

## Yoga to Support Fertility

### Anna Blackmore

Of the women who have come to me for yoga therapy to assist conception, only one did not conceive and she realised after a few sessions that she actually was not at all sure she even wanted to have children!

All had been thoroughly medically investigated and several were undergoing fertility treatment. One couple did have some medical impediments. She was diagnosed as pre-menopausal (premature at only 36) AND her husband's sperm had poor motility. She was a tall, rather thin, sinewy type, creative, hyperactive and doing a very strong, dynamic yoga practice (a typical *vata dosha prakruti* – see below, Ayurvedic Doshas). They were determined to have a child and did everything they could to enhance their fertility. They kept to a very healthy diet and regular mealtimes, gave up alcohol, reduced work commitments, including travelling, and followed a sustained course of acupuncture and Chinese herbs. She (and sometimes he) did the daily yoga routine I drew up for her; slow mindful movement sequences with lots of focus on breathing, some restorative poses and a guided relaxation that I recorded specially for her. At first she found it quite a challenge to slow down so much and occasionally felt the need to do a more dynamic practice, but after a while, as she discovered the benefits, she enjoyed the slower practice more and more and went walking / gentle jogging in the park, if she felt the need for more exercise.

They even got a puppy and took to spending more time out in nature – amongst the birds, the bees, the flowers and trees....!! It took 2 years and their third assisted conception (ICSI) worked. Now they have 2 lovely daughters.

A woman's body needs to be soft and 'juicy' to assist conception. Strong, dynamic exercise (and strong yoga styles / practices) tend to be too heating and drying. It is best to do a gentle, slow-moving, mindful yoga practice, with more focus on breathing and relaxation and to avoid overworking and stressful activities. Walk in nature as much as possible and make time to do the things that bring you joy. Keep to a regular daily routine of meal times and sleep, avoid excess cold, raw foods, stimulants and too much time on the computer and internet, **especially** in the evenings. This deranges *vata dosha*, which dries out the body, can reduce fertility, stirs up nervous energy and anxiety and disturbs sleep.

Commit to making the yoga practice as part of your regular daily routine, even if you can sometimes only manage a few minutes or even just 1 technique (occasionally that may just be standing on your mat and repeating your sankalpa!). Explore and experiment with the sequence to discover what works best for you. You may find a few poses that feel particularly beneficial and develop your own mini practice, that you can easily do on a daily basis, and then use the rest to vary the practice from time to time. I have kept the sequence to 2 pages, so that it is easy to print them out on one double sided sheet and use as a quick reference while practising.

Aim to practice at the same time each day, if possible, make a special space for the practice and place there something that inspires you: pictures / images / symbols / colours.

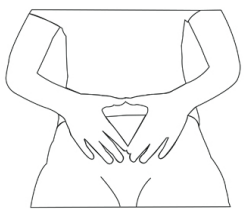
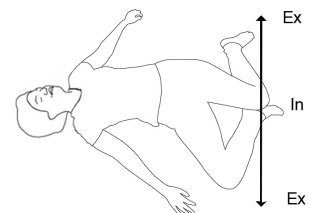
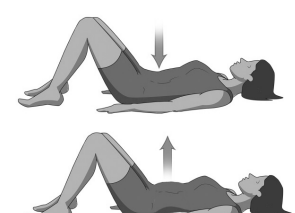
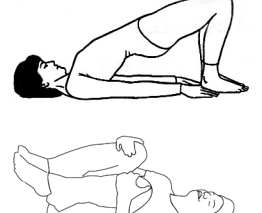
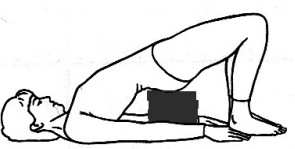
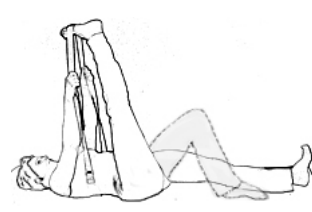
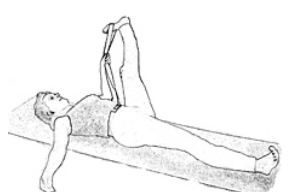
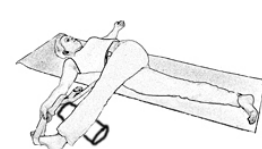
Formulate an intention, a *sankalpa* (see notes after the sequence) as a short, simple, positive statement, phrased in the present tense and repeat it daily before and at the end of the practice and imagine the results. At the same time, too much attachment to the result creates tension, do all you can, on your side AND let go of the result. The rest is in the hands of the Universe.

