



As you may remember, the goal of *Wholly Holistics* is to offer insights into life from alternative points of view. In keeping with that focus, today we'll travel back in time – way back, 3,000 years – to ancient, exotic India to explore one of the world's oldest holistic (whole body) healing systems, Ayurveda.

If you follow physicians and New Age movement leaders Deepak Chopra, alternative medicine advocate, or Andrew Weil, integrative medicine proponent, you may be familiar with at least the term Ayurveda. As its scope encompasses an entire lifestyle, we'll discover first what it is, then how it works and how to apply it to your own life, should you choose to do so.

One of the world's most sophisticated and powerful healing options, Ayurveda is way more than a system of treating illness, but is actually a science of life: *Ayur* = "science" + *veda* = "life." It's a huge chunk of wisdom developed by sages to help people stay vibrant and well while realizing their full potential. Two basic principles provide its foundation: 1) the mind and body are innately connected; and 2) nothing has as much power to heal the body as the mind does. You may remember hearing about those two precepts in Bill Moyers' popular 1990's television classic,

Healing and the Mind

. According to Ayurveda, wellness depends upon expanding your awareness, bringing it into balance, and extending that balance to the body, a relatively easy process.

Take meditation, for example, well-known as an Ayurvedic tool. When you meditate, your body relaxes and slows your breathing, your heartbeat and the production of stress hormones, such as adrenalin, while it increases the production of neurotransmitters that promote well-being, including serotonin, dopamine, oxytocin, and endorphins. The resulting state of expanded awareness and inner quiet refreshes the mind and brings the body back in balance.

The goal of Ayurveda is to promote good health, not to fight disease. According to its principles, as long as your mind, body and spirit are in harmony with the universe, your health will be excellent. When such factors as genetic defects, age, seasonal and climate change, injuries and your emotions disrupt this balance, you get sick.

Ayurvedic practitioners believe that the body is composed of five basic elements found in the universe: space, air, fire, water and earth. These combine to create three life forces, or energies, called doshas, that control how the body works. They are: Vata dosha (space and air), Pitta dosha (fire and water), and Kapha dosha (water and earth). We're all born with a varying amount of each of these master elements. If space and air are predominant in your constitution, then your main dosha is considered to be Vata.

Believed to be the most powerful, Vata dosha controls basic body functioning, such as the dividing of cells, in addition to the mind, breathing, blood flow, heart function and the ability to get rid of waste through the intestines. It also controls all body movement, even that of vocal cords and of thoughts. According to M.D. Sheila Patel, medical director of the Chopra Center, Vata physical characteristics can include a thin, light frame, good agility, bursts of energy and bouts of fatigue, dry skin and hair, cold hands and feet, light sleeping and sensitive digestion. Vata energy can be disrupted by eating again too soon after a meal, fear, grief and staying up too late. If Vata is your main dosha, you're more likely to develop conditions such as weight loss, hypertension, constipation, asthma, heart disease, skin issues, digestive challenges and arthritis.

Pitta dosha controls digestion, metabolism, energy production and certain appetite-linked hormones. Physically, Pittas are of medium size and weight, have a tendency toward baldness or thinning hair, superb digestion, warm body temp, sound sleep for short periods and strong sex drive. Eating sour or spicy foods can disrupt this dosha, as can too much sun-time. As a Pitta you may be more likely to develop skin rashes, peptic ulcers, indigestion, Crohn's disease, heartburn, high blood pressure and infections. Out-of-balance Pittas may be short-tempered and argumentative.

The third dosha, Kapha, controls muscle growth, body strength and structure, weight and the immune system. Characteristics can include, large soft eyes, radiant skin, and thick hair. Kaphas sleep soundly with regular digestion, though can be change-resistant and stubborn. An excess of Kapha energy can lead to weight gain, fluid retention and allergies. You can throw Kapha energy off kilter by day-sleeping, overeating sweet foods and eating or drinking too much salt or water. If Kapha is your primary dosha, you may develop asthma or other breathing disorders, depression, cancer, diabetes, post-eating nausea, and obesity.

Following are a few of the most essential aspects of the Ayurvedic system and ways you might incorporate them into your own life:

1. Understand your individual mind-body type and how to support its basic needs. Determine your body dosha and consult an Ayurvedic practitioner to create a personalized approach to health.
2. Eat colorful, tasty food. Make your diet healthful by balancing the six Ayurvedic tastes – sweet, salty, sour, pungent, bitter and astringent. Eat food of a variety of colors.
3. Get lots of restful sleep, generally, between six and eight hours. Lack of good sleep disrupts the body's balance, weakens the immune system and speeds up the ageing process.
4. Live in tune with nature. Embrace healthy desires about what you actually need, only that which nurtures your health and life.
5. Get regular exercise that supports your body's specific needs. Ask it, "How do you feel about this?" and wait to feel a reply. Learn to recognize its signals of comfort and discomfort.
6. Strengthen your digestion. When our digestive energy, *agni*, is healthy, we're in an ideal balance called *ojas*. But when *agni* is weakened, a toxic substance accumulates called *ama*, the source of all disease.

Thus ends Ayurveda 101. If you're intrigued by the concept and want to know more, there's plenty of info online. The Chopra Center's website – www.chopra.com – is an especially informative source.

Here's to your good health!

Katherine Tandy Brown has traveled the world as a freelance writer for 25 years. She teaches memoir, travel writing and writing practice in USCB's OLLI Continuing Ed program and in her downtown cottage. A certified writing coach, she is penning her first novel, *One to Go: An Equine Thriller*.
ktandybrown@gmail.com
or (859) 312-6706