

Dravya-guṇa – Ayurvedic Pharmacology

Dravya-guṇa means the “Qualities of Substances” – This is the traditional system of classification of substances according to certain āyurvedic principles.

1) Rasa (Taste) Herbs are classified as possessing one or more of the six tastes: e.g. ginger has a pungent and sweet rasa.

2) Vīrya (Hot or Cold Potency) Herbs are classified as hot, warm, cool, or cold: e.g. sandalwood has a very cold viirya.

3) Vipāka (Post Digestive Taste) Herbs all have a certain taste in the small intestine where nutrients are absorbed from the digested foods, once the herbs have been processed in the stomach: e.g. gotu kola has a bitter taste, its vipaaka is pungent (which is true of bitter herbs in general).

4) Doṣa Pariṇāma (Effect on the Three Doshas) All herbs will have a tendency to increase or decrease the individual doshas: e.g. licorice increases kapha but decreases vaata and pitta.

5) Dhātu Pariṇāma (Effects on the Organs) Certain herbs have an affinity to effect particular organs: e.g. brahmi calms the mind and clears heat and repressed anger from the heart and liver.

6) śrotāṃsi Pariṇāma (Effect on the Systems in the body) Certain herbs have an affinity to effect particular systems in the body: e.g. cinnamon tends to effect the digestive system, the circulatory system, the blood, and the respiratory system.

7) Roga Pariṇāma (Effect on particular dis-eases or conditions) Certain herbs have an affinity to effect specific dis-eases or conditions. Neem is used to treat infections, rashes, parasites, fungus, liver disorders, toxic blood, diabetes, heat, high pitta, and kapha, etc.

8) Karma or Guṇa (Herbal Actions) “Karma” means “action” & “guṇa” means “quality.” Herbs are further categorized according to specific qualities or actions: e.g. expectorant herbs clear kapha and plegm from the lungs, stomach, sinuses, and throat.

9) Prabhāva (Special Action) Prabhava denotes special and often unexpected qualities of various herbs. These qualities are often exceptions to the standards of ayurvedic pharmacology: e.g. sweet taste is usually cool and generally has a sweet vipaaka; Honey has a sweet taste, but is warming and has a pungent vipaaka. For this reason honey is considered a suitable sweetener for kapha even though kapha is usually increased by the sweet taste.

Taste:

The ṣaḍrasa (six tastes) and the tridoṣa

Taste and examples	śveta (sweet)	lavaṇa (salty)	amla (sour)	kaṭu (pungent)	tikta (bitter)	kaṣāya (astringent)
	sugar, fruit, rice, grains, root veggies, shatavari, marshmallow, comfrey	salt, soy sauce, seaweed, snack foods, celery	lemon, vinegar, tamarind, alcohol, yogurt, amalaki, hibiscus,	Chilies, ginger, black pepper, mustard, horseradish, cinnamon, cardamom	Coffee, greens, bitter melon, katuka, barberry, burdock, dandelion	Tea, peach pits, okra, legumes, raspberry, vibhitaki, bael fruit, yarrow
Vāta	-	-	-	+	+	+++
Pitta	-	+	+	+	-	-
Kapha	+++	+	+	-	-	-

"-" indicates that that taste is pacifying to that dosha (that is to say it reduces that dosha).

"+" indicates that that taste is aggravating to that dosha.

"+++" means that is the most aggravating taste for that dosha.

