

# Ayurveda: The Art of Stress Management

Ayurveda<sup>[1]</sup>, literally translated means the “knowledge of life.” It is the traditional healthcare system of India. Ayurveda is based on the idea that a life and lifestyle of harmony is the basis for optimum health. It can be said that where there is harmony there is health and where there is disharmony there is disease. Ayurveda is the science of creating harmony between a person and their environment.

It is well accepted that stress is the greatest threat to the well being of people. Stress weakens the immune system making the host (you and I) more attractive to the multitude of pathogens present in the world. As the strength of the host diminishes, the ability of the microorganism to penetrate its defenses increases. Stress plays a role in the onset of just about every disease people face from the common cold to heart disease. Not only is stress invisible, it is created by the person who is affected by it. This realization helps people understand that just as they have the ability to create the experience of stress, they also have the ability to create the experience of peace of mind. Ayurveda, and its sister science Yoga are a path to personal power helping people learn how to gain control over the mind. Once in control, a person is no longer the slave of their thought process but rather its master.

A lifestyle based in harmony is a stress -free lifestyle. Ayurveda applies its principles to both the mind and the body. Though the practices of meditation and yoga, Ayurveda helps a person expand their perception of themselves and how they relate to the world around them. While so many people are plagued with fear, anger, anxiety and / or depression, Ayurveda helps people to come to the realization that life can be and is beautiful!

Ayurvedic lifestyle begins with an understanding who one’s constitution<sup>[2]</sup>. This is the inherent balance of the three doshas (biological energies) determined at the moment of conception. Each person’s constitution defines their uniqueness. Ayurveda understands that nothing is right for everyone and everything is right for someone. Ayurveda is non-dogmatic. Each person’s path toward health and harmony are is unique. Ayurveda is the path of finding out what is right for the individual. This path includes learning to live harmoniously through each of the five senses.

Hence, through diet, aromatherapy, color therapy, sound therapy and touch (massage) therapy along with yoga and meditation, Ayurvedic practitioners slowly guide their patients back to living in harmony with their true nature. Success on this path takes time and patience but pays great rewards. Along the way, Ayurvedic practitioners utilize their vast knowledge of herbalism to support the process and alleviate suffering. Stress reducing herbs are called nervine sedatives and include herbs such as valerian root, jatamamsi, shankha pushpi and thousands of others found throughout the world. More importantly, the Ayurvedic pharmacopia includes an understanding of rasayanas or rejuvenatives. These special herbs build up the bodies resistance to stress and increases its endurance. These herbs are especially beneficial to those who are highly sensitive to stress. These herbs include ashwaganda, bala and amalaki and many others.

According to Ayurveda, the greatest factor in a person’s sensitivity to stress is a substance found within all cellular tissues and the mind. Ayurveda calls this substance ojas. Ojas is the essence of the immune system and provides the mind with both stability and contentment. Ojas is produced by the body as the body digests nourishing foods. Hence, a nourishing diet combined with excellent digestion is the key to building ojas. Ayurveda places great emphasis on proper digestion. This includes selecting the proper foods for a person’s constitution as well as eating them properly. Long term problems with digestion and elimination deplete the body of ojas. Ojas is protected by a lifestyle that avoids overindulgence, includes significant rest and reinforces self -love.

In summary, Ayurveda helps a person come to a better understanding of themselves and their relationship to the world around them. By adopting a healthy lifestyle, Ayurveda helps people reduce

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stress. By reducing stress, each person can attain optimum health and peace of mind.

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