

The Ayurvedic Approach

The world's oldest medicine may offer hope for a post-antibiotic era.

DO YOU EVER WONDER why your partner is invigorated by a morning run while you finish your workout feeling one step away from a bad flu? Or why you never catch a cold, but your co-worker has one that stretches all winter?

According to an emerging group of health practitioners, these physiological differences are due to immutable individual differences. Using ayurveda, an ancient prevention-oriented system of healing that originated in India, these practitioners tailor treatments not to the specific ailment, but to the specific person.

Ayurveda, roughly translated as "knowledge of life," combats sickness secondarily. Instead, almost every element of treatment is designed to strengthen the individual and remove those things that adversely affect his or her health. Lifestyle adjustments, meditation, massage therapy and aromatherapy are among its preventative prescriptions. Herbal-based medicines are used in both prevention and cure.

The burgeoning popularity of ayurveda in this country—witness the success of Deepak Chopra's book *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind* (Crown Arts and Letters, 1993), rooted in ayurveda—comes to some as no surprise. (See "A Tide That Cannot Be Stopped," July *Vegetarian Times*.) As we witness a decline in the effectiveness of antibiotics, increasing deaths from cancer and AIDS, and soaring health care costs, many people—rightly or wrongly—are losing faith in conventional medicine. As they become skeptical about wonder drugs, they are interested in learning how to become wonder people.

D. Edwards Smith, M.D., an internist and rheumatologist in Rocky River, Ohio, became disillusioned with Western medicine in the early 1980s. Smith, who looks more like Mr. Rogers than a man on the medical outskirts, left his practice in 1985 and now practices only ayurveda. (Although there is no licensing board or certification for ayurveda, there are several training programs, ranging in length from one to three years.) Today a "doctor's appointment" with Smith is typically ayurvedic, resembling a teacher's conference more than a medical visit. There are no

stethoscopes or examining tables—just a pen, paper and some handouts. The only "test" performed is a questionnaire filled out by the patient, which includes queries of every ilk, from the usual family medical history to how often you feel angry.

Like conventional doctors, ayurvedic practitioners take their patient's pulse but for a different reason: they are determining constitutional type. According to ayurvedic doctrine, there are primarily three *doshas*, or constitutional types: *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*. These terms are used repeatedly because they relate not only to body type but to categories of illness, activities, moods and more—all of which, according to ayurvedic doctrine, intertwine to affect a person's health.

Distinct characteristics are assigned to each of the three *doshas*. For example, a *pitta* type would have an average body, a strong intellect, determination and a hearty appetite requiring regular meals. *Pitta* often has freckles, reddish or early graying hair and glasses. *Pitta*'s strongest emotion is anger. Think of Robert Redford when you think of this *dosha*.

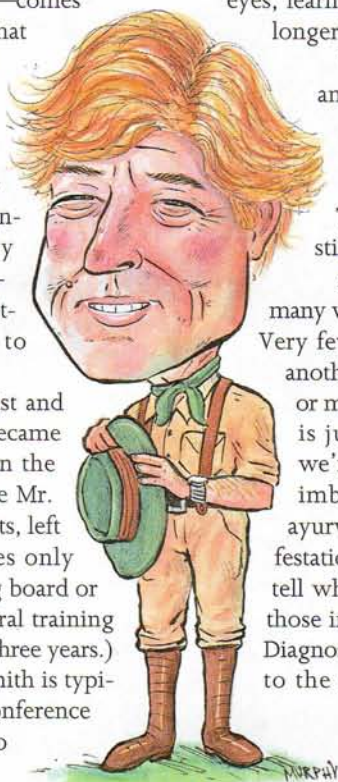
Oprah Winfrey is basically *kapha*, with a body and nature that tends toward ample. *Kapha*—ruled by inertia, oiliness and the water element—tends to gain weight easily but can go longer than *pitta* without eating. *Kapha*, with thick, lustrous hair and large eyes, learns more slowly, but retains things longer.