The ṣaḍrasa (Six Tastes) and their Effects The Body and Emotions

Taste	Sweet	Salty	Sour	Pungent	Bitter	Astringent
Bodily Effect	Cool, Heavy, Moist, Strengthening, Nourishes tissues, Balances Mind, Soothes Mucus Membranes, Eases Burning, Laxative, Expectorant	Hot, Heavy, Moist, Softening, laxative, sedative, stimulates digestion, in large amounts it is purgative, and in larger amounts it causes vomiting	Hot, Light, Moist, Stimulant, Digestive stimulant, Dispels gas, Relieves thirst, Increases tissues in the body, decreases reproductive tissue	Hot, Light, Dry, Stimulant, digestive stimulant, causes sweating, heating, promotes sweating, increases metabolism, and promotes organ function	Cool, Light, Dry, Purifies the blood, cleansing, detoxifying, decreases tissues in the body, increases lightness in the mind	Cool, Heavy, Dry, Stops bleeding (and all discharges like sweat or diarrhea), healing to skin and mucus membranes, depleting
Emotional Effect	Joy – Love In excess: Lack of Fulfillment - Sadness	Calm In excess: Greed	Contentment In excess: Envy - Judgement	Clarity - Understanding In excess Anger – hatred - rage	Purity - Detachment In excess: Grief - Resentment	Independence - firmness In excess: Fear – anxiety - confusion
Organ Damaged (When taken in excess)	Spleen and Pancreas	Kidneys	Liver	Lungs	Heart	Colon

Vīrya (Hot or Cold Energy) – Generally the Vīrya of a substance can be predicted by its taste.

Taste	sweet	Salty	Sour	Pungent	Bitter	Astringent
Vīrya	Cool	hot	hot	hot	Cold	Cold

Vipāka (post digestive effect) – Generally the Vipāka of a substance can be predicted by its taste.

Taste	sweet	salty	sour	pungent	Bitter	Astringent
Vipāka	sweet	sour	sour	pungent	pungent	Pungent

Karma or Guṇa (therapeutic qualities or actions) – The ancient texts on āyurveda classify herbs according to their qualities or actions. Authors like Charaka and Suśruta list various groups of herbs with similar qualities like the *elādi gaṇa* or the category of herbs beginning with cardamom, which all have aromatic properties and relieve itching etc.

List of Important Ayurvedic Herbal Actions in Modern English Terminology

Name of Herbal action	Description of Herbal action	Examples
Alterative	Purifies blood	Manjishtha, Indian Sarsaparilla, Sandalwood, neem, Turmeric, Vetiver, Sassafrass, burdock, yellow dock
Analgesic	Relieves pain	Opium, Cloves, Camphor, Aniseed
Antacid	Reduces stomach acid, heat, pitta and burning	Conch Shell Ash, Licorice, Amla Fruit, Solomonseal, Black Cohosh, Marshmallow
Anti-inflammatory	Reduces inflammation	Guggulu, Neem, Tulsi, Licorice, AloeShallaki, Turmeric, Ginger, Basil, Garlic
Anthelmintic	Destroys and dispels parasites (Ayurveda calls all parasites krmis and this includes worms, bacteria, fungus, and yeast). These can be further divided as to the type of parasites they dispel as anti-fungal, antibacterial, vermifugal, anti-bacterial. Many herbs can be used against all sorts of parasites and many of these herbs are somewhat toxic.	Neem, Vidanga, Vitex, Tulsi, Turmeric, Lodhra, Camphor, Garlic, barberry, wormwood, ginger, cinnamon, goldenseal, Mint
Antipyretic	Dispels fever, heat, and pitta. Unlike refrigerants, these herbs may be heating or cooling, but most are cooling.	Neem, Sandalwood, Red Chandan, Vetiver, Indian Sarsaparilla, Mint, Camphor, catnip, yarrow, ginger.
Anti-spasmodic	Relieves muscle spasms (many of these herbs also have nervine properties)	Guggulu, Cumin, Aniseed, Ajowan, Asafoetida, Costus root, galangal, angelica, calamus, pennyroyal, wild yam
Aphrodisiac	vājikaṛaṇa – reproductive tonic / increasing potency and fertility (does not increase sexual desire – this is considered undesirable)	Ashvagandha, Shatavari, Vidhari, Ginseng, Astragalus, Black Cohosh, Wild Yam, Slippery Elm
Aromatic	Are fragrant, increase digestion, dispel gas, and improve the flavor and smell of medicines	Camphor, Cardamom, Clove, Cinnamon, Indian Bay Leaf, Nutmeg, wormwood, spice bush, sweet birch, wintergreen, pennyroyal
Astringent	Causes constriction of tissues, eliminates secretions, discharges, and hemorrhaging (astringent herbs which stop bleeding may also be called hemostatics)	Bael fruit, sandalwood, vetiver, alum, raspberry leaf, safflower, green tea, sage, chamomile
Bitter	Expels pitta from the liver and small intestines,	Neem, Kutki, Brahmi, Bhringaraj, Bhumyamalaki,

