

SIX WAYS TO BALANCE YOUR ENERGY

By Trisha Howell

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What are the six elements and who are the fourteen officials of my body? What relevance do they have to my journeying?¹

Introduction

Because many journeys below deal with the various elements in nature and their expressions in your body, the following is an explanation to prepare you to get the most out of those journeys. It is important to become familiar with the energy of the different organs in your body and how they are composed of the elements in order to know yourself more fully and thus to maximize your success in journeying and in life in general.

All life is made of energetic vibrations—vibrations that are constantly in motion and changing. These changes are orderly and cyclical, with each phase of energy giving rise to the next. This dynamic cycle has been acknowledged by all cultures in the progression of the seasons, the stages of human maturation, the patterns of personal and global history, the processes of artistic creation, the patterns of learning, and other cyclical processes.

Most Native American traditions recognize four elements or qualities of energy (earth, water, fire, and air) while the traditional Chinese recognize five (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water). However, there seem to be at least six elements or flavors of energy that govern the universe: air, wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. The interpretation of each element varies somewhat according to culture. Below are the elements as I have experienced them.

The cycle of elements

Water—cold, dark, wet, resting energy (winter) gives rise to
Air—fresh, clear (transparent), invigorating, inspiring energy (thaw)—which blossoms into
Wood—warm, bright, green, upwardly thrusting new energy (spring)—which explodes into
Fire—hot, red, expanding, passionate energy (summer)—which produces
Earth—ripe, sweetly nurturing, yellow, abundant energy (harvest)—which melts into
Metal—cool, white, authoritative, falling away energy (autumn)—which again hibernates as
Water (winter).

¹ Much of the information in this section came from my plant spirit medicine studies with Eliot Cowan. Trisha Howell • Howell Canyon Press • Information 360.563.0865 • Orders 888.252.0411 • Free bonus gifts at www.HowellCanyonPress.com and www.TrishaHowell.com

The cycle can be thought of as Hibernation (Water), Fertilization (Air), Birth (Wood), Increase (Fire), Maturity (Earth), Balance (Metal), and Decrease/Hibernation/Death (Water), which leads back to Fertilization (Air), etc.

The elements inside you

Like all of creation, you are made up of these elements, which must be properly balanced in themselves and in relationship to each other. You have one element that is most pronounced, which is your greatest strength (when balanced) and yet your greatest weakness (when imbalanced). This constitutional (dominant/causative) element is often difficult to determine, but it can be tested via subtle skin color and odor, the sound of your voice, and the nature of your emotional response. (This is performed in Plant Spirit Medicine.)

The elements correspond in function to certain organs of your body, to the times of day when these organs have their highest surge of energy, and to certain directions, senses, taste, smells, sounds, and colors. Each of the following fourteen organs has a so-called official—an energetic intelligence that may be personalized if you wish—to supervise that organ's functioning. Each organ is either more yin (dense and blood-filled) or more yang (hollow).²

Water

Water is the cradle of life, the repository of ancestral, genetic chi (life force). Every cell of your body is swimming in a sea-like fluid. Water is incredibly responsive; everything that lives pulsates with fluidity. Water supports both movement and stillness. Everything both moving and resting in nature does so with the lubrication of water. Resting times of sleep and silence (hibernation) enable you to cleanse and to gather the strength to move forward to recreate yourself. You do this by drawing on the energy deep within water, the great mystery of life and of creation.

Water governs all the rhythms in your body/mind/spirit. When your water energy stagnates, your natural rhythms are disrupted, and you become imbalanced and even fearful. When your water energy flows freely, you feel a keen sense of purity, aliveness, reassurance, courage, and ease.

Water corresponds to:

- the northern direction
- the sense of hearing
- a salty taste
- a putrid smell (when imbalanced)
- a groaning sound
- dark blue or black

² There are endless explanations about the meaning of yin and yang. This opposition is often understood as female versus male, passive versus active, hidden versus revealed, etc. For our purposes here, the opposition is dense and blood-filled versus hollow.

- the following organs and time periods: Bladder (controls quality, quantity, and adaptability of all fluids, is yang—hollow)/3pm-5pm; Kidneys/Adrenals (distributes fluids, produces ambition and cleverness, is yin—dense and blood filled—energy)/5pm-7pm

Air

Air is the primary sustenance and inspiration of life. It nourishes your life force every moment as an invigorating, clarifying, and inspiring influence. Much life dies within a few minutes if deprived of air. Life is always in motion, frequently changing its direction and force like the wind. Air provides the freedom and flexibility that all life needs to thrive and even to survive.

Air is a quick, agile, and sprightly influence. When your air energy becomes trapped and stale, you feel cooped up, uninspired, and dull, resulting in a sense of suffocation, listlessness, and aimlessness. When your air energy flows freely, you feel a sense of buoyancy and alertness, an animation and flexibility in mind, body, and spirit.

Air corresponds to:

- the upward direction
- the sense of intuitive knowing
- a fresh or cleansing (e.g., like cucumber) taste
- a stale smell (when imbalanced)
- a gasping sound
- a shiny or transparent color
- the following organs and time period: Lungs and Skin (receives chi, guidance, and inspiration from the heavens, is yin)/3am-5am

Wood

Wood is the energy of birth and of growth: the upward thrust and push toward self-manifestation that resides in all living things. This is a vigorous, youthful, springtime energy that manifests as self-expression and healing. Healing is a specialized form of growth involving the expansion of body/mind/spirit towards its full potential.

