

Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Prevention with Ayurved

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Allopathy or western / modern medicine has no cure for viral infection, immunity problems, allergy and many diseases which do not involve a microorganism attacking human body. So it is no surprise that allopathy has no cure for Coronavirus (Covid-19).

As a student of ayurved, while I believe that ayurved may have a cure for Covid-19 it is not appropriate for me to try to offer a cure for the ailment. Purpose of this article is to offer practical tips based on ayurved to help one avoid getting afflicted by the disease without going into self-imposed quarantine and without consuming cartons of sanitizer. Before we talk of practical tips, let us look at some hard facts.

Wuhan, the capital of Central China's Hubei province, has a population of about 11 million. Total number of people infected by the virus in China at the time of writing is estimated to be about 81,000. It will be reasonable to assume that say about 70,000 persons were affected by the virus in Wuhan. Surely with the large number of affected persons in the city, everyone in the city was exposed to the virus at sometime or the other. But, everyone was not affected. More than 99% of the population of the city were exposed to the virus but did not allow the virus to overpower them.

Total deaths in China are about 3,136 which amount to about 3.9% of the total persons affected. Let us consider only Wuhan – number of persons affected is about 0.65% of the population of Wuhan. Of the affected persons, more than 96% of the people managed to survive the virus even though, as doctors claim, there is no cure for the viral affection. The point is simple. Human body has an inherent capability to fight the Coronavirus and in 99.99% of the cases human body is able to bounce back.

The paradigm of western or modern medicine focuses on the attacker and ignores the attacked. The model believes that the fault lies only and only with the external

and there is no fault with the internal. In contrast, ayurved focuses on the internal. There is never any dearth of attackers. The effect that any attacker is able to cause depends on the internal strengths of the attacked. According to ayurved, if the body is strong enough and healthy, it will have the ability to fight and withstand the attacker. Key in ayurved is to focus on the strength of one's own body and not be concerned with the attacker. So, one should aim to be like one of the 99% in Wuhan who were exposed to the Coronavirus but did not fall sick.

Before moving further let us understand the paradigm of ayurved which is based on the principle of balance of three faults – **vaat, pit and kaph**.

Vaat is cold, dry and mobile. Vaat is responsible for all all types of movements in the body – breath, spitting, urine, stool, sweat, semen, foetus, sneeze, yawn, food. Vaat is what inspires senses (eyes, ears, tongue, skin, nose) to do their work. Vaat is what moves and keeps together body parts like joints, muscles and bones. Vaat gives strength to appetite. Vaat is aggravated when one is depressed or dejected or sad. As one goes beyond forty years of age diseases caused by aggravation of vaat start troubling one. So, every disease that one associates with aging and old age is a vaat disease. Of course, age is not the only factor responsible for vaat related diseases.

Pitt is like acid. It is warm. It is responsible for digestion of food. It is critical for wisdom, intellect, ego, sharpness, enthusiasm and achievement of objectives. While vaat is like a gas, pitt is liquid. Pitt is what makes the skin and face glow. Even one's ability to appreciate beauty comes from pitt. The age group when pitt is at its prime is 20-40, the age when one's enthusiasm is at its peak. Most problems of pitt aggravation are seen in this age group.

Kaph is like fat – semi-solid, cold and lethargic. Kaph causes moistening and softening. Kaph leads to lubrication of joints, eyes and other body parts. Kaph is responsible for the feeling of being satiated or happy. Typically, after consuming meals kaph goes up and one feels satiated, relaxed and happy. Across the world, friends eat together and share the feeling that comes after one has eaten well.

Covid-19 is a quintessential vaat aggravation disease. Many patients have reported a chilly feeling at the start of the symptoms. It causes breathing problems. It causes dry sore throat. The coughing is dry. It causes body aches. Running nose and nasal congestion are also well-known to be caused by vaat aggravation. While it

is not reported by media and medical personnel, I suspect that the first and foremost symptom is frequent yawning. As one would expect from a vaat disease, Covid-19 does not generally affect persons below 20 years of age and affects persons in the age group of 20-40 mildly. Most fatalities are in the age group of >40 when vaat is aggravated.

