Eating for Vata

Foods to generally favor and go easy on, by food group

Ayurveda describes Vata, the dosha of air and movement, as cold, dry, light and changeable. The traditional answer is food with the opposite qualities: warm, moist, cooked meals with a little oil, eaten at regular times. Sweet, sour and salty tastes are favored, though no food is strictly off limits.

FOOD GROUP	GENERALLY FAVOR	GO EASY ON
Grains	Warm oatmeal, white or brown rice, and soft wheat such as noodles or fresh flatbread.	Crackers, rice cakes, granola, popcorn, chips and other dry, crunchy foods.
Vegetables	Cooked roots and squashes: carrots, beets, sweet potato, pumpkin, zucchini. Also green beans and well-cooked spinach.	Big raw salads. Raw cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli (these usually sit better cooked with oil and spices).
Fruit	Sweet, ripe fruit: bananas, mangoes, peaches, berries. Stewed apples. Dates and raisins soaked in warm water.	Unripe or puckery fruit: raw apples, cranberries, green bananas. Handfuls of dried fruit eaten dry.
Beans and lentils	Split mung beans, red lentils and soft tofu, cooked with warming spices.	Kidney beans, chickpeas and black beans, unless soaked and cooked until very soft.
Dairy	Warm milk, ghee, soft fresh cheese, and fresh yogurt in small servings.	Ice-cold milk, ice cream, and smoothies straight from the freezer.
Nuts, seeds, oils	Soaked almonds, walnuts and sesame seeds. Sesame oil and olive oil.	Fat-free cooking. A little oil or ghee is part of the Vata approach.
Animal foods if you eat them	Eggs, chicken and fish, especially in soups and stews.	Dry, heavily grilled or jerky-style meats.
Spices	Ginger, cumin, cinnamon, cardamom, fennel, and a pinch of asafoetida (hing) in bean dishes.	Very large amounts of hot chili.
Drinks	Warm water, herbal teas, broth.	Iced drinks. Several cups of coffee or strong black tea, especially on an empty stomach.

Eating habits that help

1. **Keep regular mealtimes.** Try not to skip meals or let them drift late.
2. **Make most meals warm and cooked:** soups, stews, porridge, dal and rice.
3. **Sit down to eat.** Meals eaten on the run are the first habit to change.
4. **Sip warm water or herbal tea** with meals instead of iced drinks.

Keep in mind

- **Starting points, not rules.** These lists come from Ayurvedic tradition, have not been tested in clinical trials, and are not a diagnosis.
- **"Go easy on" means less often,** not never. Go by how a food actually suits you.
- **Have a medical condition,** are pregnant or take medicines? Discuss changes with your practitioner first, and do not cut out whole food groups.
- **Keep protein up.** If you eat few beans and little meat, rotate in mung beans, lentils, tofu, dairy or eggs.

This handout is general information. It is not a substitute for medical advice from your own doctor or practitioner.