

# Ayurvedic Medicine

## Background

Ayurveda is the ancient medicine of India which originated more than 5,000 years ago. Its modern practice is philosophically linked to Yoga and Tantra. The capability for self-healing and self-awareness is central to treatment. Treatment consists primarily of lifestyle and hygiene modifications, yoga, breathing, meditation, massage, the use of herbs, gems and metals, with emphasis on laxatives and purgatives.

## Philosophical Basis

Ayurveda, Yoga and Tantra form interdependent practices, together nurturing the health of the body and the mind.

Three subtle life energies (vata, pitta, and kapha) govern one's mind and body. Vata can be translated roughly as air, space, or movement, Pitta as heat or fire, and Kapha as stability, water plus earth. If these elements are out of balance, illness occurs. Each person's ideal balance of these energies is set at birth and does not change. Health is maintained by keeping vata, pitta, and kapha close to one's individualized balance through proper diet, exercise and rejuvenation programs.

Imbalance of these energies creates toxins that circulate through the body and accumulate in weak areas. Repression of emotions or bodily urges results in an imbalance of vata. In Ayurvedic practice, one is taught to observe negative emotions with detachment, allowing them to dissipate. For example, one is taught that when anger occurs, one should be completely aware of it, watch the feeling as it unfolds, learn the nature of the anger, then let it go, releasing it. Ayurveda teaches that all negative emotions can be released through awareness.

Just as repression of emotions can cause the harmful build-up of toxins, one should also not suppress bodily functions such as coughing, sneezing, belching, or passing gas.

Generally speaking, imbalances in bodily waste systems result in disease. Diabetes and ascites, for example, result from imbalances of urine and perspiration.

## Diagnostic Methods

Ayurveda teaches a "moment to moment" monitoring of the interactions between order (health) and disorder (disease). Physical examination includes evaluation of various pulses. The tongue is inspected for size, shape, color, contour, surface texture and margins. Patterns of wrinkles are examined on the face and the lips and eyes are assessed for size, shape, color, and texture. Changes in the nails reflect the waste products of the

bones. They are evaluated, observing as to whether they are dry, soft, brittle, grooved, stained, convex or bulbous.

## **Scope of Practice**

There are 2 types of healing practices in Ayurveda – elimination / release of toxins and neutralization of toxins. Practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine may recommend laxatives and purgatives to eliminate, release, or neutralize toxins, and may also encourage self-healing through changes to lifestyle or hygiene, the practice of yoga, meditation, or massage, specialized breathing, possibly in combination with herbs, gems or metals.

### ***Physical elimination and neutralization***

Cleansing of the body through physical elimination is accomplished through vomiting, use of laxatives or purgatives, medicated enemas, nasal manipulation or administration of herbs, and bloodletting. Vaman is therapeutic vomiting used to eliminate the upper airways of mucus. Purgatives are given to relieve excess bile.

Ayurveda states that human urine is a natural laxative that assists in detoxification. One cup taken every morning will help cleanse and detoxify the large intestine. Senna tea leaves, used to make Sennecot, are used as laxatives. Medicated enemas are used to alleviate constipation, distention, fever, sexual disorders, kidney pain, heart pain, vomiting, backache, neck pain and dyspepsia. Arthritis and gout are also treated with enemas. Release of blood toxins can occur through actual release of a small amount of blood or by using a blood purifier in the form of a tea, such as burdock root tea. Other blood purifiers are saffron, sandalwood, turmeric and calamus root.

The ingestion of hot pungent herbs such as ginger or black pepper can neutralize toxins as can sustained hunger and thirst, exercise, sunbathing or sitting in fresh air.

### ***Diet, Lifestyle, Hygiene and Routine***

Ayurveda teaches that an individual can heal oneself through a sound diet and a stable health routine of meticulous hygiene, meditation and exercise. Diet is chosen based on one's constitution. Quality and freshness of food and the observance of fasts are also important. Normal, healthy individuals with specific constitutions should observe a warm-water fast (1-2 quarts of warm water over 24 hours) at least once per week. One should avoid taking vitamin and mineral supplements other than what is present in the food one eats, as this practice may perpetuate vitamin deficiencies.

There are strict guidelines for hygiene and routines in Ayurvedic practice. One should wake at sunrise, observe one's tongue, teeth, eyes, nose, and throat, then clean them, drink a glass of warm water, massage the body with oil and take a warm bath. Put on loose, comfortable clothing for exercise and meditation. Do not eat breakfast after 8:00 am; eat slowly and in silence with an awareness of the food. Take lunch before noon, dinner at sunset and go to bed before 10:00 pm.

### ***Yoga, Breathing, Meditation and Massage***

Ayurveda indicates which type of breathing exercises are suitable for each constitution. For example, a person with pitta constitution should perform breathing exercises focused on the left nostril, individuals with kapha constitutions should perform right nostril breathing exercises, and individuals with vatta constitutions should alternate right and left. Yoga asanas or postures should be chosen based on one's constitution and ailment. Yoga is combined with chanting and meditation to achieve harmony and natural order. Massage therapy is important for the movement of energy in the body and to help maintain balance of vata, pitta, and, kapha.

### ***Medicinals/Herbals/Gems/Metals***

Self-applications of herbs such as cardamom and cinnamon and gems such as amethyst, pearl, and agate can promote healing. Gems and colors contain energy vibrations with healing properties. Purified heavy metals - mercury, gold, silver, copper, iron, lead, and tin - contain healing energy. If there is no improvement after utilization of these self-healing remedies, a physician should be consulted.

### **Scientific Basis**

There have been few randomized controlled trials of Ayurvedic medicine to adequately assess its efficacy.

### **Training and Licensure Requirements**

There are no established licensure requirements or certification processes for practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine in the United States.

### **References**

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