

Unit 1: Foundations of Ayurveda

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(*Tridoṣa* • *Pañcamahābhūta* • *Agni-Āma-Ojas* • *Prakṛti* • *Dinacaryā & Rtucaryā*)

1) Tridoṣa Theory: Vāta, Pitta, Kapha — characteristics and imbalances

Ayurveda explains regulation of the living body through three organizing principles called **doṣas**:

- **Vāta** governs motion and communication—nerve impulses, breath, peristalsis, tissue transport. Its primary qualities are **light, dry, cold, mobile, subtle, rough**. The classical “seat” is the pelvic/colon region.
- **Pitta** governs transformation—digestion, metabolism, enzymatic reactions, vision, temperature regulation. Its qualities are **hot, sharp, light, slightly oily, spreading**. The abdominal/umbilical region is its seat.
- **Kapha** governs structure and cohesion—growth, lubrication, immune reserve, emotional steadiness. Its qualities are **heavy, cool, oily, slow, stable, smooth**. The chest is its seat.

Imbalance (prakopa) patterns.

- **Vāta↑**: dryness, coldness, insomnia, variable appetite/bowel, anxiety, shifting pains.
- **Pitta↑**: heat, irritability, reflux, rashes, inflammatory pain, sharp hunger/thirst.
- **Kapha↑**: heaviness, edema, lethargy, congestion, dull appetite, sluggish mood.

Clinical logic. Doṣas rise when like qualities accumulate (e.g., cold + dry → Vāta↑); they settle when **opposite qualities** are applied (warmth, unctuousness, steadiness for Vāta; cooling and moderation for Pitta; lightness and stimulation for Kapha). In hands-on therapy this translates into **oil choice, temperature, pressure/tempo, and stroke direction**. For example, a Vāta-dominant, tense client benefits from **warm sesame-based oil, slow depth on exhale, longer holds at feet/ankles**; a Kapha-heavy client benefits from **brisker, lighter strokes and short heat priming**.

2) Pañcamahābhūta — the five great elements and their role in the body

Ayurveda models physiology through five elemental functions:

- **Ākāśa (Space)**: provides room—lumens, cavities, micro-spaces in tissues; permits vibration and transmission.
- **Vāyu (Air)**: movement and flow—neural signaling, muscular motion, gas exchange, peristalsis.
- **Agni (Fire/Tejas)**: transformation—digestion, metabolism, cellular respiration, vision.
- **Āpa (Water/Jala)**: fluidity and cohesion—plasma, mucus, synovial fluid, cytosol.
- **Prthvī (Earth)**: solidity and support—bone, muscle bulk, connective matrix.

The doṣas are functional composites of these elements (Vāta ≈ Ākāśa+Vāyu; Pitta ≈ Agni; Kapha ≈ Āpa+Prthvī). Therapists use elemental qualities to predict **tissue feel**: e.g., a Prthvī-dominant myofascia will feel dense and slow to change; an Ākāśa/Vāyu state feels dry, thin, and twitchy.

3) Agni, Āma, and Ojas — digestive fire, toxins, immunity

Agni (digestive-metabolic fire).

Agni is the capacity to **digest, absorb, and assimilate**. It operates at multiple levels:

- **Jatharāgni** (gut fire),
- **Bhūtāgni** (element-specific transformations),
- **Dhātvagni** (tissue-level metabolism).

Functional states of Agni:

- **Sama (balanced):** steady appetite, comfortable digestion, stable energy.
- **Manda (low):** heaviness, bloating, somnolence after meals.
- **Tikṣṇa (excess):** hyperacidity, irritability, burning sensations.
- **Viṣama (irregular):** alternating constipation/looseness, gas, variable appetite—often Vāta-linked.

Āma (incompletely processed by-products).

When agni is weak or erratic, intermediate, **sticky, obstructive** material forms—Āma. It gums up channels (srotas), burdens immunity, and predisposes to disease. Clinically, Āma presents as **coated tongue, foul breath, malaise, heaviness, erratic bowels**.

Ojas (vital essence).

Ojas is the **final essence of fully nourished tissues**—a subtle substrate of vigor, emotional stability, and disease resistance. Robust ojas shows as **bright eyes, steady mood, quick healing**; depleted ojas shows as **fatigue, frequent infections, poor wound repair**.

Therapeutic arc. Support **Agni** → prevent or clear **Āma** → protect and build **Ojas**. In practice: meal timing, warm digestible foods, gentle spices when needed; in bodywork: dosha-matched oils, pacing that fosters parasympathetic tone, and seasonal resets.

4) Prakṛti (constitutional type) — identifying and applying in therapy

Prakṛti is a person's relatively stable constitutional pattern set at conception. Most people are **dual-dominant** (e.g., Vāta-Pitta, Pitta-Kapha). It describes baseline **body build, skin, appetite, sleep, thermoregulation, emotional style, and stress response**. Distinguish **prakṛti** (baseline) from **vikṛti** (current imbalance).

Assessment. Combine structured questioning with observation (voice, eyes, skin, gait), pulse/tongue where trained, and history (appetite, bowels, sleep, heat/cold tolerance, reactivity).

Applying prakṛti in therapy.

