

---

# – Ayurveda & the Six Tastes –

---

Instead of looking at the individual components of foods—such as carbohydrates, protein, fats, and calories—as Western-based nutrition does, Ayurveda identifies six “tastes” of foods. They are: **sweet**, **sour**, **salty**, **bitter**, **pungent**, and **astringent**. Each taste has specific effects on the three doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) and thus on the body–mind. By including all six tastes in each meal we abundantly satisfy our nutritional and dietary needs without the need to count calories or consult a manual. Simply adding a squeeze of lemon juice to a dish can satisfy the **sour** taste, while including a side salad with a meal can satisfy the **bitter** and **astringent** tastes. Many foods, in fact, are made up of more than one taste: onions, for instance, have all six tastes except for salty.

---

## THE SIX TASTES

The **sweet** taste is a heavy, dense, cooling taste. This is *not* what westerners understand as “sweets,” ie: pastries and sugary baked goods. These are nourishing, tissue-building foods. Dairy, grains, nuts and seeds, oils, and some fruits and vegetables make up the **sweet** taste.

The **sour** taste is a hot, light, moist taste. It, too, builds tissue, although not to the extent that the **sweet** taste does. The **sour** taste is typically found in fermented foods, pickles, and citrus fruits. The **sour** taste stimulates digestion, helps circulation, aids elimination, relieves thirst, and helps to extract minerals from foods.

The **salty** taste is hot, heavy, and moist. Water always follows salt, and salt stimulates water retention, thus its “moist” characteristic. Sea salt and sea vegetables are common **salty** foods.

The **pungent** taste is hot, dry, and light. It is the hottest of the six tastes and is found in spices (ginger, cayenne) and some vegetables (garlic, onion). The **pungent** taste stimulates digestion, dispels gas, aids circulation, improves metabolism, and promotes sweating and detoxification.

The **astringent** taste is dry, cooling, and heavy. It is the least common of the six tastes. The **astringent** taste is known for drawing moisture out of the tissues and for creating a puckering sensation in the mouth. **Astringent** foods include pomegranate, cranberries, broccoli, cauliflower, and caffeinated teas.

The **bitter** taste is a light, cooling, and dry taste. It is the most reducing of the six tastes. The **bitter** taste stimulates the appetite, detoxifies, and reduces weight and water retention. It is also helpful in relieving nausea and skin rashes. Additionally, the **bitter** taste typically has antibiotic, anti-parasitic, and antiseptic qualities. Food as Medicine! Leafy greens and bitter melon are bitter foods.

---

## PRAKRUTI AND THE SIX TASTES

Each Prakruti (constitution) naturally desires tastes that are balancing to it, and each Prakruti is disinterested in tastes that are aggravating to it. If we were to follow our natural nutritional urges, eating would be simple! Vatas, for instance, are naturally drawn to eat foods that are heavy, moist, and grounding—qualities that balance Vata’s cool, dry, mobile nature. Pittas naturally are drawn to foods that are cooling to counter Pitta’s innate heat. Kaphas favor light, drying foods, to counter Kapha’s heavy and dense tendency.

Each Dosha responds differently to the various tastes; they have different nutritional needs. Vatas tend to be underweight by nature; they need the tissue-building tendencies of the **sweet**, **sour**, and **salty** tastes to keep them from being too underweight. Kaphas tend to be overweight; they need the tissue-reducing properties of the **bitter**, **astringent**, and **pungent** tastes to keep their weight in check. Pittas need a mix between Vata and Kapha to keep themselves in balance: Pittas need the cooling properties of the **sweet**, **bitter**, and **astringent** tastes and would do well to minimize the heating properties of the **pungent**, **salty**, and **sour** tastes.

