

What is Ayurveda? SELF AWARENESS

Ayurveda (ayur means “life” or “daily living” and veda means “knowing”) is India’s 5,000 year-old preventative-based holistic system of natural healing medicine. As the “science of life,” Ayurveda uses poses (asana), breath work (pranayama), meditation, diet, lifestyle, herbs, and aromatherapy to help create a daily routine of balance.

Ayurveda is the torchlight that illuminates the inner secrets of health, healing, and longevity. It calls each one of us to be curious about our existence, both internal and external. As the sister science of Yoga, the goal of both is to promote balance and harmony while removing and mitigating pain and suffering. Ayurveda is the healing side of Yoga, and Yoga is the spiritual side of Ayurveda. They address different ways to achieve our highest goal...self-realization and enlightenment.

The Hindu philosophy Samkhya, shared by Ayurveda and Yoga, states that life exists for the purpose of acquiring experience and knowing the Self. The Ayurvedic physician Charaka believed that consciousness is energy manifested in the five elements and out of the five elements all matter is created. All forms of matter and thoughts have distinct characteristics and possess varying degrees of several elements. The doshas (vata, pitta, kapha) are made up of these five elements (ether, air, fire, water, and earth) and come together in different proportions to make up our unique physical bodies and emotional and mental constitutions. The doshas determine our likes and dislikes and our habits. Illness and disease are the imbalance or disharmony between the doshas, and the human inner clock must stay in sync with the external seasonal clock. Time of day, season of the year, our age, and planetary rotation make up the external clock. Charaka also believed that when we understand opposite forces function together in the universe, we can understand cause and effect and in turn understand what our bodies need to heal.

MOTHER NATURE

HUMAN NATURE

A person’s constitution determines what we are naturally attracted to and what triggers an imbalance or illness. Our goal should be to create a diet and lifestyle that supports our prakriti (“original nature” established at conception) and nourishes our vikriti (current state of “imbalance”).

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

When following Ayurvedic principles, we look for imbalances in our bodies that affect our health. When the doshas becomes aggravated, they each disrupt the body in its own way. Knowing your unique dosha combination can be used as a tool to understand and maximize your natural strengths while nourishing your vulnerabilities.

As Ayurveda recognizes, we are not what we eat, but we are what we digest. By making choices to strengthen our digestion, or agni, we form the foundation for good health and vitality. Think of agni as the engine that drives digestion, nutrient absorption, and assimilation. Weakened agni is the root of all imbalances and diseases from which we suffer. The three most important factors of the human body's agni function (aka the body's trinity) are the doshas, the dhatus (tissues), and the malas (waste matter). If our digestion is strong, our body can turn poison into nectar.

BE PRACTICAL

KEEP IT SIMPLE

In Ayurveda, a daily routine is integral to bringing balance in our lives while eliminating decision fatigue. The main goal of having a daily routine is to protect one's rasa - "juice" or true essence. Proper diet, sufficient sleep, and loving relationships constitute the foundation for health, allowing us to digest everything the body needs and eliminate the rest. The human body and mind crave routine, and our organs and systems are designed to run most efficiently when we're on a schedule. Once in balance, we crave things our belly and our mind really need.

OBSERVATION

CURIOSITY

Ayurveda teaches precise methods for understanding the disease process before any overt signs and symptoms manifest. Simple day-to-day observations inform us of our unique constitution and provide signals of disharmony in the body. Prevention is primary! Ayurveda teaches self-awareness and trust in intuition. And the body does not react well to constant or frequent change. The body responds well to rhythm and routine.

BASIC PRINCIPLES of AYURVEDA

- #1 Self-sustaining health is true liberty.
- #2 Everything that exists in the external universe has a counterpart in the internal universe of the human body.
- #3 The physical universe is made up of the five elements (ether, air, fire, water, earth).
- #4 Whatever affects the body affects the mind (and vice versa).
- #5 The three doshas (vata, pitta, kapha) are the three principles fundamental to life.
- #6 Like increases like. An external increase of one of the doshas, increases the force of the same dosha inside the body. This is also the case exclusively inside the body.
- #7 Since like increases like, it makes sense that opposites are medicine.
- #8 Remedy for disease is found in the cause. Signs and symptoms can complicate and mask the path to health and harmony.
- #9 Food is medicine and medicine is food. Food is that which is digested and medicine is that which aids digestion. Poison is that which disrupts digestion. Nectar becomes poison and poison nectar.
- #10 Daily and seasonal routines promote the natural rhythms of the body.

“There is no end to Ayurveda,” says the ancient text.