

Ashtānga Hridayam: Straight from the Classics

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Prakriti

Understanding one's constitution, or *prakriti*, is a core concept in Ayurveda. Constitution isn't simply a tendency; rather, it represents the unique physical and emotional inclinations embedded in an individual. Constitution defines how we process energy and life, with different "ways of processing" associated with each dosha: a Vata way, a Pitta way, a Kapha way, each linked to specific physiological patterns. This blueprint of the body, once established, remains unchanged over a lifetime.

Constitution is shaped at conception by various factors, including the doshas present in the sperm and ovum, the conditions within the mother's uterus, seasonal influences, and even the mother's emotional state at the moment of zygote formation. All of these elements collectively determine an individual's *prakriti*, or constitution. As the embryo develops, the doshas influence cell division and differentiation, forming organs, channels, and systems until a fully developed fetus emerges. For instance, if Pitta was dominant at conception, it imprints this intensity on the genetic makeup, establishing a Pitta constitution.

Scientific studies have explored the relationship between Ayurvedic constitutions and genetic traits. Research published in *Nature* demonstrated that people with the same doshic constitution share certain genetic patterns, indicating that constitution can influence genetics on a cellular level. For example, Kapha types typically exhibit anabolic tendencies, while Vata-dominant individuals might have traits like dry skin due to their doshic imbalance.

Once formed, constitution remains stable, though epigenetic factors like diet, environment, and lifestyle can influence some gene expressions over time. However, these factors do not fundamentally change one's constitution; they only adjust certain tendencies within its framework. In genetics, dominant and recessive traits play a role in determining characteristics, much like Vata's inherent "force" often dominates over Kapha.

Ayurveda also emphasizes the importance of a balanced constitution, in which Vata, Pitta, and Kapha are harmonized. This balance is considered the optimal state, promoting health and longevity. When imbalances are present in all three doshas from conception, they can create instability that the fetus cannot sustain, leading to spontaneous abortion. Thus, Ayurveda views a balanced constitution as the foundation for a strong genetic and physical makeup, making it the ideal state to support life's processes with vitality and resilience.