Once we know that Covid-19 is a vaat aggravation disease, it is obvious that any prevention of the disease must focus on keeping the vaat under control. Let us look at some of the pre-symptoms that indicate a tendency of body disturbance likely to cause increase of vaat in the body:

- a) **Constipation** – increase of vaat causes stools to become hard and once the stool movement is not smooth, vaat shoots up. It is a vicious circle that must be broken. If you need to exert even slightly for bowel movement, you must act to correct the situation. An easy remedy is a cup of hot milk with two or three teaspoons of castor oil (with or without sugar) at bedtime.
- b) **Depression, Sadness, Negativity, Lack of Enthusiasm** – Mind is the key to the body. Feelings of dejection, sorrow and depression must be fought. You must take help of friends, relatives and family members. But most importantly, you need to pull yourself out of the hole that often you are digging for yourself. Ayurvedic medicines that reduce vaat can be useful to break the vicious circle. Foods that are vaat reducing can also help.
- c) **Dryness / cracking** – If your lips or hands or feet become dry and you have to use moisturizer every now and then, this is not a problem of only lips / hands / feet; it is an indication of aggravated vaat. Instead of merely applying moisturizer on the affected part, you should pay attention to the whole body internally as well as externally.
- d) **Yawns / hiccups / burps / flatulence** – These are the first signs of increase of vaat. One must take them as indications from the body asking you to act immediately on the fault that is developing.
- e) **Stiffness** – If any part of your body is feeling stiff, it is a sure sign of increased vaat. The part may be neck, back, legs, ankle or some other.
- f) **Pains and needle-pricking sensation** – Body ache or sensation of needles pricking your body can mostly be result of increased vaat.

- g) **Feeling cold** – If you need to increase the room temperature when everyone else is comfortable, this most likely is an indication of increased vaat.
- h) **Disturbed menses** – For women, menses turning abnormal with reduced flow or missed cycle is often a sure sign of vaat disturbance.

Let us also look at some of the key causes for increase of vaat.

- i. **Food** – Consuming vaat aggravating foods is often the cause of increased vaat. Dry cold food can also cause vaat. Foods that are seasonal in summer often lead to increase of vaat. Most gourds (*lauki / doodhi / gheeya, tinda, tori / gilki, karela*) fall in this category. Most coarse cereals lead to increased vaat. Many pulses (moong / green gram, tuar daal, moth, masur) aggravate vaat. Pungent foods (chilli) can also cause vaat aggravation. Some health foods are also vaat aggravating. Amla is extremely healthy but it causes vaat to increase. Similarly, honey causes dryness and leads to increase of vaat. Honey and amla have different effect when used in combination with other foods. Both should be used in conjunction with vaat reducing foods.
- ii. **Late nights and sleeping during the day** – Whether you consume alcohol or don't, the day after a late night party never feels good. The reason is increased vaat. When one sleeps during the day the body metabolism goes into reverse gear leading to increase of kaph which in turn leads to increase of vaat. It is not just important that one has the right amount of sleep, it is necessary that one has it only during night with regular sleeping and waking hours.
- iii. **Emotional disturbances / tensions / fear** – A healthy mind is in a healthy body and vice versa. Any disturbances to your mind and heart will lead to increase of vaat.
- iv. **Fasting** – Remaining empty stomach for long can lead to aggravated vaat. Similarly, in winters eating light food can cause vaat disturbance.
- v. **Excessive physical exercise** – Hitting the gym is a good thing. But when you get tired vaat increases. Excess of physical exercise can lead to vaat shooting up. So, light exercise is recommended but heavy exercise must be done with caution. Traditionally, Indian wrestlers and bodybuilders resorted

to eating lots of vaat-reducing foods accompanied with massage using vaat reducing substances.