	clears fat and mucus, popular in the West to counter diet of meat, fat, sugar, and alcohol	Goldenseal, Osha root, Barberry, dandelion, burdock, turmeric
Carminative	Stimulates digestion, removes gas from intestinal tract, treats bloating, gripping, and pain. Ayurveda has agni dīpanas (increases appetite and digestion) and āma pācanas (burns removes toxins)	Agni diipana: ginger, black pepper, long pepper, chili pepper, cumin, coriander, fennel, musta Aama paachana: ginger, vidanga, guggulu, chitrak, mustard, wormwood, mint, cilantro
Demulcent	Soothing, nourishing; promotes secretion in the mucous membranes and lubricates the body	Shatavari, musali, comfrey root, marshmallow, solomonseal, kudzu, wildyam, sugar
Diaphoretic	Promotes perspiration, removes toxins (these may be cooling or heating)	Tulsi, Ginger, Pippali, Devadaru, Cinnamon, Angelica, Basil, Mint, Sage, lemon balm, mugwort, bayberry, juniper, boneset, yarrow, chamomile
Diuretic	Promotes urination, treats urinary obstructions and other conditions of the urinary system	Guduchi, punarnava, fennel, coriander, cumin, barley, dandelion, tea, burdock, corn silk, lemongrass, cinnamon, cubeb, juniper
Emetic	Induces vomiting, clears kapha from the lungs and stomach	Salt, Licorice, Calamus (large quantities of these herbs are used)
Emollient	Softening, soothing, and protecting the skin.	Turmeric, Manjishtha, Lodhra, Tulsi, Rose, Saffron, Safflower, Licorice, Calendula, Aloe, Lavender
Emmenagogue	Promotes and regulates menses, there are also specific herbs to induce labor (oxytocic) or abortion (abortifacient)	Musta, Ashoka, Saffron, Turmeric, Amalaki, Dang Quai, Safflower, Raspberry, Leaf, Black Cohosh, Motherwort
Expectorant	Clears mucous from the lungs, sinuses, throat and stomach	Licorice, Sugar, Vams Lochana, Vasa, Pippali, Cinnamon, Aniseed, Mullein, Ginger, Elecampane, Calamus, Solomonseal, Wild Cherry, Bayberry, Honey
Febrifuge	Reduces fever – this is simply another word for anti-pyretic	See anti-pyretic
Galactagogue	Promotes the formation and flow of milk	Shatavari, black cohosh, solomonseal, Aniseed, Fennel, Fenugreek, nettle, vitex
Laxative	Promotes bowel movements, clears the GI tract, removes pitta from the small intestines and colon	Triphala, Amalaki, Haritaki, Arawagandha, Trivrit, Aloe, Psyllium husk, Flax seed, Raisins, Senna, Castor oil, most fruits, Licorice, Ginger (in a larger does most of these have purgative properties)
Lithotriptic	Dissolves and discharges stones from the urinary tract	Pashana bheda, gravel root, corn silk, horsetail, parsley root,
Nervine	Strengthens and nourishes to the nervous system and mind. These herbs may be further classified as stimulant or sedative nervines.	Nervine Sedatives: ashvagandha, Nutmeg, Shankhapushpi, Jatamamsi, Tagar, Valerian, Kava Kava Nervine Stimulants: Brahmi, Gotu kola, Jyotishmati, Bhringaraja, Galangal, Skullcap, St John's Wort, Sage, Gingko, Calamus, Tulsi, Kushtha,
Purgative	Strong laxative action: deeply cleaning the colon and intestinal tract. Strong purgative therapy is usually not safe or effective without a full pancha karma treatment to lubricate and prepare the body for the removal of toxins.	All of the herbs listed under laxative except for licorice, and ginger have purgative qualities in large doses
Refrigerant	Reduces body temperature and relieving thirst. They reduce pitta and heat and all the conditions caused by pitta. Though many herbs are somewhat cooling, these herbs have a special power to cool the body.	Sandalwood, Red Sandalwood, Vetiver, Rose, Cucumber, Cilantro, Jassmine, hibiscus
Sedative	Calms or tranquilizes the body; lowering activity. Many work on the central nervous system to relieve tension and anxiety. Ayurveda favors sedative herbs which do not cause dullness, like Jatamamsi. Certain herbs like chamomile, gotu kola, lemonbalm, and skullcap are often wrongly	These are listed under nervines

