

The Journey Into Ayurveda

Ayurveda^{i[1]}, which literally means the knowledge or wisdom of life, is the traditional medicine of India. Over the past decade, its popularity as an alternative or complement to Western Medicine has grown steadily. Brought into the mainstream public eye by Dr. Deepak Chopra M.D. in 1991, his book Perfect Health enlightened millions of readers about this ancient healing art. Since that time, interest in Ayurveda has grown steadily and Ayurveda is quickly establishing itself as a unique health care profession. Focusing on how we relate to our environment, Ayurveda views the cause of disease as the natural expression of the body and mind to living out of harmony with its environment. From this perspective we can begin to understand that Ayurvedic treatments center around helping each individual move back into a harmonious relationship with their environment. In Ayurveda we understand that where there is harmony there is health and where there is disharmony, there is disease. Our environment consists of everything that we experience through our five senses. Thus what we eat, look upon, smell, touch or listen to, affects our well being. The goal of Ayurveda then is to help each person take in the impressions that are right for them. In Ayurveda, each person is seen as a unique individual with unique genetics and biochemistry. Hence, what is right for each individual is different. We call a person's uniqueness their "constitution"^{i[2]}. Your constitution describes who you are at the most fundamental level. The concept that we are all different is unique to Ayurveda. As a result of this understanding, Ayurveda prescribes a different program to each individual based upon their constitution and the nature of the imbalance within them. This avoids the "Everybody Must" syndrome that infiltrates many systems of healing. The "Everybody Must" syndrome says that everyone must follow one specific path in order for healing to take place or to establish optimal health. Ayurveda vehemently disagrees with this notion and subscribes to the philosophy that "nothing is right for everyone and everything is right for someone." I am reminded of the story of Lord Buddha who upon selecting his personal physician sent several physicians into the forest with the task of finding as many plants as they could with no medicinal value. Each physician brought back many samples of plants that they felt from their experience and meditations had no value. One physician by the name of Jivaka came back empty handed. He explained his frustration to Lord Buddha. "I am afraid I have failed you, he began, I have spent much time in the company of all of the plants in the forest but there is none that I can find with no value to someone." Upon hearing this, Lord Buddha selected Jivaka as his personal physician. Indeed, Ayurveda recognizes that medicine exists everywhere and often in the most unlikely of places. Not only are plants and herbs sources of medicine but Ayurveda also uses aromas, colors, sound, special forms of massage and food as healing tools. It is through our senses that we experience the world around us. If we take in harmonious impressions through our senses, we can expect to experience greater calm, clarity and peacefulness and thus, via the mind/body relationship, greater physical health. If we take in disharmonious impressions, we create agitation in the mind and this leads to disease. We will now explore the fundamentals of each of the five senses. Through our eyes we take in thousands of impressions each day. These impressions are actual energies with different vibratory rates. Each color is a different energy or vibrates at a different rate. Some colors are harmonious for us and some agitate us in subtle ways. We interact with color all the time through the clothes we wear and our home environment. Conscious use of color can help create an environment for healing. While some color therapist attribute healing qualities to certain colors, Ayurveda once again teaches us that each person is an individual and hence, every color has a healing capacity if prescribed for the right person. Not only is color important but also how colors interrelate. Clashing colors in general create greater agitation while those that blend harmoniously create a greater sense of calm. In Ayurveda we also look at the quality of the impression received by the eye. Violent images as seen in real life or in the movies create agitation and disharmony. Viewing nature and flowers creates a feeling of calmness and clarity and thus benefits our journey toward health. Through the sense of taste, we interact with the foods we eat. Each of the Six tastes affects the body and mind differently. Each taste has its benefits and each has its negative consequences if we overindulge in them. Sweet taste as an example is very nourishing and builds tissue and strength, but overindulgence, as we all know, leads to excessive weight gain, diabetes and other complications. In Ayurveda we do not count calories, grams of fat, or the cholesterol content of food. From an Ayurvedic perspective, if we

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Published on CA College of Ayurveda (<http://www.ayurvedacollege.com>)

learn what balance of tastes are right for us, then we will eat in harmony with our body's constitution and the body will respond with greater health. Some benefit from hot, spicy food while others from milder or bland foods. Some people benefit from meat while others thrive as vegetarians. Some people need the nourishment of sweet-tasting grains and others the cleansing qualities of bitters. What tastes and types of foods are correct for each individual depends upon that person's constitution and the nature of any imbalances that may be present. Our ears take in the vibratory energy of sound. Some sounds are calming and others agitating. Of course, which sounds balance our energy depends again on our constitution. We may think that only quiet, calming sound is healing. Again we must remember the tenant of Ayurveda that teaches us that what heals each person is different. For instance, agitating music can also be motivating. If lethargy and depression is a challenge, motivation is what you want. Meanwhile, for anxious individuals, the calming nature of new age music is beneficial. In Ayurveda, special sound energies called mantra are sometimes prescribed to induce specific reactions in the body. Through our nostrils we entertain the sense of smell. Aromatherapy is an important part of Ayurveda as smell has long been known to evoke emotion. From the perfumes and scents long used in mating rituals to the relaxing feelings evoked by a walk through a rose garden, aromas have always played a large role in our lives. While most people use aromas (perfumes and aftershaves) unconsciously, Ayurveda teaches us that some aromas create harmony while others contribute to disharmony and ultimately to diseases. From this understanding we can see that aromas are also medicine in the context that they can be intelligently used to balance the subtle energy of our bodies. In Ayurveda specific aromas are prescribed to aid the healing process. Touch is a very important aspect of Ayurveda. Through Ayurvedic massage the body and mind are nurtured. The skin is seen as a receptacle of a variety of energies. Some forms of massage are aggressive while others are soothing. What type aids an individual's healing process depends upon the constitution and the nature of the imbalance. Through the knowledge of Ayurveda, different oils are selected for each individual. These oils are chosen based upon their unique properties. Some are warming while others are cooling. Some nourish the body through the skin while others are less effective. In addition, specific hand motions are utilized to balance the subtle energies defined by Ayurveda. These subtle energies are known as doshas or humors in Ayurveda. There are three fundamental doshas known as Vata ^{i[3]}, Pitta, and Kapha. How they combine and in what percentages make up a person's inborn constitution. No two people share the same constitution. This natural unique balance of energy is essentially an energetic blue print of the person on the physical and emotional level. Through understanding the constitution we can predict where in the body weaknesses are likely to occur and thus take measures to prevent disease. Likewise, a Clinical Ayurvedic Specialist can observe how the current balance of these energies is out of balance with their inborn ideal, and thus come to an understanding of how a disease took root in the body and began to grow. With this knowledge, regimes can be prescribed to re-establish balance and often reverse the effects. Our constitution can be described as an energetic template of our genetic blueprint. Our genetics have been shown to be the basis of our individuality. Our genetics control how we are likely to react to our environment and can also be used to predict predisposition's toward certain diseases. They also determine our biochemical individuality. This individuality affects everything from our unique nutritional needs to how we respond to different drugs, foods, colors, aromas, temperatures and everything else in our environment. Indeed, if we can understand our constitution, we can begin to take conscious control over our choices and choose those that will lead us toward optimal health.

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