



# Living In Harmony Through Ayurveda

by  
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## The Cycles of Life

Healing is a natural part of life and is something we always have to think about, especially as our body ages. As we age we develop a growing appreciation for health because we learn when we are injured, get sick or attain an imbalance of any sort that it takes longer to recover and thus we become more sensitive. We become like a delicate antique that needs care, this is natural law taking place and is considered a core principle of ayurvedic wisdom. According to ayurvedic life cycles, adolescence is dominated by kapha (water) until about the age of 16 and then the body moves into the pitta (fire) period until about 50 and lastly, the vata stage is predominant after the age of fifty until death. Sensitivity is common with vata types and each of these three stages reflects the manner in which the body and mind will function according to the qualities of that element. Fire's qualities practically speaking promote, activity, drive, fertility, heat, goals, accomplishments and achievements. Water during youth is seen in the natural growth and development of the body, and psychologically we retain all of our experiences in the vault of the brain.

Ayurveda's wisdom guides us in a simple manner to approach each phase of lifestyle accordingly. In early age, activity and stimulation are key to spawn growth, promote circulation and allow the mind-body relationship to stay in balance. Once we enter into young adulthood the fire is burning strong and alternatively we should approach life with moderation, by adhering to the middle path and this also means keeping balance by diversifying our health and wellness practices so that our entire being (physical, mental & emotional) are kept in check. The majority of mental patterns and health habits that we acquire occur during early age and then they eventually manifest during middle age.

Diversity in health and wellness practices has become a common theme today in fitness with the concept of cross training as an amalgamation of various exercises. Years ago I began telling everyone that branded (style based) yoga would also eventually restore itself back to an energy focused approach that provides the practitioner with a transcendental experience and not merely limited to a body workout, which is much of what we see today, basically stretch and sweat.

The synthesizing we see occurring today in yoga Americana reminds us that there is ONE yoga system and there is no need to re-name or reinvent it. The case is so, that, few asana (postural) yoga teachers are staying aligned to one “style” and most have now diversified their studies and are now teaching in a manner that follows an integral approach.



In life we realize more and more the importance of maintaining our health, so to enjoy our lives to the fullest potential. When I speak of health I am referring to an integral balance between the body, mind and spirit. True health as taught in the science of Ayurveda is about living in harmony with ourselves, and the elements around us. Ayurveda literally means the wisdom of life, and is one of the most ancient systems of healing in the world, dating back thousands of years from India. Ayurveda is based on the very practical concept that the body and mind are intrinsically connected to one another, and without a good relationship or connection between the two, we are more susceptible to imbalance, stress and disease. Further, the mind-body relationship is also necessary to bring us into inner harmony with our spirit. Have you ever felt a sense of not knowing what you want to do with your life? A lack of feeling purposeful in your work or life in general, this can come from not fully committing to your truth or even having an idea of what it is? This *misalignment* comes from not being connected to spirit and in order to establish this deeper relationship, it must begin with a sound mind-body relationship.

#### Diet and the Seasons

Many of the issues I come across in my counseling practice are rooted in a lack of alignment. Americana has influenced so many countries and cultures in diet. Big portions and the choice of eating many different foods any time we want is creating digestive issues, obesity, heart disease and lethargy. Trying to teach a person who is coming into Ayurveda for the first time the principles behind diet can be a challenge for many reasons. One basic one is, there are rules (natural laws) that no one is excluded from following and these days there is such a lack of discipline in this area, as both taste and sight are very difficult senses to discipline when there are so many choices. One effective approach I use with my clients and students is a dual season diet that is focused on making dietary changes twice per year instead of adjusting four times with each seasonal change according to doshas. Splitting the diet into a dual lay out of summer and winter aligns with one of the original founding concepts of Ayurveda known as agni-soma. As summer produces hot temperatures, we become thirsty, requiring more fluid intake and naturally as a

result of excess fluid intake there is a loss in appetite. We balance our heat in the summer with sweet tastes, this includes, starches, most grains, fruits, some dairy and juices.



Summer is the ideal time to enjoy heavier starchy type foods like pasta, breads and potatoes. Bitter tastes are also important for balancing pitta and kapha as found in many greens like kale, chard, brussels sprout and arugula to name a few and to boot these are all loaded with B and C vitamins as well as many essential minerals. Generally speaking, the diet should be kept bland and moderate in terms of spices. Strong spices like cayenne, jalapeno and red chili peppers (flakes) etc... increase heat, dry out the body and also increase thirst, which is already high because of the sun. In relation to nature, the physical body is its miniature, our digestion and body follow what the sun does, so Ayurveda's wisdom teaches us how to counter act.

The winter diet is should be opposite to that of summer. So that makes it easier to remember and includes only some of the same foods you would eat in summer, namely bitter greens that are helpful in managing kapha and minimize the onset of excess body fat. The key to weight management in winter is following a diet that is well-spiced, smaller portioned, includes a reduction of starchy foods in the evening and minimizing salty and sweet foods as these increase water, which eventually turns to fat in the body.

### Vegetarianism & Non-Violence in Ayurveda

As a science of nature, Ayurveda adheres to a common sense approach to life, humanity and ethics. Much medical research today has shown that a diet of whole plant based foods is best for longevity and overall general health and there is little evidence that opposes this. The yogic law of ahimsa is based on non-violence, non-killing or harm to animals or any living being. Violence and aggression in our outer nature produces the same effect internally. When a person's body begins the lengthy process of digesting flesh in the stomach and intestinal tract, the vibrations of the meat are slowly released and additionally, the flesh carries many toxins, bacteria's and other agents that disrupt systemic and organ function. This is particularly important to consider on the more subtle energetic level, especially if we are trying to expand our consciousness. Meats bring bog us down and turn our attention into moods of heaviness that can lead to depression and fear. Fleishy foods are used in rare cases in ayurvedic healing to overcome chronic life threatening disorders to build the *ojas* or immune levels of the body. In such cases meats were medicines and not enjoyed merely as pleasure or social foods. We must differentiate between condition and biological requirement. What we eat is typically a condition of our mind and not something the body actually needs. When we choose to follow a plant based vegetarian diet the body changes and so will the mind. A vegetarian diet increases energy, we feel lighter, the body is absent of any foul odors and the subtle sensitivities of the mind are receptive, providing insight, intuition and

the capacity for greater compassion. Animals in ancient times have always been part of our global family (with the exception of some barbaric eras in human history); humans and animals have always coexisted until very recently. Gandhi made a profound point when he said, "To my mind, the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being. The more helpless the creature, the more it is entitled to protection by man from the cruelty of man." The biggest travesty, particularly of the modern era, is the act of killing as a solution to our problems and to satisfy greed. In global political affairs we resort to killing each other when diplomacy seems to have failed, the majority of animal species in the world is now extinct as a result of humanity's quest for survival and search for a meaningful life. The Global Seven<sup>1</sup> along with China and Russia and have pillaged our ecology in the name of increasing their GDP<sup>2</sup>. May the harmonious principles of Ayurveda awaken in us to illuminate our consciousness and live in harmony with nature.

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<sup>1</sup> The Group of 7 (G7) is a group consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United States and The European Union is also represented within the G7. These countries are the seven major advanced economies as reported by the International Monetary Fund.

<sup>2</sup> Gross domestic product