	classified as sedatives. These herbs can also help induce peace of mind and restful sleep, but it is by their <i>stimulant</i> action, stimulating the flow of oxygen to the brain.	
Spiritual	These are herbs used for their spiritual effects. Many herbs for spiritual application are listed in the aayurvedic texts, including herbs which promote mental clarity and meditative states, herbs which increase perception, herbs which help elevate consciousness, herbs which break black magic, herbs which dispel and protect from demonic influences, herbs which open channels into the inner realms, and herbs used for various purposes in tantras (mystical incantations). In general the popular herbs of Ayurveda have been selected for their sattvic qualities (enhancing clarity and stability).	Tulsi, Turmeric, Sandalwood, Brahmi, Calamus, Kustha, Durva Grass, Darbha grass, Bilva, Gotu Kola, Saffron, Lotus, Sage, Sagebrush, Sweet Grass, Red Cedar, Deodara Cedar, Rose, Jasmine
Stimulant	Increases circulation, mental activity and organ function. Most stimulants also increase heat and metabolism, though there are some cooling stimulants which help to balance pitta in moderation. All carminative herbs have stimulant qualities, but not all stimulant herbs have carminative properties.	Since many stimulant herbs are listed under carminatives, we are listing only stimulants which are not also carminative in action: Somalata (Ephedra), Mormon tea, Tea, Coffee, Yerba Mate, Ginseng, Jyotishmati, St John's wort, Skull cap, Brahmi,
Tonic / Nutritive tonic	Herbs that strengthen and support the proper function of the body, or specific tissues or organs. Tonics give strength and restore vitality. Many of these herbs are cool; a few are heating.	Ashvagandha, Shatavari, Musali, Bala, Vidhari, Kapi, Licorice, Medha, Solomonseal, Slippery elm, Ginseng, Saw Palmeto, Eleuthero, Astragalus, Comfrey root, Marshmallow, Wild Yam, kudzu, Arrowroot

** It is not possible to list all Ayurvedic herbal actions in modern English terms as for some Ayurvedic herbal actions there are no neat translations. We have favored modern English terms as much as possible for this chart, but have included Sanskrit terms where needed for clarity.*

Table of Basic Ayurvedic Herbal Preparations

Preparation	Description	Application
Pa~nca kaShaya – Five Basic Preparations – other preparations are based upon these basic techniques of preparing herbs.		
1) Svarasam	Fresh pressed juice – (when fresh herbs are not available a reasonable facsimile of svarasa can be prepared by soaking ½ part powdered herbs with 1 part water for 24 hours before straining)	This is the purest and most potent herbal preparation. These are however difficult to digest and must be used quickly.
2) Kalkam	Paste from fresh crushed herbs or powder mixed with water – these may be made more or less watery depending on the use	Herbal pastes are used for external application as poultices and also in the preparation of more complex herbal formulas.
3 a) Kvātham (kaṣāyam)	Decoction – coarsely powdered herbs are boiled with water and water reduced – requires hours to prepare – generally made from 1 p herb; 16 p water; and reduced to 1/4 th	Decoction is a potent preparation which is more digestible than fresh juice and more potent than infusions. They do have the disadvantage of being time consuming to prepare.
3 b) Kṣīra-	Milk decoction – herbs are cooked with	Milk decoction helps to bring out the tonic