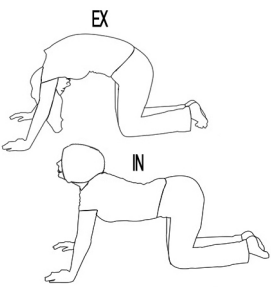
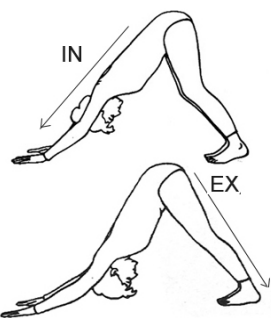

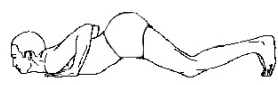

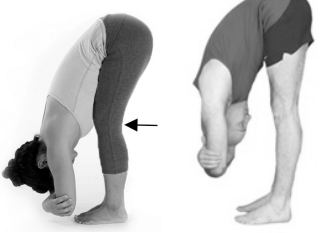
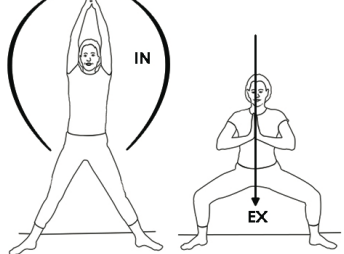

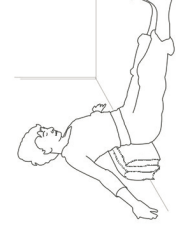
## Yoga Sequence

Repeat your *sankalpa* (see notes after the sequence) daily as well as before and at the end of the practice and imagine the results.

This sequence supports *apana vayu*, the energy current which governs the pelvic organs of elimination and reproduction, clears space in the body-mind for 'new things' to come in, promotes relaxation and letting go (of what does not serve us).

All poses MUST be comfortable, never force or strain. Any stretch sensation should only be mild and diminishing.

1. Yoni Mudra	2. Twists for hips, pelvis and low back	3 Pelvic tilts	4. Bridge <-> Apanasana
			
Lie on your back with knees bent. Index and thumbs form a triangle between navel and pubis. Breathe into this area with long exhalations, sense nurturing energy circulating in & around pelvic organs.	Knees bent feet apart, exhale knees to side, inhale to centre +/- roll head towards opposite side. Find a natural soothing rhythm 5-10x. If comfortable rest in the twist +/- cushions to support knees. 3-5 belly breaths as in 1.	Exhale tilt pelvis back flattening low back into floor, inhale tilt forward, arching low back. Keep well with the comfortable range, move slowly and mindfully, to light up the area with your conscious awareness and with prana.	Exhale flatten low back and lift from coccyx to curl spine up pressing arms down. Inhale roll spine down. Exhale clasp knees into chest. Inhale feet and arms back to floor. Alternate ~5x
4. Supported bridge	5a. Supine leg stretch /spine release sequence....	5b .... to side....	5c ... Twist
			
Rest pelvis on bolster / blocks. Inhale breath from diaphragm to collar bones, exhale sense breath flowing as if from navel through pelvis to feet.	R leg up to 90° with strap around ball of foot. Bend L knee if more comfortable. Stretch should be MILD & diminishing. Long exhalations, soften belly, sense prana flowing through hamstrings and up whole spine. 3-5 breaths	Hold strap in R hand take leg out to side +/- bolster beside R hip for support. Feel front pelvis broadening, breathe into R side of low back. 3-5 breaths	Hold strap in L hand, take R leg slowly across body rolling onto to L side +/- bolster to support leg. Breathe into buttock / hip area, softening and releasing.

