

A GENTLE BEGINNING

Ayurveda for Beginners

*Basic tenets of Ayurveda, simplified
for everyday use*

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CHAPTER ONE

An Introduction to Ayurveda

Ayurveda is an ancient science of life and longevity. It was first conceived in India many thousands of years ago, and it is still practiced today as a living medical tradition. The Charaka Samhita, one of its most authoritative texts, is dated from around 200 BCE.

You might have heard about Ayurveda from a friend, or read about it on the internet. Your curiosity has landed you here. Do you want to learn how Ayurveda can help you?

As a professor and Ayurveda doctor, I have been teaching and practicing Ayurveda for more than thirty years. I want to share with you the goodness of self care and the healing wisdom of Ayurveda. I can help you learn what Ayurveda is, and how you can use it for your own healing and wellbeing.

The meaning of the word Ayurveda

Ayurveda is a Sanskrit word that means "knowledge of life." It is the science and wisdom of living a life of health, joy and satisfaction, from the time of birth through the whole of a person's lifetime.

Ayurveda teaches us the ways to protect our health and build vitality and resilience. It explains the reasons behind illness and the miseries of mind and body, and it teaches us to live a life of health, joy and satisfaction.

Mind, body, soul and senses

According to Ayurveda, we are a combination of body, mind, senses and soul. In this way, it takes into account our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

To protect our health, Ayurveda advocates an Ayurvedic way of life, one of discipline and mindfulness, taking care of all of these every day. Ayurveda empowers us with simple yet powerful tools: daily routine, lifestyle, food, eating habits, sleep, and the judicious use of our senses. The three sub-pillars that hold our lives are correct food, correct sleep and the correct use of the senses.

Ayurveda contains a large repository of herbs, minerals, metals, herbal formulations, herbo-mineral formulations, and many types of therapies, such as Panchakarma, Nasya and Basti.

Ayurveda is, in the truest sense, a science and wisdom of life. In a more limited sense, it is considered the traditional Indian system of medicine. In the USA, Ayurveda is practiced as complementary and alternative medicine.

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CHAPTER TWO

The Five Elements & the Three Doshas

The theory of the five elements is core to understanding Ayurveda. Anyone who doesn't grasp this idea will find it hard to understand the rest of what follows. These are not the elements of chemistry. They are the elements of cosmic energy.



SPACE



AIR



FIRE



WATER



EARTH

Space is subtle, vast, without boundaries, and cold. Air is mobile, cold, rough, dry and light. Fire is hot, sharp, light, oily and soft. Water is flowing, soft, heavy and moist. Earth is heavy, stable, dense, rough and hard. Our bodies are made up of these five elements, as is everything else in this universe.

From five elements to three energies

The elemental composition of the human body is explained in terms of Dosha, Dhatu and Mala. Doshas are the physiological entities of the body, and they have the potential to get vitiated and fall out of balance. Doshas play a vital role in causing both physical and mental disease.

Doshas are three in number: Vata, Pitta and Kapha. Their elemental composition is decided by the dominance of elements within them.

Vata Space + Air. The energy of movement.

Pitta Fire + Water. The energy of transformation.

Kapha Earth + Water. The energy of structure.

Why are Vata, Pitta and Kapha called Doshas?

These three energies are responsible for every biological process in our minds and bodies.

When they are in balance, we stay healthy.

When they fall out of balance, they create disease, and it is for this reason that they are called Doshas. Dosha means "the one that can cause disturbance or disease."

What is health? According to Ayurveda, balance and harmony, within ourselves and with the outside environment, is essential to good health. The root of all disease and misery in mind and body is imbalance and disharmony.

You may wonder, how can I do that?

It is easier than you think. Ayurveda is all about eating the right food, good eating habits, a daily routine, a seasonal routine, and a lifestyle personalised for you. You can consult an Ayurvedic practitioner like myself to learn more about your own mind-body type, and how to live a life of balance. These are simple but powerful tools. They work in subtle ways, but their impact is very powerful. They help you create your own wellbeing, and maintain good health.