pākam	water and milk and reduced over time. Made with 1 p herb; 8 p milk; and 32 p water boiling until the water evaporates.	properties of herbs, but can be very heavy to digest. Lighter versions are made by reducing the decoction less.
4) Phāṇṭam	Hot infusion – coarsely powdered herbs are steeped in hot water – for 30 minutes	Infusions are not so powerful as decoctions or fresh juices, but they are much quicker and easier to make and much lighter to digest. Hot infusion is the most easily digested of the 5 basic preparations.
5) Himam (śīta kaṣāyam)	Cold infusion – coarsely powdered herbs are steeped in cold water for 1 day and 1 night	Cold infusion is easy to make, but does require time to sit. This technique is used most often for herbs with very volatile properties which may be lost through heat or boiling, like sandalwood, camphor, mint etc. This technique is useful for the preparation of cooling herbs used to reduce pitta and heat.
Other traditional Preparations		
7) Cūrṇam	Powder – dried herbs and minerals are ground and sieved to attain a coarse or fine powder. In some cases powdered herbs are triturated with fresh herb juices or other liquids and then dried to add extra potency (this is usually done 7 times).	Powder is a convenient way to prepare herbs. They are very easy to use: the powder is simply placed on the tongue and washed down with water. Powders have the disadvantage of losing potency more quickly than any other preparation. Fine and course powders are used for different preparations. Fine powder is used for making powdered formulas for consumption, or adding to finished formulas. Course powder is used for making decoction and other preparations where the herbs will be strained. It is best to powder whole herbs just before use for maximum potency.
8) guṭikā (vaṭikā, modaka, guḍa, bati, varti)	Pill – powdered herbs are mixed with binders and formed into tablets and dried.	Makes herbs easy to palate and to travel with. Pills are often made out of strong tasting herbs and minerals. A special category of pills called guggulus is made from a resin also called guggulu. Guggulus are very good for removing toxins from the body. Pills do have the disadvantage of not allowing a person to taste the herbs. It is said that herbs work in part on account of their taste and for the maximum benefit from herbs, they should be tasted. Pills are easier to travel with than powders and more or less as easy to use and they maintain their potency somewhat longer than powder.
9) Leham (avaleha, lehya, rasakriyā, modaka, guḍa)	Herbal Confection – these are prepared by cooking raw or refined sugar along with a svarasa (fresh juice) or kvaatha (decoction) of herbs and with kalka (paste of herbs) or cuurNa (powder). In many formulas ghee, sesame oil, honey or all three of these are	Preparing herbs as Lehams can increase the tonic or expectorant qualities of herbs. They nourish all tissues in the body. This preparation also serves to preserve herbs for a long time due to the presence of sugar.