- **Vāta prakṛti:** benefits from **warmth, oiliness, steadiness**—sesame-based oils, slow cadence, longer holds at distal points; emphasize routine and sleep hygiene.
- **Pitta prakṛti:** benefits from **cooling, evenness, and moderation**—coconut or manjistha-balanced oils, avoid vigorous friction/overheat; encourage pauses, cooling breaths.
- **Kapha prakṛti:** benefits from **lightness, movement, and stimulation**—brisker strokes, brief heat (kizhi/steam), upright finishes; emphasize daily movement and early meals.

Prakṛti guides **oil selection, temperature, tempo, pressure**, and **home routines**. Vikṛti determines **what to treat first**.

5) Dinacaryā (daily routine) and Rtucaryā (seasonal regimen)

Dinacaryā — daily rhythm.

- **Pre-dawn rising:** align with natural cortisol rise; quiet breath/prayer/meditation.
- **Elimination and oral/nasal care:** tongue cleaning, gentle oiling where appropriate.
- **Self-abhyanga (oil application):** nourishes skin-nervous system, supports lymph.

- **Movement (vyāyāma):** appropriate to constitution; in Kalari contexts, chuvadukal drills scaled to season and recovery status.
- **Main meal by midday:** supports digestive capacity; lighter evening meal.
- **Evening wind-down:** screens down, calming breath, timely sleep.

Rtucaryā — seasonal rhythm.

Adapt diet, activity, and therapies to climate-driven doṣa drifts:

- **Late winter/early spring (Śiśira/Vasanta):** Kapha tends to rise—favor lighter foods, spices, brisk movement, brief heat.
- **Summer (Grīṣma):** Pitta rises—favor cooling hydration, shade, moderated exertion, coconut-based oils.
- **Monsoon (Varṣā):** Agni dips—favor easily digestible meals, hygiene, careful heat; in Kerala, Karkidaka rejuvenation is traditional.
- **Autumn (Śarad) → early winter (Hemanta):** balance residual Pitta then nourish Vāta—gradually richer foods, grounding oils, steady routines.

Transitions (ṛtu-sandhi) are handled by **gradual** change over 1-2 weeks.

Summary Tables (exam-ready)

A) Doṣa quick map

Doṣa	Elemental basis	Primary seat	Key functions	Aggravation cues	Core calming levers
Vāta	Space + Air	Pelvic/colon	Motion, nerve flow, transport	Dryness, gas, insomnia, variable pain	Warmth, oiliness, steadiness, routine
Pitta	Fire	Umbilical/small intestine	Digestion, metabolism, heat, vision	Heat, reflux, rashes, irritability	Cooling, moderation, even tempo
Kapha	Water + Earth	Chest	Cohesion, lubrication, immunity	Heaviness, edema, congestion, lethargy	Lightness, movement, brief heat

B) Pañcamahābhūta → function

Element	Qualities	Physiologic analogies	Therapy hints
Ākāśa (Space)	subtle, open	lumens, channels	respect “space” around organs/joints
Vāyu (Air)	mobile, dry	neural conduction, peristalsis	steady rhythm, avoid abrupt force
Agni (Fire)	hot, sharp	enzymes, metabolism	manage friction/heat input
Āpa (Water)	fluid, cohesive	plasma, mucus, synovial	maintain hydration/oil film
Prthvī (Earth)	heavy, stable	bone, fascia, myofibres	longer holds to remodel density

C) Agni-Āma-Ojas interplay

Node	Balanced signs	Disturbance signs	Primary interventions
Agni	steady appetite, lightness after meals	heaviness, acidity, variability	meal timing, warm digestible food, gentle spices
Āma	none present	coated tongue, malaise, foul breath	simplify diet, light movement, lymph-first strokes
Ojas	good stamina, calm mood, quick healing	fatigue, frequent colds, poor repair	sleep, nourishing oils/foods, steady parasympathetic tone

D) Prakṛti in practice (therapy lens)

Prakṛti	Oil & temperature	Tempo/pressure	Movement & lifestyle
Vāta-dominant	warm sesame-based	slow, steady, longer holds	routine, warmth, early sleep



Prakṛti	Oil & temperature	Tempo/pressure	Movement & lifestyle
Pitta-dominant	neutral/cooling (e.g., coconut-manjistha)	even, avoid friction heat	moderation, shade, cooling breath
Kapha-dominant	lighter oils, brief heat (kizhi/steam)	brisk, lighter	daily vigorous movement, lighter dinners

E) Dinacaryā & Rtucaryā — core steps

Time frame	Recommendation	Rationale in practice
Pre-dawn	Wake, breath/meditation, elimination	anchors circadian rhythm, reduces mental clutter
Morning	Self-oil, movement, bath	vagal tone, joint glide, lymph support
Midday	Main meal	aligns with strongest digestive capacity
Evening	Light meal, screen-down, sleep routine	supports ojas and repair
Seasonal	Gradual change at transitions; season-matched diet/activity	buffers doṣa swings, prevents flare-ups

Closing synthesis

- **Tridoṣa** gives a control-systems view of physiology; **Pañcamahābhūta** offers a qualitative ontology of tissues and functions.
- **Agni-Āma-Ojas** form a metabolic-immune axis that explains resilience or breakdown.
- **Prakṛti** personalises baseline care; **vikṛti** directs immediate intervention.
- **Dinacaryā/Rtucaryā** embed therapy in daily and seasonal time, turning short-term changes into durable health.

For therapeutic arts like Kalari Uzhichil, these foundations translate directly into **oil selection, stroke pacing, heat dosing, positional choices, and home routines**—so touch isn't generic, but individualized, seasonal, and physiologically coherent.