- vi. **Excessive sexual activity** – No one can define what is excessive when it comes to sex. But, if you feel increased vaat, this may be one point on which you may pay attention.
- vii. **Exhaustion** – Our times will be remembered in history when machines replaced men for all the hard work and yet mankind was overworked and always tired. Long commutes, long working hours and pressures of social activity and entertainment have created a generation that is always tired. Nothing can be a surer recipe for increased vaat.
- viii. **Exposure to cold** – Nature of vaat is cold. Hence, it is to be expected that any exposure to low temperatures can lead to increased vaat. This can happen not just in regions with sub-zero temperatures. It can also happen in places like Mumbai if office air conditioning is set to low temperatures. More often than not, the foods in cold places are based on the weather there and people living there can endure higher level of cold before suffering from vaat. In contrast food in hot plains of India does not prepare one for the low temperatures of air conditioned offices.
- ix. **Weight reduction therapies** – All weight reduction therapies (including physical exercises) lead to reduction of kaph in the body which almost as a rule leads to increase of vaat. So, beware!

We now know the pre-symptoms of vaat aggravation and we also know the causes of increase of vaat. We had discussed earlier that Covid-19 is an extreme case of vaat aggravation. The logical steps for prevention of Covid-19 would therefore be (a) remove the cause that is creating vaat aggravation and (b) as soon as any of the pre-symptoms appear take proactive steps to reduce vaat both by removing the cause and by adding vaat reducing foods, medicines and actions.

Let us now look at foods with a critical eye. The general rule is that **sweet, salty and sour will reduce vaat while pungent, bitter and astringent tastes will increase vaat**. Of course, nature is not simple and there are always exceptions. Typically, one needs to rely on traditional knowledge common in the region where one lives and learn by past wisdom as well as one's own experience.

Some foods are notorious for aggravating and disturbing all three – vaat, pitt and kaph. Such foods should be avoided except when there are strong reasons in its favour and due care is taken to offset the negatives. Let us first look at a few of these tri-doshkaark (the ones that cause disturbance of all three faults):

- **Beef or cow's meat** – One would think that beef eating is banned for religious reasons. No, it is not religion. Beef is harmful because it disturbs vaat, pitt as well as kaph. Notably, the prohibition applies only to cow's meat and does not apply to buffalo meat or any other meat.
- **Rajmah or Kidney Beans** – Rajmah is eaten only in northern states of Punjab, Jammu etc. In these states, where winters are fairly harsh, agriculture was and is the primary occupation. Rajmah, if digested well, can be a strong source of strength much needed by farmers working in extreme cold weather of northern states. Rajmah is cooked with a lot of butter, cream, onions and garlic. The cooking method ensures that rajmah is well digested and the faults are corrected. But, that is for someone working in the fields in extreme weather. If you spend your day on a desk working on a laptop, rajmah, howsoever cooked, is definitely not something for you.
- **Sarson ka saag or Mustard leaves** – The same as rajmah. Traditionally sarson ka saag is eaten with makki ki roti (flat bread made from corn) with lots of butter, green chili and a big glass of lassi (thick curd stirred well with sugar or salt). For most urban dwellers all this is just too much. So, the simple rule for city dwellers is to avoid sarson ka saag.

Having looked at three tri-doshkaark foods, let us now look at three tri-doshshamak substances or the ones that help control all three faults (vaat, pitt and kaph):

- ✓ **Triphala** – This is a mixture of three fruits. It is readily available in powder form. A teaspoon of the powder can be had with water twice a day. For better control of vaat, one can have one teaspoon of triphala with one teaspoon of sugar powder with two teaspoons of ghee. This combination is extremely potent but may lead to increase of kaph. It is not recommended for those who are overweight. Triphala can also be had with honey and dry ginger powder. Presently, triphala tablets are also available. It is very convenient to have two triphala tablets twice a day after meals. Triphala is also a mild laxative. By aiding bowel movements it prevents aggravation of vaat. It is said that if a fool

who does not know ayurved starts practice as an ayurvedic physician, he can start giving triphala powder to all patients; majority of patients will get cured and the fool will build reputation as a learned doctor.

- ✓ **Mulethi (also called Madhuyeshti) powder** – This works wonders for all throat related ailments; but is also useful in other problems. Mulethi powder can be had thrice or four or more times with water. It can be taken without water and can be kept in the side of the mouth. One can also take one teaspoon of mulethi with unequal quantities of ghee and honey. As soon as one experiences dryness or irritation in throat at any time, taking multehi regularly can help a lot.
- ✓ **Giloy (also called as Guduchi or Amrita)** – It is a creeper found commonly across India. The branches can be used either fresh or dry. Boil a small piece (say about 15 cm long) with a small piece of ginger in four cups of water till the water is reduced to one cup only. The decoction can be had with sugar. One may also add a teaspoon of castor oil to the decoction. This is a potent combination that can cure many diseases. Giloy / Guduchi / Amrita tablets are also available and may be used.