6. Cat pose	7a Downward dog...	7b...Plank	7c Astanga namaskar
			 7d. ...Cobra.... 
<p>Exhale tuck tail under and gradually round the spine, spread the shoulder blades and bring chin in.  Inhale lift the tail, slowly curve into a back bend, focusing more into the upper back than low back and keeping the back of the neck long as you lift the head. 3-5x</p>	<p>Toes under, push pelvis back toward heels and lift knees.  Inhale soften legs, lift heels and slightly bend knees, lengthen whole torso and spine to finger tips. Exhale softly draw navel in, gently stretch legs, knees, ankles, feet and toes.  Alternate 3-5 breaths.....-&gt;  Repeat sequence 3-5x</p>	<p>.... Inhale move shoulders towards hands into a firm straight position.  An alternative is to bend the knees to the floor at this point.  .....-&gt;</p>	<p>Exhale bend knees to floor, lower chest between hands and chin in front. OR lower hips chest and chin then lift the pelvis  Press pubis into floor, point toes and firm the legs. Inhale peel the chest up, keeping shoulders down and the back of the neck long.  Return to 7a.</p>
8. Hanging forward bend	9. Horse stance	10. Supine cobbler pose	11. Relaxed inversion
			
<p>From downward dog walk feet to hands.  Feet hip width, knees slightly bent, hold elbows, letting head and spine dangle from pelvis. Exhale bend knees into belly inhale to gently stretch back of legs. 3-5 breaths.    Bend knees and roll spine up from tail bone finishing with head to come to standing.</p>	<p>Feet a leg length apart, turned out 45°. Keep outer feet grounded.  Inhale arms out to sides and up (imagine gathering in all you need from the universe), join palms.  Exhale draw palms down the centre (bringing what you need down into the body) to the heart, while bending knees (NOT beyond 90°). Move hands down turning palms toward body into yoni mudra on the lower belly, connecting heart and uterus (heart-womb meridian).  Inhale arms out and up pushing into feet to straighten knees.  3-5x. +/- hold bent knee pose with hands in prayer position 2-3 breaths. Inhale feel openness &amp; softness in upper body, exhale stability, centredness &amp; grounding in lower body</p>	<p>Buttocks on the floor, a bolster / rolled blanket / cushions comfortably supporting low back and whole spine, pillow / blanket under head &amp; neck.  Feet together, knees out to sides with enough support to completely relax and soften the inner thighs (no more than a mild stretch).    1. Inhale downwards to pelvic floor, feeling it subtly stretch, exhale feel the release ~5x  2. On exhale gently contract pelvic floor, inhale relax ~5-10x  3. Relax with normal breathing 3-10 mins.</p>	<p>Elevate the pelvis on bolster / folded blankets / pillows (NOT during menstruation – keep the back flat).  The legs can instead be bent, resting on a chair / sofa seat.    This pose <b>may</b> help conception if done just after sex.    Relax 5-15 mins.  +/- listening to the fertility relaxation that accompanies this sequence.    You can also do this at bedtime to help promote good sleep.</p>

## Sankalpa - The Soul's Wish

San = whole / complete

Kalpa = idea / thought / creation

In yoga the *Sankalpa* is the positive resolve, usually made during the practice of yoga *nidra*, when the mind is in the *nidra* state of relaxed alertness. It has the potential to release tremendous power by summoning a clearly defined goal from beyond the ego mind's fears and desires. Its effect is to mobilise the deep unconscious willpower that leads us towards the goal, often by routes we might not have been able to even imagine. It takes the form of a short positive phrase or sentence, clearly and concisely expressed, using the same wording each time and designed to bring about a change in one's life.

The important question is how to choose the appropriate *Sankalpa*. It is not something to think about, grasp for, analyse or work out, nor is it an affirmation, chosen simply to do battle against a negative belief. It arises naturally and intuitively when we summon it. It is recognisable because it aligns with our inner truth, feels believable and achievable and resonates in the heart.

*"Whatever the mind can conceive and believe it can achieve" (Napoleon Hill)*

The *Sankalpa* can be seen from different perspectives. Let us say that life is like a river that has to be crossed. We cannot step straight across from where we are standing now because the river is wide, nor can we swim against the strong current. So we search for things to use as stepping stones that we can take, one by one, to cross over safely.

Crossing the river is our aim – our life's goal. Very few people know what this ultimately is. It may take years to discover. Nearly everyone who has come to yoga will recognise that they are striving for something, but will not be clear as to exactly what that is. To begin the process we have to acknowledge where we are now, where we stand on our bank of the river, and then to recognise what initial change can be undertaken to begin our way over – to take the first step.