Wood is the structure that holds up a tree—and you. It must be firm and strong yet pliable and flexible. When your wood energy is blocked and becomes brittle, you may become angry and frustrated. When your wood energy flows freely, you easily make and carry out good judgments, plans, and decisions because you have clarity of vision and direction.

Wood corresponds to:

- the eastern direction
- the sense of sight
- a sour taste
- a rancid smell (when imbalanced)
- the sound of shouting

- green
- the following organs and time periods: Gall Bladder (specific decisions and judgments, is yin)/11pm-1am; Liver (overall strategic planning, is yang)/1am-3am

Fire

Fire is the energy of warmth, joy, and passionate sexuality. It is the playful, sparkling, summertime energy that nourishes with pleasure, shared communication, and love.

Fire is the heart that enables you to confront anything in life without being rattled or suppressed. It is naturally outgoing and communicative. When your fire energy is stifled, you become sad and even may despair. When your fire energy flows freely, you feel laughter, joy, and happiness in yourself and radiating towards all mankind.

Fire corresponds to:

- the southern direction
- the sense of touch
- a bitter taste
- a scorched smell (when imbalanced)
- the sound of laughter
- red
- the following organs and time periods: Heart (divine love and compassion, is yin)/11am-1pm; Small Intestine (sorts, separates, absorbs, transforms, is yang)/1pm-3pm; Pericardium (protects the heart with genuine pleasures, is yin)/7pm-9pm; Triple Warmer (shared field of warmth and team spirit, is yang)/9pm-11pm

Earth

Earth is the mothering, grounding energy that nurtures you and others. It brings not only food but also identity, security, understanding, sympathy, and comfort.

Earth is the foundation for all else in life. It grounds you and brings abundant sweetness and caring. When your earth energy is blocked, you cannot digest and assimilate your food and your experiences, and you may become worried, insecure, and obsessive. When your earth energy flows freely, you appropriately nourish and care for yourself and others.

Earth corresponds to:

- the downward or center direction
- the sense of taste
- a sweet taste
- a sickly sweet smell (when imbalanced)
- yellow
- the sound of singing

- the following organs and times of day: Stomach (breaks down food and experiences, is yang)/7am-9am; Spleen and Pancreas (transport and distribute bodily fluids and experiences, are yin)/9am-11am

Metal

Metal is the fatherly sky energy that gives each thing its unique essence, qualities, and value. With paternal leadership and guidance, the precious, essential part of yourself is brought out (mined) and appreciated.

Metal carries the crisp, vibrant autumn energy in which all extraneous growth and exuberance fall away, and things return to their essence. It is the dying of the old (colon processing) and the beginning of the new (empty bowels). When your metal energy is blocked—when you cannot let go of the old—you may feel grief. When your metal energy flows freely, your internal cleanliness, respect, and admiration flourish.

Metal corresponds to:

- the western direction
- the sense of smell
- a pungent/spicy taste
- a rotten smell (when imbalanced)
- the sound of weeping
- white
- the following organ and time of day: Large Intestines/Colon (drains toxins, establishes cleanliness, is yang)/ 5am –7am

Strengthening the elements inside you

If you ask your power animals and other guides during journeying, they will provide you with specific actions you can take to strengthen each element in yourself. However, the following are general guidelines that can be helpful.

Practices to **strengthen Water** include:

- swimming, playing in the water, scuba diving, and taking a regular, soothing soak in a warm bath
- taking a cruise
- drinking plenty of water
- eating foods that support water (such as beans, peas, leeks, and dates, but especially cranberry juice and water laden-fruits like watermelon)
- using herbs that support the bladder, kidneys, and adrenals
- getting plenty of rest, sleep, and meditative time

Practices to **strengthen Air** include:

- spending time in fresh, brisk air

- eating foods that support air (such as amaranth, garlic, and mangoes but especially peaches, pears, and quince)
- using herbs that support the lungs and skin
- taking an early morning brisk walk outside
- scrubbing the whole body with a loofa or stiff brush
- attending inspiring events and reading inspiring books

Practices to **strengthen Wood** include:

- spending time in contact with wood (trees, woodworking, carpentry, etc.)
- eating foods that support wood (such as wheat, mallow, and peaches but especially liver, beets, and vegetable oils)
- using herbs that support the liver and gallbladder
- shouting and pounding something (not someone!) to release pent up anger
- engaging in martial arts or in any other heavy contact arts and sports
- limiting animal fat, alcohol, and drug intake

Practices to **strengthen Fire** include:

- hanging out in the sun
- eating foods that support fire (such as glutinous millet, coarse greens, and plums but especially spices (in moderation))
- using herbs that support the heart and small intestine
- avoiding temperature extremes
- engaging in pleasurable social activities, watching a funny movie, or doing anything else that promotes laughter

Practices to **strengthen Earth** include:

- taking walks in nature (especially barefoot)
- gardening
- cooking
- eating foods that support earth (such as millet, scallions, and apricots, but especially all varieties of squash)
- using herbs that support the stomach, spleen, and pancreas
- singing
- nurturing/pampering oneself daily, taking a hot bath, getting a massage
- doing simple, nonintellectual tasks

Practices to **strengthen Metal** include:

- engaging in metal working
- eating foods that support metal (such as rice, onions, and chestnuts, but especially foods high in dietary fiber)

- using herbs that support the large intestines/colon
- mentoring another person
- practicing seeing into the essence of each matter