	added.	
10) Sneham – herbal oils - two types:		
10 a) Ghṛtam	Herbal ghee – prepared by cooking a kvaatha (decoction) or svarasa (fresh juice) along with a kalka (paste of herbs) and ghee, until the liquid has evaporated. The remaining paste is strained and what remains is siddha ghṛita or medicated ghee.	Usually taken internally or in the nose, herbal ghees are good for the liver, mind, nerves. Carries herbs to the deeper tissues. Small amounts of ghee increase digestion as opposed to most oils which weaken digestion. These are also commonly used for eye treatment because ghee is good for the eyes it acts as a good carrier of herbs to treat eye conditions. This preparation lasts a long time when stored properly.
10 b) Tailam (Thailam, Enna, Keram)	Herbal oils (all other oils) Prepared in the same way as ghṛitam only using oil instead of ghee. Sesame oil is most common for these preparations but coconut oil, castor oil, mustard oil and other oils may be used as well.	Mainly used externally. Tailam is used for daily massage and massage treatments, to treat skin, blood, the colon, lungs, nerves. It is good for treating conditions effecting certain parts of the body like gout, arthritis, wounds, rashes, or conditions of the head like dandruff or headache. May also be taken in the nose, ears, orally, for enema, douche, or for various ayurvedic treatments like shirodhara, shirobasti, katibasti etc. This preparation lasts a long time when stored properly.
11) Saṁdhānam – Herbal wines – herbs are fermented along with sugars and water, for a product with much less alcohol and much more potency than tinctures - two types:		
11 a) āriṣṭham	Kvaatha (decoction of herbs) fermented with sugars or honey and water – along with powdered herbs	Used to increase digestion and absorption – good for heavy herbs. Carries herbs to the heart, and liver and nervous system. This preparation lasts a long time when stored properly.
11 b) āsavam	Svarasa (fresh juice of herbs) fermented with sugar or honey and water – along with powdered herbs	Indications same as for ariShTham but slightly less good to increase digestion. This preparation lasts a long time when stored properly.
12) Dhūpanam	Herbal incenses for healing or smoking – may be produced as powder or small pieces for use along with charcoal, or as incense sticks or “cones.” Powdered herbs can be mixed with resins like guggulu and formed into “dhupa”	Used for purifying negative energies from a patient or a healing space and used for treatments of the sinuses and lungs. Good for conditions with spiritual causes like many types of insanity.
13) Añjanam (Kajjal)	Eye salves – these are created in various ways	These are applied to the eyelids like eye shadow for their healing effects on the eyes and also to treat spiritual disorders. These preparations are also used to draw on the face of children to protect them from negative energies.
14) Kṣaram	Alkalies – caustic preparations of herbs often prepared by burning the herbs to an ash, steeping the ash in water, and then distilling the liquid to attain alkali	Taken internally mainly to increase digestion and absorption and used externally for their caustic effects. Many minor surgical procedures like the treatment of hemorrhoids or the removal of warts are commonly achieved without knives using alkilies.
15) Viṣam	Poisonous herbs like monkshood,	These herbs are used after processing in the same way

	dhatu, marijuana, red rosary pea, and others processed for internal use through various processes to neutralize toxic effects	as other herbs in the standard preparations. Their actions are usually quite powerful and so only a very little is needed for most preparations. These can have adverse effects and even kill a person if they are not processed properly or used in the wrong amount or for the wrong condition and so the guidance of an Ayurvedic physician is needed for their use.
17) Yantram	Talismans – These are prepared in various ways along with mantras and prayers.	Herbs and other substances like gemstones and mystical diagrams are used for balancing the doshas, protection, and inducing spiritual states of consciousness. Herbs may be worn, carried or kept at certain places for these purposes. Herbs may be used on the body to pacify the effects of the doshas or the planets and in the home to make up for vastu doshas.
16) Jāṅgama dravyam	Processed animal substances – including pearl, conch shell, cowrie shell, red coral, deer horn, musk	These are used when needed to add potency to formulas. Ayurveda usually advocates a vegetarian diet, but in the case of dis-ease meat and animal products are permitted as necessary for healing. These preparations are very potent and the same cautions for poisonous herbs apply.
16) Ratnam (Gems), Dhātum (Minerals), Rasam or Pāradam (Mercury)	Gemstones like ruby, diamond, minerals like gold, silver, copper, lead, arsenic, pyrite, sulfur or borax, borax, and mercury, processed to be absorbable and to remove toxic qualities	These are used in formulas for internal consumption to add extra potency. They are very potent and work immediately even upon skin contact. There is danger of toxicity if not properly prepared and they are not currently approved for use in the US due to misunderstanding of their uses and lack of scientific studies to prove their safety. They are many times more potent than herbs and used in very small quantities. They must be proscribed with expert knowledge for safety and efficacy. When prepared and proscribed properly, they are very useful to treat serious dis-eases and otherwise incurable conditions.

Anupānam – is a substance taken with herbs to enhance or direct its healing properties. A formula which is balancing to the three doShas may be made better for one specific doSha by using a suitable anupaana: for example triphala can be taken with ghee for pitta, honey for kapha, or ghee and honey for vaata. Particular properties of an herb can be brought out by the use of anupaana: e.g. the anti-arthritis properties of herbs can be increased by taking with a tea of kulanjana (galangal root). A formulas affinity to affect certain tissues or organs can be increased using anupaana: e.g. herbs taken with ghee will go deeper into the tissues and effect the nervous system and liver. This is a broad subject and it is only possible to introduce the concept here.