If the goal is to have a baby, initially the *Sankalpa* may be to make all the changes in your lifestyle that will best prepare your body, your mind and your life, e.g. "I am doing all that is needed to conceive and grow a baby" - find your OWN wording (of course conception may or may not take place internally). Visualise / sense your body as soft, juicy and fertile. When that is well established, the *sankalpa* may evolve into the intention to be the best parent you can be, imagining holding your baby in your arms and the boundless love you feel for him/her.



The *Sankalpa* has the power to insinuate itself through the unconscious or semi-conscious patterns of self-sabotage. It is flexible enough to take changing circumstances into account, as its results begin to manifest in our inner and outer world. Yet it is precise enough not to be diverted by the internal negative beliefs that seem to stand against it – *vikalpa* (vi = separate / against).

Some common core negative beliefs are: 'I am not worthy', 'I was never good enough', 'I am unlovable', 'I never do anything right', or 'I cannot be financially successful and true to myself'. These can result from the actions or omissions of authority figures in the past and are also embedded in the dominant culture. The *Sankalpa* can arise as a very immediate and simple need, such as to relax, be at ease, calm or confident or something more long term, such as resolving or achieving something in life.

It is always framed as a positive i.e. something we want to move towards, not something we wish to move away from or experience less of (e.g. pain-free). If it arises in that form, find the positive feeling that will be there when the negative one has gone (e.g. ease). Using a *Sankalpa* gradually transforms the negative beliefs as one begins to experience it manifesting in one's life. And that is when we naturally alter the way we feel about ourselves, how we behave with family, friends and society, and in our lifestyle. Using a mantra is a form of *Sankalpa*.

The *Sankalpa* is repeated at the start and end of each practice and can be reinforced by imagining the results – all the changes you will notice in yourself and in your life and the changes that other people see in you, that let you know the *sankalpa* is fulfilled.

Be patient. Regular practice is required. All depends greatly on sincerity, commitment and your deep-felt desire to reach the goal of your *Sankalpa*. Also, as you practice yoga and progressively clear the mind, through yoga and other methods, the *Sankalpa* become more powerful.

As changes begin to manifest, it become possible to see deeper within, and recognise the qualities lying dormant, that hold our hidden potential. This is when the *Sankalpa* takes on a more spiritual dimension, because it is the nature of the inner forces, of consciousness, to be always trying to find expression. From here the focus of the life force becomes quite clear, and one's purpose (dharma) in this life may be recognised, which is what we ultimately understand by *Sankalpa*. This must come spontaneously from within as an intuitive understanding, where our nature and character, our goal and dharma are in harmony.

In truth the *Sankalpa* is really always one – the call to awakening. But to realise the deepest aspect of *Sankalpa*, we may have to go through some of the stages along the way, like the stepping-stones across a river, each step within reach of the previous one and the following one.

It is essential to formulate one's own *Sankalpa*, but examples could be:

- Daily practice is fulfilling my heart's desire.
- I am following my inner wisdom.
- I am happy and grateful to be achieving my goal.

A simplified alternative, when one is focused on immediate needs or for those for whom the concept of *Sankalpa* is alien, is to use 'trigger words'. These are words which trigger a feeling response in the body which we are aiming for. Examples might be relax, peace, calm, ease, happy, energised, joyful, inspired, loving.... Different words have power for different individuals, so it is important to summon one's own. It is useful to sit down and brain storm a list of ones which you (or your client) find particularly potent. They can be used at any time, by simply repeating internally one or two several times over, preferably in time to the breathing and experiencing the response they evoke in the body. Placing a hand on the part of the body where the feeling seems to be located also helps to reinforce and 'anchor' it as a physical experience.



## AYURVEDIC DOSHAS Body / Personality Constitution and Imbalances



The *doshas* are composed of the basic elements, as in the diagram and the word dosha means that which tends to go out of balance.

In Ayurveda the three different types, or doshas, are vata (air and space), pitta (water and fire), and kapha (earth and water) and we are all made up of all of these three. Our individual unique combination is determined at the moment of conception and forms our basic constitution, or *prakruti*, which defines our basic body type and tendencies. We can be predominantly of one dosha type or a combination of 2 predominant doshas. It is relatively rare to be tridoshic, where all 3 doshas are equal.