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CHAPTER THREE

Ayurvedic Lifestyle & Daily Routine

Mindful living, and living in balance and harmony with nature, is at the core of an Ayurvedic lifestyle. You can live a life of balance by following an Ayurvedic daily routine and seasonal routine, and by understanding and honoring the energies of your own mind and body.

What is a daily routine?

Most of us see the day as work time, lunch time, our time, and sleep time. Ayurveda sees it differently. According to Ayurveda, the time to wake up, eat, sleep and work needs to be in sync with the rhythm and energy of the day. Doing this daily becomes our daily routine, and following it is a blueprint to good health.

This practice of following a routine every day is called **Dinacharya**, a Sanskrit word where "Din" means day and "charya" means to follow. With Dinacharya, we live in tune with the energy of the day, and maintain balance with our environment.

According to Ayurveda, the day starts at sunrise, with cool, earthy Kapha in charge. The middle of the day is Pitta time. The afternoon is ruled by Vata, and then the cycle begins again. The Ayurvedic Rishis, or saints, considered a daily routine to be a stronger healing force than any other medicine.

A peek into an Ayurvedic Dinacharya

Get up from bed before sunrise. Follow your morning rituals: say a prayer or a word of gratitude to transition mindfully from sleep to wakefulness. Brush your teeth, scrape your tongue, and try oil pulling. Match your energy to the appropriate time of morning for exercise and breakfast, and eat your lunch at noon time.

You can learn the details of each practice, when and how to do it, and how to personalise your Dinacharya to your own unique mind-body type, in a consultation with me.

Questions I hear often

I love getting up a little late. Why do I need to change that?

Getting up late feels luxurious, but it falls within Kapha's energy: dullness, heaviness and sluggishness. Getting up early leaves us feeling alert and energised. Try five minutes earlier each morning, and in a month you'll be right on schedule.

Why do I need to scrape my tongue?

Gentle scraping of the tongue removes ama, or toxins, freshens the breath, and stimulates agni, the digestive fire. The first step is to get a tongue scraper, and learn how to use it.

I exercise in the evening. Is that the right time, according to Ayurveda?

Most Ayurvedic texts say morning is best, since it calms Kapha and raises Vata. That said, the best time is whenever is genuinely convenient for you, so long as you balance it with your other practices.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Food & Digestion in Ayurveda

Ayurveda describes three pillars of life: food, sleep, and Brahmacharya, the judicious use of the senses. It gives immense importance to food and digestive health. Diseases are like weeds in the body, with their roots in the digestive tract, so taking care of digestive health is like removing disease by its roots.

"When diet is wrong, medicine is of no use. When diet is correct, medicine is of no need." An Ayurvedic proverb.

Agni, the digestive fire

In Ayurveda, the term Agni describes the quintessence of digestion and metabolism. It is the force within the body responsible for the transformative processes of digestion, all the way through to cellular metabolism. Its proper maintenance helps a person live a long life, and its impairment gives rise to disease.

WHEN AGNI IS GOOD: OJAS

Ojas is one's vigor, immunity, strength and happiness, accumulated from properly digested, nourishing food.

- Feeling rested
- A radiant complexion
- Feeling centered and balanced
- Easy digestion, a clear mind
- Rarely getting sick

WHEN AGNI IS DISTURBED: AMA

Ama means uncooked or undigested. It is toxic, sticky waste that can spread through the body.

- Heaviness, fatigue, weakness
- Headaches, body aches
- Bloating, constipation
- Low appetite, mental confusion

Some eating guidelines

Eat mindfully, without screens, and only when you are hungry. Eat warm food, sip only room-temperature water while eating, and avoid incompatible combinations like fruit with yogurt. Eat a hearty lunch at noon and a lighter supper, and plan meals with all six tastes.

The six tastes of Ayurveda

Ayurveda describes food from the perspective of taste. Including all six in your meals helps maintain balanced nutrition, kick-starts digestion, and gives real satisfaction from eating.

Sweet

Rice, wheat, banana, dates, milk, ghee

Sour

Lemon, lime, tamarind, yogurt

Salty

Sea salt, rock salt, seaweed

Bitter

Turmeric, kale, dark chocolate

Pungent

Ginger, garlic, chili, cloves

Astringent

Beans, lentils, cabbage

AN AYURVEDIC HEALING MEAL

Khichari

Nourishing for the body, easy on digestion. Ideal during stress, illness, and the change of seasons.

