

Aging and Health: An Ayurvedic Perspective

Physicians often quip that no matter how good we are, our patients will eventually die. It is true that regardless of human invention and new technologies each and everyone of us will eventually take that journey into the unknown we call death. The goal of modern medicine is to delay that journey and to improve the quality of life while we are here. It is to this end, that Ayurveda^[1] offers humanity the greatest hope of achieving both of these goals.

Ayurveda means the “science or knowledge of life.” It is a complete system of understanding the human being and his relationship with the world around him. If an individual is living in harmony with their environment, optimum health is possible. However, the further out of harmony an individual is living, the less likely it is that they will reach their full life potential in either length or quality.

In order to maximize life potential, it is taught in Ayurveda that each person must learn to live harmoniously with the world through their five senses. Our senses are like portals or gateways into our body, mind and consciousness. If we take in sensory impressions that are healthy, we will in turn be healthier. If we take in that which is unhealthy, the body suffers. It is often said that “we are what we eat”. In fact, we are what we eat, smell, see, hear and touch. Through our senses, we absorb the world around us. While the human body and mind can survive on low quality sensory impressions it can not thrive.

Ayurveda is not simply a science of how to care for the body but also the mind. The Mind-Body connection is well established, both in the East and the West. Stress is recognized as an important contributor to disease. The damaging effects of stress on our immune and endocrine systems are well documented. Stress plays an important role in the both the onset and the prognosis of most diseases.

Ayurveda is a science of stress reduction. One facet of living a harmonious life of low stress is using the senses properly. Low quality food is a stress on the physical system. Likewise, inappropriate smells, sights, sounds and touch can be just as or more stressful. While the proper use of the senses is important to reducing stress, complete stress reduction requires control of the mind as well. Toward this end, Ayurveda employs the techniques of Yoga to bring about greater peace of mind and stillness. When the mind can focus on the present moment and resist wandering off into past or future dramas, stress is reduced and time appears to slow down. As the mind slows down and relaxes so to do internal bodily process. Heart rate slows down and contractions become stronger and more regular, there is decreased activity in the sympathetic nervous system and the secretion of stress chemicals such as epinephrine is reduced. When the mind is calm, both the mind and body are healthier.

As we age, we begin to realize the accumulated effects of decades of stress and poor lifestyle. We experience the results of this in the form of cardiovascular disease and the deterioration of all of the tissues of the body. The bones become osteoporotic, neurons in the brain degenerate, muscles atrophy and tissues become drier. The list of age related diseases is long. Each is the end result of decades of wear and tear.

Healing is the process of restoring optimal function. Health is the experience optimal function. Ayurveda offers people the opportunity to maximize their healing potential and restore optimum health. Through proper lifestyle and medicines provide to us by nature in the form of herbs, both the cause and the symptoms of many age-related diseases can be eradicated.

The role of Ayurveda is to remove the cause of disease and gently support the healing processes of the body with natural remedies. Each of us is a unique individual and each disease is also unique. Two patients who suffer heart attacks do not necessary have the same cause of their condition and therefore, the cure may be different as well. It is the goal of Ayurveda to understand the unique

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nature of the patient and the unique nature of the disease. With this understanding, the Ayurvedic physician is able to prescribe the best individualized program of care and then support the patient as they progress on their journey back to optimal health. Ayurveda maximizes the potential of the patient heal, regardless of the disease. Patients under Ayurvedic care can expect both an increase in the quality of life and the length of life.

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[1] <http://www.ayurvedacollege.com/glossary/term/10>