In addition, the balance of the three doshas constantly fluctuates throughout life, according to our environment and needs. This includes our age, diet, seasons, climate, occupation, activities and many more factors. The current levels of the three doshas, at any given moment, defines our imbalance, or *vikruti*, which is a healthy response to changes in demand. However, when it is too extreme or remains out of balance for too long, it can lead to dis-ease.

Understanding both our *prakruti* and *vikruti* offers us the potential to make the best possible choices for finding a healthy life balance. The Western equivalent is the humors, which date back to Hippocrates in ancient Greece and was the dominant medical model in the West well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The three doshas are described in terms of the five elements: earth, air, fire, water, and ether (the subtle substrata that connects all things). Vata is made up of air and ether. Like the wind,



it is light, drying, cooling, and has the inherent capacity for movement. Pitta is made up of fire and water, like a pot on the hearth with water to spread the heat. It is inherently hot and light, with a fine balance between dryness and moistness. Kapha is made up of water and earth, which combine like mud. Kapha is moist, heavy, cool, and stable.

The three doshas each have a 'seat' in a particular area of the body, Vata resides in the colon, Pitta in the small intestine and digestive organs and Kapha mainly in the chest.

When working with the doshas: like increases like, and opposites balance each other. In other words, foods, weather, and situations that have similar characteristics as the doshas will increase them; those that have opposite characteristics will decrease them. Knowing this, you can adjust your yoga practice, diet, and other environmental factors to affect these forces in ways that create greater balance and harmony. For example, vata types—who are dry, light, and airy—should avoid foods with similar qualities, like salads, and consume foods with opposite qualities, like warm soup. Pitta types are fiery and should avoid spicy foods and stimulants. Kapha types are cool, moist and heavy and should avoid things like cold drinks and ice cream.

People of vata constitution or imbalances are most supported by a yoga practice that is calming, quieting, grounding, gently strengthening and warming. People of pitta nature or imbalance are most supported by a yoga practice that is calming, engaging and cooling. People of kapha nature or imbalance are most supported by a yoga practice that is dynamic, stimulating and warming. Each individual has different needs. To practice in a way that does not support you is to invite greater imbalance.

Fast moving, restless modern, western society tends to foster vata imbalances and the internet and social media are all vata inducing, creating something of an epidemic of anxiety and insomnia. The drive to achieve, acquire, compete and succeed tends to increase pitta and lead to excess heat in the body and mind - high blood pressure, indigestion, irritability, frustration and impatience. Pregnancy is a temporary, NECESSARY kapha imbalance. The capacity for producing substance, growth and increased fluids are provided by kapha, as is the muscular and ligamentous softening required to enable expansion and childbirth.

If you have a predominantly Kapha constitution, you may not need to make many adjustments, apart from ensuring that you take enough exercise and being careful to gain only the right amount of weight. Vata and Pitta types, who are having trouble conceiving, often need to quite dramatically alter their lifestyle and habits and carefully examine the styles of yoga they tend find themselves attracted to.

The simple quiz below can help give you an idea of what your basic constitution is. There are many similar quizzes online, which can help you determine your main imbalances.

## CONSTITUTIONAL DOSHA QUIZ

Note a score for each question:

0 = describes me not at all, 1 = describes me a little, 2 = describes me quite well, 3 = describes me perfectly

- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Body shape :                        | <input type="checkbox"/> slim, slight   | <input type="checkbox"/> medium, muscular   | <input type="checkbox"/> large, solid   |
| 2. Height:                             | <input type="checkbox"/> taller / shorter than average                        | <input type="checkbox"/> average  | <input type="checkbox"/> big or short & plump                                   |
| 3. Weight:                             | <input type="checkbox"/> light, don't put on weight                           | <input type="checkbox"/> average, weight goes up & down                           | <input type="checkbox"/> heavy, easily gain weight                              |
| 4. Skin:                               | <input type="checkbox"/> thin, fragile, dry, cold                             | <input type="checkbox"/> warm, moist, gets pimples                                | <input type="checkbox"/> oily, smooth, thick, cool                              |
| 5. Complexion:<br>(within racial type) | <input type="checkbox"/> dull, lustreless, may have<br>grey or brownish tinge | <input type="checkbox"/> fair, ruddy, freckles, flushes<br>and sunburns easily    | <input type="checkbox"/> pale / sallow, shiny                                   |
| 6. Hair:                               | <input type="checkbox"/> thin, dry, frizzy, fragile<br>sparse body hair       | <input type="checkbox"/> straight, fine, early grey<br>average body hair          | <input type="checkbox"/> thick, abundant, oily, wavy<br>abundant body hair      |
| 7. Hair colour                         | <input type="checkbox"/> brown, mousy   | <input type="checkbox"/> light coloured, blond, red                               | <input type="checkbox"/> brunette, dark   |
| 8. Eyes:                               | <input type="checkbox"/> small, darting, dry                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> piercing, light colour, bloodshot                        | <input type="checkbox"/> large, lustrous, bright whites,<br>long eyelashes      |
| 9. Lips:                               | <input type="checkbox"/> thin, dry, cracked                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> medium, soft   | <input type="checkbox"/> full, smooth   |
| 10. Head:                              | <input type="checkbox"/> small, moves a lot                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> medium, well proportioned                                | <input type="checkbox"/> large, steady  |
| 11. Nails:                             | <input type="checkbox"/> small, thin, brittle                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> medium, pink   | <input type="checkbox"/> large, thick, smooth, pale                             |
| 12. Climate:                           | <input type="checkbox"/> dislike wind & cold                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> sensitive to direct sun & heat                           | <input type="checkbox"/> dislike damp & cold                                    |
| 13. Movements:                         | <input type="checkbox"/> quick, fidgety                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> directed, purposeful                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> slow, steady   |
| 14. Mentally:                          | <input type="checkbox"/> quick, agile, adaptable                              | <input type="checkbox"/> penetrating, critical                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> thoughtful, slow                                       |
| 15. Moods:                             | <input type="checkbox"/> changeable, anxious, nervous                         | <input type="checkbox"/> quick tempered, impatient                                | <input type="checkbox"/> even, calm, phlegmatic                                 |
| 16. Temperament:                       | <input type="checkbox"/> lively   | <input type="checkbox"/> determined, driven                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> easygoing  |
| 17. Interests:                         | <input type="checkbox"/> artistic, intuitive, creative,<br>travel             | <input type="checkbox"/> sports, politics, leadership<br>technical, fixing things | <input type="checkbox"/> business, family, home, social                         |
| 18. Memory:                            | <input type="checkbox"/> quick to learn, quick to forget                      | <input type="checkbox"/> good overall   | <input type="checkbox"/> slow to learn, good long term memory                   |
| 19. Voice:                             | <input type="checkbox"/> quiet, weak, hoarse                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> loud, high, strident                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> low, resonant  |
| 20. Speaking style:                    | <input type="checkbox"/> quick, talkative, imaginative                        | <input type="checkbox"/> clear, convincing, authoritative                         | <input type="checkbox"/> slow, thoughtful, moments of silence                   |
| 21. Energy level:                      | <input type="checkbox"/> fluctuates, can be hyperactive                       | <input type="checkbox"/> moderate to high, can be driven                          | <input type="checkbox"/> slow to get going, steady, good stamina<br>can be lazy |
| 22. Appetite:                          | <input type="checkbox"/> variable, erratic                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> strong, irritable when hungry                            | <input type="checkbox"/> low, consistent, tend to comfort eat                   |
| 23. Habitually eat:                    | <input type="checkbox"/> quickly  | <input type="checkbox"/> moderately fast  | <input type="checkbox"/> slowly   |
| 24. Usual sleep<br>pattern:            | <input type="checkbox"/> light, interrupted, insomnia                         | <input type="checkbox"/> moderate, can wake but fall<br>asleep again easily       | <input type="checkbox"/> heavy, deep, slow to awaken                            |

Add up the total for each column separately

TOTALS	A	B	C
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	VATA	PITTA	KAPHA

## RESOURCES

Online dosha quizzes:

[http://www.holisticonline.com/ayurveda/w\\_ayurveda-dtest2.htm](http://www.holisticonline.com/ayurveda/w_ayurveda-dtest2.htm)

<https://www.banyanbotanicals.com/info/prakriti-quiz/>

Books:

Yoni Shakti by Uma Dinsmore-Tuli

Wild Power by Alexandra Pope and Sjanie Hugo Wurlitzer

Yoga and Ayurveda by David Frawley