

ANCIENT SCIENCE FOR MODERN WOMEN

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Ayurveda is a collected wisdom of ages and sages, and is extremely relevant to today's woman. Ayurveda is, first and foremost, a science of preventative living through the application of accrued wisdom. Traditionally, women are the first teachers of preventative living; often, however, modern women do not care for themselves first, even though they must—for a healthy self, family and community.

Physically, digestion is the principle focus of health; psychologically, one's life philosophy is the primary focus of health; spiritually, meditation and selfless service are the primary focus of health. Observing these together produces health and happiness for a woman and beyond.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH DIGESTION

“Agni,” (meaning metabolic fire in Sanskrit) implies transformation—the food transforms into you, the image transforms into a name, the experience transforms into wisdom. These parallel digestive processes involve heat (tapas), which implies austerity. Restraint is necessary to choose suitable foods to be eaten at a suitable time. Serve the main meal at noon and a lighter meal in the evening.

Food science in Ayurveda is based on the “Law of the Six Tastes” rather than on the relationship between proteins, carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins, which are isolated food components. Today's woman would do well to simplify food fads and to move toward classical concepts of nourishing herself and her family by considering the taste on the tongue of foods served daily.

“Shad rasa” (sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent) describes the global effects of substances at all four stages of digestion. While Western science does not yet discuss the post-digestive effect of foods, Ayurveda talked about sub-atomic assimilation (the emotional interface of mind and body) thousands of years ago.

The process of eating is meant to both cure and prevent disease. Most disease can be cured or managed by adjusting the food habits passed down from time immemorial through mothers and grandmothers, who taught their children good food choices and healthful

lifestyle habits to help prevent illness. Herbs to take and observances to remember were passed down from generation to generation in the kitchen.

An experienced Ayurvedic practitioner can offer advice on specific food choices for individual women and their family members. Herbal supplements may, from time to time, be needed for unresponsive symptoms to help maintain balance.

THOUGHTFUL NOURISHMENT

Ayurvedic medical science is based mostly in the Sankhya philosophy of creation, as expounded by the great sage Kapila, who taught that the soul is eternal and takes on various transiting “coverings” (koshas). These soul coverings include the acculturation body, which nourishes itself through mental repetition; the respiratory covering, which nourishes itself from oxygen in the air (prana); and the physical body, which nourishes itself from daily food intake.

One’s thoughts are generated by a precipitation of qualitative tendencies and repeated choices, which in turn generate the secretion of a fluid neuro-transmitter. This communication then enters the general circulation to nourish and form our bodily tissues.

Qualitative mental influences have a greater impact on well-being than food choices, and therefore are more important in the prevention and healing of disease. It’s best to maintain one’s focus on emotional balance. A mother is the first guide to restrain the child from - potentially harmful practices, and she teaches by example. So, once again, a woman must care for the self first to best care for others.

RESTING MEDITATION

Providing rest to the mind is critical to maintaining mental and emotional equilibrium. Joy comes from the contentment of everyday satisfactions such as appropriate food, meaningful work, loving relationships and opportunities to serve in the world.

A woman needs to take time to withdraw from worldly life in order to re-charge and discharge her “batteries,” which can be unduly affected by stress. Taking 20 to 60 minutes daily in the morning and evening for quiet introspection refreshes the consciousness and restores creative enthusiasm to the mind. Sit facing east for ease in receptivity to the inner light of gladness. Sit with the back straight and relax the body deeply, gradually. Focus the attention in the third eye (located approximately behind and between the eyebrows) and return the

focus there if the mind wanders. Follow the breath until the mind become quiet behind the root of the eyebrows. Let the mind rest between respiratory phases.

Morning meditation supports the day to unfold with grace and alignment, while evening meditation supports preparation for deep rest and repair of the body's cells. If you awaken early in the early morning, sit in meditation, which will to help provide deeper restoration to your body than will fitful sleep.

SEVA (SELFLESS SERVICE)

In Ayurveda, the spiritual priorities used to guide difficult decision-making are: God/Goddess first, family second and community third. "God" (cultivating love) is first by giving priority to meditation and the remembrance of our divine nature, according to one's personal style and beliefs. Secondly, decisions are made in favour of the family's needs. Ayurvedic teaching is to put oneself in the first position of family, that is, to put one's own self-care first. Next in priority is the spouse's needs, then the parents' or children's, depending on the ages and stages of need, and then other family members.

If energy or resources such as time or money remain, up to half can be given away to the community as selfless service. To give hidden donations with no consideration for return is meritorious and helps ensure enduring spiritual health and strength. If only one-tenth or one-fortieth can be spared, this is still very effective in cleansing spiritual imbalances such as fear or judgment while strengthening faith and tolerance. With loving kindness, such as volunteering or many daily kind acts for the family or community, happiness, freshness and creativity return to the mind, heart and body.

Once again, it is common for women to take the last place in the priority chain, but really they need to put themselves first. Only then can excellent care of self and others be created and sustained.

WOMEN AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Throughout history, women have upheld family and community health. Nowadays, the responsibilities of women have further increased and stress has grown as a result. However, practice of the basic principles of food science, herbology and loving kindness is enough to sustain individual health even in today's busy lifestyle. Still, the realization of the importance of self-care is absolute. Taking time to rest while menstruating, for example, is a single important gesture to make each month for self-care. The consequences of not observing rest

during the flow are costly for society. The consequences of hormonal replacement therapy for birth control and menopause management are also costly for women and their society, as are the consequences of imbalance, such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Ayurveda is a universal science of everyday living, brought to us through an ancient oral tradition of living principles of ancient wisdom. Living includes eating, sleeping, thinking, relating, working and, indeed, all of life. When a woman accepts that her life is of the utmost importance, the balance and health that results benefits not only her but those she loves as well.

Jaisri M. Lambert has studied and taught Ayurveda since 1990. See the HANS "Calendar of Events" at <http://www.hans.org> for her upcoming lectures, classes and appearances.

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