

AYURVEDA – A LIFE ALTERING EXPERIENCE

by EdB

Two years ago I was diagnosed with high cholesterol. My doctor put me on a drug called Lipitor and that was the end of it. A year and a half later blood tests showed high sugar levels. Diagnosed with Diabetes, I was given another medicine and was told to exercise more and start eating healthier. Online research on diabetes and cholesterol bombarded me with advertisements for different types of drugs. Something inside me shifted. I was getting tired of taking synthetic drugs, taxing my body even more. I didn't want to do the quick fix. I wanted to get to the root of my problems. Unsure of where to go, I asked my doctor about alternative medicine. Unfortunately she was unable to refer me. To this day, medical students spend very few hours studying nutrition, and no time at all on alternative approaches.

I searched. A friend introduced me to the philosophy of Ayurveda. Trusting her knowledge in the field, and taking her guidance, I was able to affect my blood test numbers, using the ancient practice of Ayurveda. Now, two years later, I am finally beginning to understand Ayurveda and I am seeing the change it brings into my life.

Ayurveda, a Sanskrit word which literally means "science of life", (ayu =life and veda = knowledge), focuses on the subtle energies in all things, living and inorganic, as well as thoughts emotions and actions. Ayurveda is the art science of health care, an ancient medical science from India. This holistic approach to health and longevity, not only incorporates diet and exercise, but includes tools such as yoga, meditation, breathing, visualization, therapeutic massage and herbs to treat illness and maintain optimum health.

According to Ayurveda, health is a participatory ongoing process of achieving and maintaining a dynamic balance in all the aspects of life through the means of comprehensive natural therapies, customized to suit each individual's psychosomatic constitution and the current imbalance. The goal of this process is to heal and establish balance as well as promote positive health and prevent disease.

In order to benefit from the Ayurvedic tradition, a major life style change may be necessary. Everything you do affects your body, your health and vitality. That is what you eat and drink as well as who you're with and how they make you feel, what program you watch on TV, the music you listen to, what books you read....everything is affected, because everything is interconnected. Regardless of our lifestyle, toxins are accumulating in our bodies. These toxins build up and over time may lead to chronic diseases.

In Ayurveda, the fundamental healing philosophy is the concept of the three *dosha's*, basic types of energy or functional principals. These three forces are called Vata (air), Pitta (fire) and Kapha (earth). According to the principals of Ayurveda, they are present in everything and everyone. In balancing these doshas we can achieve natural equilibrium.

The miracle of the human body is that it has a natural healing intelligence, which is capable of constantly rejuvenating itself. Ayurveda aims to establish the ability to lead every aspect of life to its fullest potential, in complete unison and conscious to nature's infinite wisdom.

Health is a dynamic balance which needs to be achieved in all aspects of life; physical, emotional, intellectual, biochemical, behavioral, spiritual, familial, social etc. Ayurvedic medicine sees disease as a result of an excess or deficiency (an imbalance) in the three doshas, and the presence of toxins.

Ayurvedic herbs are used to treat illness by restoring the balance of the three energies. Some other tools used to restore balance are meditation, yoga, and massage.

Everybody is different and everybody has to tailor their own changes, with attention to their specific needs. It takes a huge commitment and loving kindness toward oneself. It is time consuming and takes willingness to stick to your commitment.

Ayurveda believes in comprehensive customized therapies, with consideration to all aspects of life; addressing nutrition, exercise, rest, natural medicines, emotions, life style.

Meditation is an integral part of the Ayurvedic health system. It focuses the mind as well as disciplining the body. A technique of concentration designed to control and calm the conscious mind, achieving enhanced awareness of self in the present moment. This awareness allows us to constructively channel our mental energies so that we can be more productive, optimistic, peaceful, stress free and confident. Meditation is a pathway to increase our spiritual nature.

Yoga is another tool that should be an important part of the routine. “Yoga” is Sanskrit for “union” (that which joins), joining individual self with universal self.

Yoga is a conscious process of gaining mastery over the mind, solving menacing problems of unhappiness, restlessness, and emotional upset, hyper activity etc., caused by every day stress. It is the art of creating an intimate relationship between body and mind, working to cultivate flexibility, strengthening the muscles and bringing balance to the body. Yoga teaches us to relax into ourselves and our lives by learning tools to soothe the central nervous system. In the practice of asana (postures), we are using the body as a tool to shape ourselves for the experience of union with our higher self. The health benefits of yoga are innumerable. Through the focused breathing and twisting of the body, the internal organs and bloodstream are cleansed and purified, which has a transforming effect on our health.

Abhyanga, daily herbal oil body massage, is yet another integral part of the Ayurvedic routine. This self massage, with specially formulated essential oils, soothes the nervous system. It also

relieves stress, improves blood circulation, and nourishes body tissue, while facilitating the release of toxins from the body.

Nutritional changes are strict, as they are curtailed individually. Personally I had to make major changes in my life. My nutritional changes are my most challenging. Because I have Cholesterol and Diabetes issues, I have had to give up meat (incl. fish), bread, dairy & sugar. Starches such as pasta, potatoes or white rice are no longer on my menu. I mainly eat fruits & vegetables, grains, beans and tofu. Not everybody has to make such drastic changes. It is important to have proper guidance when making these changes into your life.

Within each of us, and the universe at large, there flows a vital energy called Prana. This “life force” is the energy of our beings. If we learn to circulate and balance this energy, it can be invigorating. When we are able to maintain this equilibrium, we radiate with life, and inspire the beauty within to flow out.