe that sounds delicious to you, get out of your comfort zone and experiment! While you're cooking for friends, family and guests this summer, herbs can go a long way in helping balance that summer heat. Herbs that are cool in nature to the body are listed at the end of this article with their benefits.

Finally, ice-cold drinks are not your friend. This contrast in temperature is a shock to the body, and while seemingly cooling it completely extinguishes your digestive fire (agni), and creates a host of other problems that materialize down the road. A drink can be cool, chilled or room temperature. Putting rose water or fresh mint in your water is revitalizing and refreshing. Coconut water and chamomile are also very cool and soothing for summer's Pitta. During the summer months here in Kerala, Dr. Ashok makes sure his guests stay cool at Greens Ayurveda by providing a refreshing drink and tonic made from Serbia syrup, Indian Sarsaparilla, for all to enjoy!

Cooling Pitta Herbs:

Green cardamom – helps balance stomach acid

Coriander/Cilantro – is cooling, helps digestion, reduces inflammation

Dill – soothes the digestive system and ulcers, relieves excess gas

Fennel – is a great digestive and helps remove toxins and gas from the body

Mint – is an antioxidant, reduces inflammation and stimulates digestive enzymes

Neem – removes toxins, purifies the blood, treats ulcers

Parsley – aids in digestion and freshens breath, a natural detox and anti-inflammatory

Rose water - strengthens the all the digestive organs, balances appetite, and assists in absorption

Saffron - reduces burning sensations, relieves heat

Turmeric – enhances digestion and removes toxins