INGREDIENTS

Black mustard seeds	1/4 tsp
Cumin seeds	1/2 tsp
Hing	a pinch
Turmeric powder	1/2 tsp
Cumin & coriander powder	1/2 tsp ea.
Rock salt	1 tsp
Ghee	2 tbsp
Mung dal, soaked	1/2 cup
Basmati rice	1 cup
Water	6 cups

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat ghee, saute mustard seeds, cumin seeds and hing.
2. Add drained mung dal, turmeric, ginger and salt. Stir until it almost sticks to the pan.
3. Add rice, water, cumin and coriander powder.
4. Boil, then simmer covered until mushy, about 30 to 45 minutes. Add water as needed.
5. Garnish with coconut, cilantro, or lime. Serve hot.

Coconut is great for Pitta, good for Vata, best avoided for Kapha. Cilantro suits everyone in moderation.

Lime is good for all.

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CHAPTER FIVE

Fundamental Principles of Ayurveda

The fundamental principles of Ayurveda are quite different from those of modern science. Ayurveda and Yoga share their roots in Samkhya philosophy, and both share a theory of the origin of the universe.

The theory of origin

According to this theory, the universe is formed from the unmanifest, called Avyakta. It has two main components: Purusha, the absolute consciousness or soul, and Prakriti, the creative, primordial, root nature.

This root nature is a quiescent state, in which three active principles are held in balance: Sattva, Raja and Tama, also called the Gunas.

The three Gunas

Sattva

Peace, purity, joy, happiness, kindness, forgiveness, harmony, calmness, contentment.

Raja

Creation, vitality, vigor, action, motion, desire, attachment, longing.

Tama

Ignorance, greed, darkness, grief, lethargy, laziness, fear, impurity.

Dhatu, the building blocks of our body

Dhatu are the body's tissues, formed and nourished by the body in sequence.

1

Rasa · Plasma

The first tissue formed from digested food.

2

Rakta · Blood

Sustains the life force and vitality.

3

Mamsa · Muscle

Provides strength and covers deeper structures.

4

Meda · Fat

Lubricates and gives suppleness to the skin.

5

Asthi · Bone

The structural framework of the body.

6

Majja · Nervous tissue

Fills the bones, supports the nervous system.

7

Shukra · Reproductive tissue

The final, most refined tissue.

Mala, the body's waste

Malas are the waste products of the body, including urine, stool and sweat. Their effective elimination is essential for maintaining good health.

The principle of similarity and dissimilarity

One of the basic principles of Ayurveda is the rule of similarity and dissimilarity, or contrast. The use of similar substances is always the cause of increase, while dissimilarity is the cause of decrease, or balance, in mind and body. Running, for example, will increase Vata energy in the body, while sleeping will increase Kapha energy.

This simple principle, that similar qualities increase what's already there, and opposite qualities restore balance, is really a master key to everything else in this book. Once you understand it, Ayurveda's recommendations about food, daily routine, and the seasons stop feeling like arbitrary rules.

WHERE BALANCE BEGINS

A Closing Thought

We began this book with a simple question: what is Ayurveda, and how can it help you? By now, I hope the answer feels less abstract. Ayurveda isn't a rigid set of rules handed down from outside. It's closer to a mirror that helps you see your own nature clearly, paired with simple tools, food, routine, rest, and the mindful use of your senses, that let you respond to what you see.

You've met the five elements that make up everything in this universe, including you. You've met Vata, Pitta, and Kapha, the three energies that govern every process in your body and mind.

None of this is meant to be memorized like a rulebook. It's meant to be lived, one small choice at a time.

Everybody's constitution, and everybody's imbalance, is different. What you've read here is the foundation. The specific path back to your own balance is personal to you.

I invite you to take the next step. Take our free Dosha Quiz to get a first sense of your constitution, or book a consultation with me to explore your Prakriti and build a plan personalized to your life.

Thank you for spending this time with me, and with this ancient, living science. May you leave these pages a little more curious about your own body, and a little closer to the balance that's your birthright.

Vandana

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