Vata is often very tall or very short and can eat freely without gaining weight. A *vata* person sleeps and eats irregularly, has rough skin and tends toward anxiety and fear. The creative *dosha*, *vata* can't sit still. We're talking Madonna here.

Assigning a person a *dosha* is, in many ways, little more than a party game. Very few people are purely one type or another; most are combinations of two or more types. "The constitutional type is just an approximation, anyway; we're reading it through a screen of imbalances," says Smith, using the ayurvedic term for the physical manifestations of life's disruptions. One can't tell what a person's true nature is until those imbalances are corrected, he adds. Diagnosed through the pulse and answers to the questionnaire, the imbalances



Madonna (Vata)



Redford (Pitta)

BY SALLY HAYHOW

(which also fall into vata, pitta and kapha categories) direct the treatment.

That the imbalances themselves are categorized is an important point; for a long time doshas were viewed as rigid categories, affecting all aspects of a person's behavior. Today, the thinking has shifted to treating people according to the doshas of their illness. Roseanne Barr may look kapha, for instance, but her erratic behavior—at least what's described in the media—is due to an "extreme vata imbalance," according to Chopra, who notes that a person's physical, emotional, mental and spiritual environment can override constitution.

When an ayurvedic physician has made a full assessment of your condition, he or she finishes with a "lifestyle prescription." Continuing the example of the vata imbalance, an ayurvedic physician may prescribe going

to bed before 10 p.m. and rising before 6 a.m. to counteract the irregularity common to vata constitutions. Herbal supplements will likely be suggested. You will surely be encouraged to meditate or take up other stress-reducing practices to calm vata. You may be told to cut back on exercise or choose a less rigorous routine. The recommended diet is vegetarian, but includes dairy products (especially good for calming vata) and excludes certain foods—raw vegetables, tomatoes and corn, for instance—that a person with a kapha or pitta imbalance may be able to eat with impunity. According to ayurvedic doctrine, heavy, oily and warm foods balance vata, while raw or very cold foods may upset the balance, thus hindering the healing process.

The ayurvedic practitioner is likely to recommend that you undergo panchakarma, "a complete luxury," in the words of Janet Chase, R.N., who administers panchakarma at The Raj, an ayurvedic health center in Fairfield,

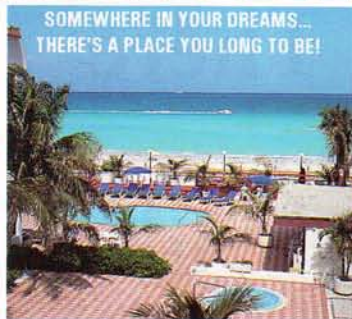


Oprah (Kapha)

DISEASE ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA

Like body types, diseases fall into three broad categories: vata, pitta and kapha. A small imbalance today can become a major illness 10 years down the line, so dry skin is taken just as seriously as gallstones. Here's a look at ayurvedic classifications of common disorders and some sample treatments.

