

Ayurveda: An Ancient Healing Science With Modern-Day Application

There is a health crisis in our modern society, and modern medicine has been unable to come to grips with it in many ways. While there are many positive things to say about Western medicine, it is important to not be blind to its failures. At the same time, modern society gives rise to diseases and chronic conditions that are not addressed very well, if at all, by the allopathic approach favored in our current health care system, which tends to focus on treating symptoms and diseases with drugs or invasive surgery, and which breeds, through this approach, a vast array of complications and unintended consequences. Drugs prescribed to solve one problem frequently become causative factors for a host of other issues! The rise of long term issues such as prevalence of stress-related conditions, insomnia, digestive problems, auto-immune diseases, allergic reactions, along with obesity, cancer, diabetes and heart disease, leads to enormous costs and suffering for many of us trying to survive in the modern world.

Ayurveda is an ancient science with a more than 5000 year history, originating in India. There are several basic principles of this science that make it a perfect modality to begin to tackle the type of chronic concerns briefly touched upon above. First, it is wholistic, which means that it looks at the whole person within the context of that person's diet, lifestyle, work, and constitutional basis. Second, it is observational, so that it adapts the proposed treatment to a specific set of circumstances for a specific individual and not generalities. Third, it provides solutions which provide support to the inherent wellness and healing properties of the human body, encouraging rather than overpowering the natural systems of health; and as a result, has far less likelihood of any kind of unintended consequences or negative complications or side effects of the treatment.

Ayurveda also provides us with a model that can be applied generally to build out a healthy lifestyle and diet regimen that has a far higher success rate than the type of "one size fits all" diet or exercise programs so frequently arising in our society as people grasp at ways to achieve health and fitness. This model provides some quite simple principles for making modest adjustments that sustain and increase health.

A few of the major principles of Ayurveda include understanding our basic constitutional type. Ayurveda categorizes constitutions into three primary types (as well as combinations that incorporate some aspects of these types together), known as "doshas" and which are called "vata" (air type), "pitta" (fire type) and kapha (water/earth type). These classifications are in turn based on a review of a series of qualities relating to one's body-mind complex which are called attributes and are paired together in opposites. So for example, there is hot/cold. Pitta types would have a predominance of "hot" while vata and kapha are both predominantly "cold". Similarly there are attributes such as light/heavy, smooth/rough, mobile/static, etc. Each of the 3 doshas is recognized by the line up of the corresponding attributes.

Ayurveda then looks at imbalances that can occur based on these attributes getting out of balance. This is considered to be the basis of the chronic health issues that we face. Treatment looks at offsetting and re-balancing the attributes by applying the "opposite" to the imbalanced quality. Each aspect of life is taken up for review to provide an appropriate course of action to restore balance and then maintain balance.

Ayurveda can be taken to extensive levels of detail with many specialized treatments and concepts, as would be expected from a living science and system that has more than 5000 years of practical

observation and experience behind it, but with the basics, anyone can begin to take charge of their own wellness needs in a simple and effective way. For instance, by cooking using ayurvedic principles, one can achieve the right dietary balance for one's constitution, achieving and maintaining one's ideal weight.

It is impossible in the scope of a short article to provide more than just a basic insight into this extraordinary healing science. I have therefore provided a recommended reading list at the end.

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RECOMMENDED READING ON AYURVEDA:

Best Introductions: Ayurveda: Science of Self Healing (Dr. Vasant Lad) and Prakriti: Your Ayurvedic Constitution (Robert Svoboda)

Ayurvedic Cooking: The Ayurvedic Cookbook (Morningstar and Desai), Ayurvedic Cooking for Westerners (Morningstar) and Sattwa Café (Doherty)

Ayurvedic Herbology: The Yoga of Herbs: Ayurvedic Guide to Herbal Medicine (Frawley & Lad), and Ayurvedic Herbology: East and West (Dass)

Ayurveda and Yoga: Yoga and Ayurveda (Frawley) and Yoga For Your Type: Ayurvedic Guide to Your Asana Practice (Frawley and Summerfield-Kozak).

Ayurveda and Diet: Ayurvedic Guide to Diet and Weight Loss (Gerson) and Ayurvedic Zone Diet (Thompson)

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