When one consumes any of the above three, one does not need to take any care since there is no chance of any of the faults getting aggravated. For most other foods when vaat is controlled either pitt or kaph goes up.

Let us first look at substances that control vaat but lead to aggravation of pitt. Typically, such substances should be consumed freely in winter but should either be avoided or consumed in small quantities during summer.

- ❖ **Ginger, Garlic, Ajwain (Bishop's weed, or Carom), Mustard, Asafoetida, Pepper, Fenugreek (methi) seeds** – All these are classified as spices. Actually these are ayurvedic medicines that have been incorporated into food. Ginger, whether fresh or dry, is extremely potent. Liberal use of these in food can reduce vaat significantly. Fresh ginger pieces soaked in lemon juice and salt consumed along with food builds up appetite and can cure many vaat diseases.
- ❖ **Meats and Eggs** – Meats of chicken, quail (also known as partridge or teetar or bater), pig (fresh not frozen) are known to reduce vaat. It is recommended that these meats cooked with spices and sour substances should be eaten

when vaat is likely to increase. Eggs of chicken as well as other domestic birds like ducks help reduce vaat. Eggs do not lead to increased pitt but may lead to constipation which may need to be taken care of.

- ❖ **Urad Daal (also called Vigna mungo or Black gram)** – It is consumed either whole or split with / without skin. In all three forms it has excellent vaat reducing properties. Kulthi (also known as Horse gram) is similar to urad. It is used regularly in Uttarakhand and some other states of India.
- ❖ **Sesame Oil (also known as Til ka tail or Gingelly oil)** – This is extremely potent for reducing both vaat and kaph. It can be used as cooking oil as well as for massage. In extreme winter, I often make a mixture of one teaspoon of triphala with a spoon of gur (jiggery) powder mixed with two teaspoons of sesame oil. This mixture can be had with food as chutney with excellent results in controlling vaat.
- ❖ **Gur or jaggery** – It is unrefined sugar but has different characteristics. While sugar reduces vaat as well as pitt (but enhances kaph), gur reduces vaat and increases pitt.
- ❖ **Tamarind, Lemon, Tomato** – All three are sour and acidic with tomato being the mildest of the three. These are used extensively in Indian cooking for taste as well as to reduce vaat. Rice, which causes increase of vaat, is rarely consumed in India without either one of the three sour substances or ghee or spices.
- ❖ **Lukewarm water** – This is the simplest remedy for vaat. Drinking lukewarm water through the day can be a very effective cure for mild aggravation of vaat.
- ❖ **Curd and buttermilk** – Both reduce vaat while increasing pitt. Normally, it is recommended that these should not be consumed at night since increased pitt can lead to faster digestion and an empty stomach later during the night.
- ❖ **Alcoholic Beverages** – Alcohol is an acid. So it increases pitt. When the quantity consumed is small, alcohol increases appetite and reduces vaat. Increased quantity of alcohol makes pitt shoot up causing all faults to increase. Thus a glass or two of wine in winter can be beneficial, while four pegs of whisky can be devastating for the body.

Let us also look at some substances that control vaat but lead to increase of kaph. Both vaat and kaph are cold in nature. Hence, substances that reduce vaat often reduce kaph also. Some key such substances that reduce vaat but increase kaph are as follows:

- **Ghee or Butter** – Ghee or butter is the best substance for reducing vaat as well as pitt. It can be used with a combination of other vaat reducing substances to reduce vaat almost instantly. It can be used stand-alone as medicine or as cooking medium or as massage oil. The best massage oil for reducing vaat is a combination of ghee, sesame oil, buffalo and pig fat, extract of buffalo and pig bone marrow.
- **Milk** – Cow as well as buffalo's milk reduces vaat but increases kaph mildly.
- **Sugar** – Sugar like ghee provides instant relief from vaat and pitt aggravation but leads to increased kaph.
- **Sweet Fruits** like banana, mango, melons etc. – All sweet fruits reduce vaat but increase kaph.
- **Almonds and walnuts** – Both the dry fruits reduce vaat but lead to increased pitt as well as kaph.
- **Buffalo meat** reduces vaat but is difficult to digest and causes increase of kaph making one lethargic.