Dosha	Most Balancing Tastes	Most Aggravating Tastes
Vata	Sweet, Sour, Salty	Bitter, Astringent, Pungent
Pitta	Sweet, Bitter, Astringent	Pungent, Salty, Sour
Kapha	Bitter, Astringent, Pungent	Sour, Salty, Sweet



So how do the Vata, Pitta, and Kapha doshas satisfy the ideal of eating all six tastes in each meal while staying in balance? The answer is surprisingly simple: Eat more of the foods that balance your predominant dosha, and eat fewer of the foods that aggravate your predominant dosha.

Vatas would eat more of the **sweet**, **sour**, and **salty** foods in a meal and would eat less of the **bitter**, **astringent**, and **pungent** tastes in that same meal. Kaphas would do the opposite: accentuate the **bitter**, **astringent**, and **pungent** tastes while minimizing the **sweet**, **sour**, and **salty** foods. Pittas, again, would emphasize the **bitter**, **sweet**, and **astringent** tastes while eating less of the **pungent**, **salty**, and **sour** tastes.

Someone who has two doshas predominant in his/her Prakruti would find the foods that are in common for the two doshas to accentuate and minimize. For instance, Vata-Pittas could eat a Vata-pacifying diet in winter and eat a Pitta-pacifying diet in summer; for the rest of the year they would eat a diet that emphasizes the sweet taste and minimizes the other five tastes. Pitta-Kaphas would eat a Pitta-pacifying diet in summer and a Kapha-pacifying diet in late winter/early spring; during the remainder of the year they would eat a diet that focuses mainly on the astringent and bitter tastes and that has lesser quantities of the other tastes. Someone who has a Vata-Kapha predominant dosha or one who is tridoshic (has all three doshas equally predominant in his/her Prakruti) would eat all six tastes in equal proportions at all meals.

Taste	Elements	Consists of	Typical Foods	Energetics	Effect on the Body-Mind
<b>Sweet</b>	water + earth	sugars, starches, fats, protein	grains, oils, nuts and seeds, dairy, meat, fish, shellfish, potatoes, sweeteners, carrots	cool, wet/oily, heavy	builds and strengthens all tissues; provides a sense of love, satisfaction, and contentment
<b>Sour</b>	earth + fire	acidic and fermented foods	pickles, citrus fruits, yogurt, hard cheeses, kiefer, sour grapes, sour cherries	heating, heavy, wet/oily	stimulates digestion, dispels gas, nourishes, quenches thirst; increases discrimination
<b>Salty</b>	fire + water	salt, minerals	sea salt, sea vegetables, shellfish, ocean fish	heating, light, wet/oily	softens tissues, sedative, laxative; provides a zest for life, increases courage; decreases fear
<b>Pungent</b>	fire + air	heating spices	nutmeg, cayenne & chili pepper, black pepper, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, cardamom	heating, light, drying	stimulates, improves circulation, promotes sweating, promotes digestion, clears gas, creates heat; increases passion, intensity and extroversion
<b>Astringent</b>	air + earth	foods that contain tannins	tea (black, green, white), dried beans, unripe bananas, potatoes, pomegranates	cooling, drying, lightening	drawing, tightening, diuretic, expectorant, stops bleeding; promotes insecurity, fear, anxiety, and introversion
<b>Bitter</b>	air + ether	leafy greens, vitamins, minerals	kale, collards, spinach, lettuces, dandelion, burdock, gentian, goldenseal, cilantro	cooling, light, drying	cleanses, detoxifies, reduces bodily tissues, clears the mind and emotions; expands the mind

## TASTE COMBINATIONS

Synergistic Combinations of the tastes include:

- + **bitter** — **astringent** :: cooling, detoxifying, diuretic, anti-Pitta
- + **pungent** — **astringent** :: drying, expectorant, anti-Kapha
- + **pungent** — **bitter** :: detoxifying, clearing
- + **pungent** — **sour** — **salty** :: stimulates digestion

Counteracting tastes include:

- + **bitter** <—> **astringent** :: light <—> heavy
- + **pungent** <—> **astringent** :: expanding <—> contracting
- + **sour** <—> **salty** :: acid <—> alkaline