	Vata	Kapha	Pitta
Common Imbalances	Anxiety, insomnia, dry skin, heart palpitations, tremors, constipation, sciatica, manic-depression, muscle weakness, paralysis.	Frequent colds, kidney stones, congestive heart failure, depression, benign tumors, edema, obesity, sinus headaches, cataracts.	Infection, ulcers, jaundice, heartburn, acne, herpes, canker sores, Crohn's disease, and any disease ending in "itis" (i.e., tonsilitis).
Areas Affected	Muscles, nervous system, heart, movements of body, fluids and impulses.	Mucous membranes, kidneys, wound healing, weight, immunity, bladder, general vigor, reproductive system.	Digestive system, eyes, skin, brain, (intelligence and comprehension), liver, gallbladder.
Sample Treatments	Warm herbal oil massage; regular sleeping patterns; light exercise; oral and nasal treatments; steam baths; meditation.	Vigorous, deep massage with warming oil; aerobic exercise; sleeping on a hard bed; no more than 4 glasses of water daily (taken with meals only); saunas.	Moderate exercise (but not aerobics or intense exertion); "cooling herbs" (such as bitters); avoidance of sun, saunas, hot tubs.
Foods to Avoid	Cold foods and drinks, tomatoes, potatoes, lettuce, apples, dried fruits, soybeans, dry breakfast cereals.	Dairy products, cold drinks, bananas, squash, olives, cantaloupe, oats, rice, wheat, watermelon, soybeans, oily foods.	Spices, peanuts, yogurt, citrus fruits, garlic, corn, hard cheese, strawberries, hot peppers, raw onions.
Especially Good Foods	Sweet fruits, rice, cooked vegetables, adzuki beans, dairy products.	Cooked broccoli, kale, cauliflower and other brassicas, corn, oats, apples, spicy foods.	Wheat, sweet fruits, dried beans, cottage cheese, milk, salads.



SOMEWHERE IN YOUR DREAMS...
THERE'S A PLACE YOU LONG TO BE!

OCEANFRONT GETAWAY

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT.
LOSE WEIGHT.

Health and Fitness Program,
Medical Supervision, Juicing Program,
Gourmet Vegetarian Cuisine, Aerobics,
Aqua-Fit, Cardiovascular and Personalized
Fitness Training, Nautilus Gym, Full Line Of
Spa Services Including: Massages, Facials,
Body Wraps and Anti Cellulite Treatments,
Daily Lectures: Health, Nutrition, Cooking
Classes, Psychology Seminars and More.



FOR INFORMATION
AND RESERVATIONS CALL
1-800-454-0003
OR (305) 454-2220
2000 South Ocean Drive
Hallandale, Florida 33009

CLEANSE DETOXIFY

THE
Purifying Program!

FREE
BOOKLET!



VISA
MC

Feel energetic!

- Lose weight, keep it off
- Rid the body of constipation

This 100% natural, easy to take herbal tablet washes away internal sediment.

1-800-952-7873

Iowa. Its combination of massage, herbal steams and gentle cleansing procedures doesn't come cheap, but helps balance the body's physiology and draw out any impurities the body has accumulated, according to ayurvedic doctrine.

WHERE EAST MEETS WEST

EVEN IF THE PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS is changing, as Chopra and Smith believe, can ayurveda edge out Western medicine, and become the dominant medical style, as it once was in India? (Would we want it to?) Though Chopra is working to end Western skepticism of ayurveda by testing its therapies at the Center for Mind Body Medicine, a program at Sharp Medical Center in San Diego, almost all ayurvedic practitioners believe "East and West is best"—that the two systems can coexist and benefit one another.

"I think antibiotics do have a place," says Stephen Weiss, M.D., a family-practice physician in Albuquerque, N.M., who splits his time between standard medical practice and non-traditional therapies, including ayurveda. "There will always be some pathogens that are extremely potent and virulent that will overwhelm even healthy individuals," says Weiss. "[But] the best way to approach healing is to strengthen the host. That's really what ayurveda is about," he says.

But isn't taking pills easier? Weiss acknowledges that getting most people to follow ayurvedic prescriptions to the letter can be a challenge.

If you can only make one or two changes, almost all practitioners recommend meditation or some other mind-body relaxation technique for all imbalances, even as little as 20 minutes a day. Other habits that rank high on the list of effectiveness are eating whole, unadulterated foods and maintaining a regular sleeping routine.

SALLY HAYHOW is a free-lance editor and former executive editor of VEGETARIAN TIMES.

RESOURCES

For information about health professionals trained in Maharishi ayurveda in your area call (800) 255-8332.

A Woman's Best Medicine: Health, Happiness and Long Life Through Ayur-Veda, by Nancy Lonsdorf, M.D., Veronica Butler, M.D. and Melanie Brown, Ph.D. (Tarcher/Putnam 1993).