



Your physical body is made up of seven key constituents. These constituents are different forms of body tissues, called *sapta-dhatu*: The seven tissues or secretions.

Before I elaborate on them, it is important to understand the word *dhatu*. One standard meaning of *dhatu* is constituent. In the context of Ayurveda, it is understood as body tissue. The word *dhatu* in Sanskrit also means the primary element.

The food you eat is made up of the five great elements. Once food is processed by your body it is broken down to form the seven *dhatu*s. These are the bodily elements, primary constituents that are the building blocks of the physical body.

From the Sanskrit root *dha*, *dhatu* also means to possess, to accept, to bestow. How your body accepts the food you consume, directly determines the quality of your health.

Additionally, *dhatu* means secretion. An embryo is formed because the parents secrete an egg and a sperm. The foetus survives because the mother secretes through the umbilical cord. Once out in the world, the infant

survives because his mother's breasts are secreting milk. As he grows, he can chew food because certain glands are secreting saliva. The food is digested because the intestinal glands are secreting. The human body is made up of secretions. As per Ayurveda, anything we consume, our body breaks down into seven *dhatu*s or secretions. These are the body's primary constituents. Ayurveda has put them in the following order, because it was believed that each subsequent secretion is harder for the body to manufacture and maintain.

Rasa

The English word for *rasa* is chyle. As with any language, however, there are certain words in Sanskrit that have no equivalent in English. *Rasa* is one such word. The taste in a food is *rasa*; the fluid in anything is *rasa*; the melody in music is *rasa*; visual beauty is *rasa*; the feeling of success is *rasa* and the emotion in an orgasm is *rasa*. It also means juice or sap. Further, *rasa* refers to a body tissue, and most notably, blood plasma.

Rasa is the first stage of any food consumed by the body. Before it converts into nutrients usable by the body, it must first become liquid in the intestine.

Blood

Blood, the second *dhatu*, is called *rakta* in Sanskrit. *Rakta* refers to the red blood cells, the haemoglobin and the blood platelets. Although the science of Ayurveda did not categorise blood into cells, platelets and haemoglobin, it indeed did understand that blood had certain constituents that allowed it to flow, to nourish and to clot. The word, *rakta*, if split as *ra* + *akta*, means that which is characteristic of heat. *Akta* also means oil. *Rakta* is the substance that is living as long as it has the constituents that retain its innate heat and fluidity.

Ra also means love. The desire and act of lovemaking causes a rush of blood in the blood vessels; it raises the body temperature (heat is blood's innate property). Like all the other *dhatu*s, blood is absolutely essential to human existence.

Muscle

Mamsa is the third *dhatu*. It means muscle or flesh. It is interesting to note that Ayurveda specifically differentiated between muscle and fat (the next *dhatu*). Even 5,000 years ago, its practitioners understood the difference between the two. The basic building block of muscle is protein.

Fat

Meda is the fourth *dhatu*. It means fat – in particular, the adipose tissue in your body. The joints in the body are lubricated by a synovial fluid. It is a viscid lubricating fluid in the joints, tendon sheaths and capsular ligaments surrounding the joints. But in Ayurveda, *meda* not only refers to the adipose tissue but also to the synovial fluid. *Meda* allows your body to retain its warmth. Its primary seat is the torso.

Bones

The fifth *dhatu* is referred as *asthi*, meaning bones. This is the supporting structure of your body. Ayurvedic texts consider teeth as bones, too.

Marrow

Majja is the sixth *dhatu*. It means marrow. It is the network of tissues that fills the cavities of a bone. The word *medha* (not to be confused with *meda* which means fat, the fourth *dhatu*) is a synonym of *majja*. Interestingly, the word for mental vigour is *medha*. Do you see the connection? Even though the brain is a muscle, it is enclosed in bone – the skull – just like bone marrow. Therefore, according to Ayurveda, anything that nourishes your bone marrow will also nourish your brain.

Shukra

Like the word *rasa*, *shukra* connotes more than its literal meaning. Hence, I've chosen to use the Sanskrit term. Generally, *shukra* means semen. In Ayurveda, it is used to mean the reproductive fluids of both men and women. The female sexual fluids are also called *artava* (lit: menstrual blood) or *shonita* (lit: blood). Ayurveda didn't have the sophisticated testing methods available today to ascertain that it was not the blood, but hormones like oestrogen and progesterone, that are the true sexual fluids. Nevertheless, it understood that a woman's sexual fluids were quite different from a man's.

Further – and somewhat surprisingly – Vedic texts state that a sperm joins with an egg to form a foetus; a statement perfectly in line with the modern view. *Shukra* has been put last on the list of the *dhatu*s. Yogic texts do not consider *shukra* to be a mere reproductive fluid. They call it the creative fluid; it is virility in men and fertility in women. One's mental (intelligence), physical (body growth) and biological (procreation) creativity depends on the wellbeing of the first six *dhatu*s.

Ayurvedic texts consider the male sexual fluid to have thermolytic properties (*soma-guna*), whereas the female sexual fluid is considered to have thermogenic characteristics (*agni-guna*).

Soma means soothing, cool, and *agni* means fire, thermal. Therefore, after the act of sexual union, a man loses body heat and is ready to rest or fall asleep, but a woman generally becomes more active, or hungry. She feels relaxed too, but her reproductive fluid is of a different nature – it rouses her sensory perception and tends to make her more aware and alert. *Shukra* also means light, bright and pure. Light is a synonym of wisdom in Sanskrit. It directly means that a life of purity, lived with discerning wisdom, ensures the complete wellbeing of a person.

I took the time to cover the core concepts of the physical body as per the ancient wisdom, because for Ayurveda and yoga to work we cannot afford to look upon our physical bodies the way modern science does.

To be continued...

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