Let us now look at some substances that increase vaat and should be avoided (or be consumed in combination with vaat reducing foods) if one is trying to keep vaat in check.

- **Fried snacks** – India has a large range of fried savories – samosa, pakoda, bhajjiya, vada etc. All of these lead to instant increase of vaat. Traditionally, these are eaten with some sweet-sour pungent chutney made of tamarind, jaggery, ginger, garlic etc. The chutney is the vaat reducing medicine that acts as corrective for the shooting up of vaat. However, if one is trying to reduce vaat, such substances should be avoided.
- **Moong, Tuar (arhar), Moth and Masoor** – These are types of daal consumed across India. Mostly these are cooked in combination with a variety of vaat reducing substances like ghee, mustard, tamarind, onion, ginger etc.

These are excellent foods in summer. However, it is recommended that in winter when vaat tends to get aggravated these should be avoided.

- **Summer Vegetables** – Nature has a way of taking care of her children. Nature gives in summer vegetables that reduce pitta but increase vaat. These vegetables (*lauki / doodhi / gheeya, tinda, tori / gilki, karela*) should be avoided when the weather is cold. It has become a fashion to consume lauki or karela juice throughout the year. Juices of summer vegetables can lead to sharp increase of vaat when weather is cold.
- **Coarse grains** – Most coarse grains like corn, millet, barley are extremely dry and lead to increased vaat. It is customary to eat these with liberal quantities of butter or ghee. The balancing generally works fine. However, if one's focus is on reducing vaat one should avoid coarse grains.
- **Amla juice / Aloe vera juice** – Both, amla and aloe vera, are excellent for reducing pitta but have the effect of increasing vaat. The two should not be consumed except in combinations (like in triphala) when one is aiming to reduce vaat.

Let us sum it up. We know the symptoms of vaat aggravation. We also know what increases vaat and what can be used to control vaat. Covid-19 is an extreme case of vaat aggravation caused by whatever reason. The obvious way to prevent Covid-19 and also to ensure that the effects of the disease are mild and non-fatal, is to keep vaat in control before one is afflicted with the disease as well as when the first symptoms appear. The way is neither difficult nor complicated. It just needs better understanding based on the paradigm of vaat-pitta-kapha.

Before I close let me give you some historical perspective. The whole world is talking of **Spanish flu pandemic** of 1918 which affected the world from January 1918 to December 1920. The death toll is estimated to have been anywhere from 17 million to 50 million, and possibly as high as 100 million, making it one of the deadliest epidemics in human history. The Spanish flu infected 500 million people around the world, or about 27% of the world population at that time.

While exact figures are not available, it is widely recognized that the pandemic did not hurt India and China as severely as it did in Europe and America. Most accounts of the pandemic acknowledge that the percentage of affected persons as well as the fatality rate was lower in India and China as compared to Europe and the USA even

though modern medical facilities were almost non-existent in India and China at that time. In fact, at the level of oral recounts of history (as we have heard from our grandparents) we have never heard of Spanish Flu pandemic in India. Indian history of 1918-20 talks of freedom movement, Jallianwalla Bagh, Rowlatt Act, Khilafat movement and non-cooperation movement but not of widespread deaths caused by a pandemic.

Clearly, both **India and China could keep the fury of the pandemic at bay with help from their traditional systems of medicine.** Face masks, sanitizers and quarantine did not work for Europe and America in 1918. There seems to be no reason why these things will work a century later.

Allopathy or western / modern medicine did not know any cure for Spanish flu but was arrogant enough to advise and prescribe with confidence. Almost ninety years after the pandemic, some scholars who studied the pandemic opined that some medicines (aspirin) prescribed by doctors at that time contributed significantly to a large percentage of deaths. Little seems to have changed in more than hundred years that have passed. The ones who do not know are guiding the world with authority and confidence. Let us not be led by the blind and take lessons from history and our ancient traditional knowledge to protect ourselves and our children.



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