

AYURVEDA (SCIENCE OF LIFE)

Introduction

Ayurveda is a Sanskrit term that means “Science of Life.” Ayurveda originated in the ancient Vedic times of India and is the oldest and most complete system of natural medicine in the world. It has ancient roots, yet is modern in its systematic and scientific approach.

Ayurveda is recognized by the World Health Organization as an effective health science. It provides an integrated approach to both the prevention and treatment of disease through comprehensive lifestyle interventions and natural therapies. Ayurveda treats disease at its source rather than merely pacifying symptoms. It is health care that restores the essential role of consciousness in creating and sustaining health, which is wholeness of body, mind and spirit.

Ayurveda is ideal for those seeking to maintain good health, prevent disorders and diseases, and manage chronic physical and mental problems. The Ohio State Center for Integrative Health offers Ayurveda along with many other integrative services in one convenient location in Columbus, Ohio. Those seeking Ayurvedic therapies will see Hari Sharma, MD, DABIHM, one of the nation’s foremost Ayurvedic physicians.

Diagnosis

Ayurveda uses a number of diagnostic techniques, all of which are noninvasive. Chief among these is pulse diagnosis, a detailed and systematic technique that allows the Ayurvedic practitioner to retrieve information signals present in the pulse, detecting specific imbalances that can be treated before they result in more serious symptoms of disease.

Ayurvedic Modalities

Upon evaluation by the Ayurvedic practitioner, each patient receives a comprehensive, individualized treatment plan. Ayurveda uses multiple strategies to restore and maintain optimal health. These approaches strengthen the body’s immune system and self-repair mechanisms. Ayurvedic therapies include:

- Individualized dietary recommendations
- Advice on health-promoting daily routine
- Life-enhancing behavioral recommendations
- Rasayana (rejuvenation) therapy
- Herbal preparations to rejuvenate the system and reduce ongoing damage to the physiology
- Procedures for the elimination of Ama (buildup of toxins in the body)
- Yoga exercises (Asanas)
- Energizing breathing exercises (Pranayama)
- Meditation

Diet and Digestion

Ayurveda has long considered problems of diet and digestion to be among the central causes of all disorders and disease. Food is viewed as providing not only matter and energy to the body, but also intelligence, order and balance. Recommendations for diet are individualized, taking into account the characteristics of the patient and the underlying imbalances.

Biological Rhythms

In Ayurveda, attuning the patient's lifestyle to natural biorhythms is considered a crucial element of prevention and treatment. This includes recommendations for a health-promoting daily routine, for example – the proper time to eat, exercise, sleep, etc.

Behavior, Emotions, and the Senses

Behavior, speech and emotions are understood to have a profound effect on one's well-being. Emotions can be understood as fine fluctuations of consciousness. Ayurvedic theory holds that sensory input also affects one's health. Just as the body metabolizes food, similarly what one sees, hears, tastes, smells and touches is metabolized in various ways and has a tangible effect on one's state of balance. Individualized behavioral recommendations are given to restore and maintain health.

Rasayana (Rejuvenation Therapy)

Rasayana therapy promotes longevity and the prevention or delay of aging. There are behavioral Rasayanas that recommend certain behaviors that increase health and well-being. However, Rasayanas are usually herbs or herbal mixtures. Rasayanas increase resistance to disease, activate tissue repair mechanisms, promote vitality and stamina, and stimulate overall health.

Herbal Preparations

Ayurveda's approach to pharmacology makes sophisticated use of thousands of herbs and other plants. The combination of plant chemicals in the herbs enhances their effectiveness and prevents toxic side effects.

Elimination of Toxins in the Body

The buildup of toxins and metabolic waste in the body is known as Ama. These impurities clog the channels in the body, leading to the development of disorders and disease. Ayurveda has strategies to eliminate Ama.

Yoga Exercises (Asanas)

Asanas are stretching exercises that massage the internal organs and promote flexibility in the body. There are Asanas that benefit health in general and Asanas that are specific to certain disease processes.

Pranayama (Energizing Breathing Exercises)

Prana is the vital life force, and Pranayama is the process by which this life force is balanced and increased. Pranayama includes various forms of breathing exercises suited to different individuals. Pranayama creates vitality and enhanced energy. It balances both sides of the brain and balances emotional responses. The enhanced vital force that results from Pranayama is beneficial for health and all aspects of life.

Spontaneous Meditation

In Ayurveda, the ultimate basis of prevention and cure is restoring one's conscious connection to (or memory of) the innermost core of one's being and experience. The foremost modality for development of consciousness is Meditation, which connects one to the wholeness of life and thereby improves all aspects of health.

Management of Chronic Disorders

Ayurveda is useful for helping manage many chronic disorders, including:

Cancer (support therapy), coronary artery disease, diabetes mellitus, digestive problems (bloating, constipation, gastroesophageal reflux disease, hyperacidity, indigestion, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcerative colitis), hyperlipidemia, hypertension, impaired immunity, menopausal syndrome, menstrual disorders, mental problems (anxiety, attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression, stress), neurological problems (support for Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease), prostate disorders, respiratory and sinus problems (asthma, bronchitis, sinusitis), and skin problems (acne, eczema, psoriasis).

Research

There is a large body of published research on the modalities of Ayurveda. A few selected references are:

- Sharma H, Chandola HM, Singh G, Basisht G. Utilization of Ayurveda in Health Care: An Approach for Prevention, Health Promotion, and Treatment of Disease. Part 1 – Ayurveda, the Science of Life. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* 2007;13(9):1011-1019.
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Hari Sharma, MD, DABIHM

The Ayurveda provider for the Ohio State Center for Integrative Health is Hari Sharma, MD, DABIHM. Dr. Sharma is nationally and internationally known for his accomplishments in Ayurveda. He has been practicing Ayurveda since 1995, and at Ohio State Integrative Health since the start of the clinic in 2005. Dr. Sharma also teaches Spontaneous Meditation and Pranayama (breathing exercises). He has conducted extensive research on the various modalities of Ayurveda, published more than 150 research papers, and written six books. He has lectured and presented his research worldwide at various medical institutions and conferences, including the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and the World Health Organization. Dr. Sharma is a Fellow of the National Academy of Ayurveda, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, and a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. He is a diplomate of the American Board of Integrative Holistic Medicine and a diplomate of the American Board of Pathology. Dr. Sharma is Professor Emeritus and former Director of the Division of Cancer Prevention and Natural Products Research in the Department of Pathology, College of Medicine, at The Ohio State University.