

# Ayurvedic Healing

By: Monica Bhatia, PhD

If you grew up in India in the seventies or eighties you may remember the '*Dabur tooth powder*' advertisement and how it made teeth stronger than any conventional fluoride toothpaste.

Or, the famous ad forever playing turmeric based face cream that was solely responsible for the marriage of girls who were not 'fair'. Turmeric based *ayurvedic* cream made the potential bride fair and beautiful.

This is the sum total of '*Ayurveda*', that my desi friends in San Diego, who grew up in India remember.

It seems as if the Indian Diaspora in the United States associates *Ayurveda* with '*Dabur*', *Baidyanath* or Himalaya advertisements playing on *Doordarshan*, while they were growing up. They know *Ashokarishtam*, *Triphala* and '*choornams*' that help digestion. (Thank god for small mercies!)

The truth is *Ayurveda* is now far more popular in European countries, than it has ever been in India.

As an *Ayurvedic* and *Panchakarma* practitioner in the U.S., I find it painful that the Indian community is probably the most misinformed about *Ayurveda*. For example, I get phone calls asking me if I do facials or am asked, if I will come to their house to do a massage. The funniest phone call I got was from a gentleman who said he lived too far away from my Ayurveda Wellness Clinic and asking me if I can meet him at a Starbucks in a central location, for his consultation. How am I supposed to do a pulse diagnosis, tongue diagnosis and check his *marma* points at Starbucks? My husband thinks he may have been inviting me for a date over coffee rather than an *Ayurvedic* Consultation.

Other *Ayurvedic* doctors that I consult with also share the 'same' frustrations.

That's when I decided that we need to clear the air about *Ayurveda*.

After years of training in *Ayurvedic* Pharmacopoeia, Herbology, working for doctors in *Panchakarma* centers, and getting my license as a therapeutic massage therapist in California- it is hilarious, that people want me to do a facial or threading.

So, this article is meant to clear a few misconceptions:

1 *Ayurvedic* nutrition does not mean cuisines from the Indian subcontinent. I have included a recipe by Chef Tim, who serves *Ayurvedic* 'American' cuisine in his restaurant and is helping me write a book.

2 *Ayurveda* is not a beauty treatment, although beauty is a byproduct.

*Ayurveda* treatments are naturally anti ageing, balancing and help you look younger. However, the focus is NOT on beauty, it is on therapy, diet, nutrition, herb protocols, detoxification and rejuvenation, and bringing a balance to your psychosomatic '*prakruti*', or, constitution.

I want to include an excerpt from my book, six favors of healing.

*Ayurveda* is an ancient science of healing. Thousands of years old! Personally, based on historical facts, I do not believe it originates 'only' from India. For, when *Ayurveda* was practiced in India 5000 years ago – India was an empire reaching out to Malaysia, Burma, Indonesia, Srilanka and Thailand. And, India had deep ties with China and Egypt.

The healing practices of *Ayurveda* were influenced by Asian and Middle Eastern practices in the last 2000 years. The *Ayurvedic* Healing Practices based on food as medicine is the '*Ayurveda*' that has been influenced by all traditional medicinal cultures.

For those of you who are not familiar with *Ayurveda*, it comes from two Sanskrit words - 'Ayush' and 'Veda', translated as Knowledge of Life.

*Ayurveda* believes in health that is achieved through remaining in sync with nature. This is achieved through herbs, a plant based organic fresh diet suited to our own unique body type, through a daily regimen as well as bodywork, and yoga therapy suited to our temperament. As an *Ayurvedic* practitioner, the first question I ask anyone who comes to me is not about their imbalance or health. I ask them what makes them who they are!

According to *Ayurveda*, each one of us has a unique psychosomatic constitution that makes us who we are, is responsible for our tastes, physical appearance, our mental constitution and defines our relationship with food. This unique psychosomatic constitution is called '*Dosha*'. Three basic *doshas* are *Kapha*, *Pitta* and *Vata*.

So, when people come to me, I do not end up talking about their health imbalances, but finding out their *dosha*. Once I know the *dosha*, and why their *dosha* is imbalanced, we talk about health issues. I end up educating most of my clients about healing benefits of a plant based diet, unprocessed food, kitchen spices that are natural healers, and herbs for their psychosomatic constitution. We also recommend yoga therapy, meditation techniques, herb protocols, dietary and nutrition protocols based on your *dosha* as well as massage and bodywork. We focus on *Panchakarma*, detoxification and rejuvenation to bring balance to people recovering from illness.

Sheila (name changed), came to me with acute digestion issues, chronic constipation and dependence on laxatives. She also had some hormonal issues. She was a *Vata Kapha* body type, had no allergies and had been tested for allergies for gluten, milk and so on. Now, you have to understand that most of us are happy with a plant based vegetarian diet, however, not with avoiding 'milk', wheat or 'urad dal'.

When I suggested a plant based diet that stayed away from milk and wheat gluten, I felt like I was personally sending her to the guillotine. The expression on her face was of pure horror.

Rest of her diet should be vegetarian, practically milk free, soy free, gluten free for a few weeks. (I couldn't recommend soy, since some studies indicate that soy increases estrogen levels.)

She was allowed organic unhomogenized milk only in her coffee twice a day. Rest of her diet would be a variety of grains – Amaranth, Millet, Quinoa, Barley, Brown Rice, Wild Rice, Garbanzo bean flour, Beans and fresh vegetables. We also stopped her 'sweet' fruit intake. (As according to *Ayurveda*, she was pre-diabetic). We also gave her the Ayurvedic Herb – *Triphala*.

At first, there was no improvement, because Sheila was overcooking, over-frying, over-spicing EVERYTHING! She killed the '*Prana*' (chi or life force) in the green leafy vegetables by cooking them for a long time.

I ended up teaching her how to cook greens by steaming them, or eating certain foods 'al dente'. I also ended up showing her recipes, taking her grocery shopping, and educating her on HOW to cook, and WHEN to eat! “

So, the story of Sheila, shows us how hard it is for me to tell my desi sister or brother, not to overcook, not to fry, and, to eat certain foods simply raw, steamed or al dente.

Some *Ayurvedic* Healing Tricks:

- ❖ Use cardamom at the end. Never boil it. Boiling it kills cardamom. Eating cardamom with fennel seeds after a meal aids digestion and assimilation of nutrients in the body.
- ❖ Turmeric – Take ½ tsp of turmeric in the morning with warm water, dried ginger and black pepper to increase 'agni' or gastric fire. It also helps clear infections.
- ❖ Have *lassi* (buttermilk) after you have stopped a course of Antibiotics. *Lassi* is naturally a probiotic drink. Use it with a small amount of salt, roasted cumin and black pepper. Drink it 20 minutes after a meal. (Only during lunch. Not suggested for dinner.)
- ❖ Drink ginger, honey decoction with *dashamula* for sore throats and cold.
- ❖ Avoid dairy when you have congestion.
- ❖ Eat *Shatavari* and *Ajwain* when nursing your baby. It increases milk and balances a woman's cycle.



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