Doṣa	Vāta	Pitta	Kapha
Suitable Anupānam	Warm Water, Milk, Ghee, Sugar, Cumin tea, Galangal Tea, Fresh Ginger Tea, Lemon juice, Yogurt, takra, Herbal Wines	Cool Water, Ghee, Sugar, Milk, Licorice tea, Amalaki Tea, Brahmi Juice, Water from washing rice, Herbal Ghees, Cold infusions	Very Warm Water, Honey, Pippali Tea, Betel Leaf Tea, Dry Ginger Tea, Brahmi tea, Garlic juice, Mustard oil, Cow Urine

Reasons for using formulas rather than single herbs –

- Herbs are more effective as a part of a formula because herbs work synergistically to enhance the healing properties of one another
- Herbs are empowered for healing certain conditions or reaching certain organs and tissues when prepared in the traditional formulas, because the other herbs in the formula will direct and empower the actions of single herbs: e.g. rosemary taken with ginger and black pepper will increase circulation, appetite, and digestion - rosemary taken with calamus and skullcap will enhance memory and treat depression - rosemary taken with licorice and wild cherry will treat cold, and expel phlegm from the lungs - rosemary taken with chamomile, raspberry leaf, and black cohosh will serve as a woman's tonic to regulate menses.
- Well-designed formulas are more balancing for the three doshas than individual herbs (certain formulas may be used to treat conditions caused by all three doshas when taken with different anupaanans).
- The strong properties of individual herbs may be eased and balanced. It is traditional to add digestive herbs (like ginger), along with demulcent herbs (like licorice) to formulas. Many formulas include herbs (like triphala) to help ensure that the herbs will be properly eliminated from the system as well.
- The undesirable effects of individual herbs can be balanced in formulas by the use of other herbs with antidotal actions: e.g. many tonic herbs (like ashvagandha) are heavy to digest; this is remedied by adding carminatives (like trikatu). Many laxatives (like aloe) can cause gripping pains; this is remedied by adding carminatives (like ginger) and nerviness (like nutmeg). Cleansing herbs like bitter, astringent or expectorant herbs (like barberry, chamomile, or elecampane) may cause pains by scraping on the tissues as they remove toxins; this is remedied by using demulcents (like marshmallow) to lubricate the tissues for easy removal of toxins.
- Herbs are safer and the chance for hyper-sensitive reaction, allergy, or toxicity is less; and the chance for drug interactions is less when herbs are taken as a part of a formula because a smaller quantity of any given herb in the formula will be taken.

Caution about herb use -

Herbs are powerful to heal and should not be taken like foods, because the wrong herbs or too much herbs may cause dis-ease. Herbs should be taken in the appropriate dosages according to condition, strength, age, weight, sensitivity etc. The commonly sold herbals teas can be very dangerous and should be used with great caution. The traditional Ayurvedic herbal preparations in particular are very potent and must be used with great caution. Additional care is required when using herbs when there are acute symptoms of dis-ease, when taking prescription or over-the-counter medications, when there are chronic conditions, when there is weakness or emaciation, when there is mental instability, when a woman is pregnant or nursing, for children under seven and adults over seventy. Whenever there is doubt as to the safety or efficacy of an herbal formula, it is always best to seek the advice of a qualified herbalist, doctor, or Ayurvedic physician. Care should be taken consulting nutritionists, doctors, and herbalist because many herbal, medical, and nutritional traditions are based upon modern fads and do not have the same complexity of understanding of the nature or actions of herbs. It is likely to be given bad advice, and so it is necessary to seek out healing a practitioner who possesses a deep understanding of herbal qualities and the use of herbs. When seeking qualified practitioners we can seek advice from people we trust but must ultimately depend upon our own intuition and the body's response to treatments.