

Prevention and Wellness for Longevity

Using Ayurveda for self-care in occupational therapy

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Prevention and wellness are emerging practice areas for occupational therapists. As an occupational therapist, I've been incorporating Ayurveda into my scope of practice to support my clients' and patients' daily living skills.

By using Ayurveda as a treatment modality tool, I've been able to emphasize ways to prevent disease by educating them on Ayurvedic daily and seasonal routines for their particular body constitution. My patients and clients have been able to experience something unique for their individual self-care during treatment sessions addressing activities of daily living.

The time is now for occupational therapists to embrace this opportunity of using holistic approaches in their scope of practice. If individuals are more mindful of their health and well-being, health care costs would be reduced. What have you been incorporating into your scope of practice that emphasizes prevention?

Wellness and prevention are defined in the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process 2nd Edition. Prevention is defined as "Health promotions equally and essentially concerned with creating the conditions necessary for health at individual, structural, social, and environmental levels through understanding of the determinants of health; peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justices, and equity. Promoting a healthy lifestyle at the individual, group, organizational community (societal), governmental/policy level."

Wellness is defined as "An active process through which individuals become aware of and make choices toward a more successful existence." Wellness is more than a lack of disease symptoms. It is a state of mental and physical balance and fitness.

Health Care Reform

According to AOTA, "The Affordable Care Act of 2010 (ACA) places an increased emphasis on preventing disease and injury as key to enhancing and improving the health of Americans. Health care will shift away from the current reactive approach toward a system that makes wellness and prevention a priority. The ACA requires health plans (including Medicare and Medicaid) to cover certain preventive services and eliminates cost sharing to increase the accessibility and affordability for such services. The National Prevention, Health Promotion and Public Health Council was established under the ACA in an effort to guide the nation in its shift from a focus on sickness and disease to one of wellness and prevention."

My passion is to bring to health and wellness through a vast variety of holistic approaches -- one being Ayurveda -- in mainstream medicine while becoming a partner in a client's or patient's growth and healing. My goal is to facilitate a process that will empower others to create change within themselves. By properly educating those I serve on Ayurvedic strategies, their health can

be drastically improved for longevity. As a result, my mission statement aligns with what the ACA is trying to emphasize.

Ayurveda in Occupational Therapy

Ayurveda is the sister science of Yoga that's been dated back 5,000 years. It can be used in occupational therapy to address prevention of a disease, injury, or illness in a client's life. Prevention is a very important characteristic in Ayurveda, and enforces the great significance of being attuned in the rhythms of nature. As an occupational therapist I teach self-care using Ayurvedic approaches and techniques. Teaching those who are in my care about creating harmony in their lives through the observation of the changes of seasons, daily and nightly cycles, birth and aging patterns, and adjusting one's lifestyle to these cycles, has provided them with opportunities for a healthy life.

A client participating in an occupational therapy evaluation with me will complete a Body Constitution Questionnaire and a Holistic Medical History, in addition to any traditional OT assessment tools that may detect any imbalances impacting their functional living skills and occupational performance. Collaboration with other disciplines is an essential piece in treating the client holistically.

It's important to consult with the client's primary care physician when modifying lifestyle regimens, including diet secondary to any contraindications related to their medical condition. In addition, it's important to network with nutritionists to collaborate in a client's care when making lifestyle modifications around nutrition, as well as educating on Ayurvedic strategies for proper treatment planning.

According to Ayurveda, the definition of a healthy person is one who has a balanced body constitution -- vata, pitta, and kapha (please refer to "Two Sister Sciences," ADVANCE, Dec. 10, 2013) -- balanced digestion, proper elimination of waste products, optimal bodily functions, and a soul, mind, and five senses in bliss.

Ayurvedic Self-Care in OT

The three tridoshas are vata, pitta, and kapha, and must be considered when trying to establish a treatment plan to help to instill balance in a person's life. After a client or patient's body constitution is deciphered, Ayurvedic approaches are incorporated into the treatment plan when addressing daily living skills.

Activities of daily living are defined in Occupational Therapy Framework: Domain and Process, 2nd Edition as "activities that are oriented toward taking care of one's own body. ADL also is referred to as basic activities of daily living (BADLs) and personal activities of daily living (PADLs). These activities are basic in living in the social world; they enable basic survival and well-being."

To learn more about the definition of Prakriti and Vrakriti body constitutions (the tridoshas), the above-linked article "Two Sister Sciences" can be referenced.

The following grid (see first item at the end of this article) categorizes Ayurvedic treatment approaches for a person's specific body constitution during changes with nature (i.e., seasons,

life cycles, daily and nightly routines, and changes of one's life within the roles of occupation) in order to ensure a successful and healthy life. According to Ayurvedic principles, the science's uniqueness is to prevent, heal, and preserve life. Therefore Ayurveda is based on the laws of nature using holistic and natural medicine.

The grid was created by one of my Ayurvedic teachers, Dr. Manisha Kshirsagar, BAMS, DY&A, who wrote Ayurveda: A Quick Reference Handbook, outlining self-care in daily routines, exercise, self-massage, aroma therapy, mealtime, nightly routine, and seasonal routines for fall, winter, spring, and summer, and can be used in occupational therapy treatment protocols.

Daily and Seasonal Ayurvedic Practices

Daily Routine (Dinacharya)
I. Waking Up
Time: Sattva Time, 5-6 a.m. (this is the best time to awaken to greet the sun as it is the calmest part of the day, which reduces anxiety and worry) Sattva - the quality we are all, consciously or unconsciously, seeking. Sattva is associated with clarity, purity, peace, balance, harmony, health, happiness, and universal love.
II. Cleansing
- Teeth-cleansed morning, noon, and night
- Tongue-scrape every morning and any other time that the teeth are brushed. Use a stainless steel scraper made of gold, silver, or copper
Benefits: Cleanses coated tongue; removes bacteria, and stimulates gastric fire
- Gargling: Triphala decoction (triphala is a common herb that has many health benefits)
Benefits: strengthens teeth and gums, and improves oral hygiene
- Face (each specific body constitution has a protocol)
Vata - warm water Pitta - cool water Kapha - warm water
Benefits: Removes sweat and natural secretions; improves circulation, prevents skin infection, acne, and discoloration of skin
- Eyes - Wash with water at room temperature
Rotate eyes in clockwise and counter-clockwise direction; up and down; side to side
Benefits: Prevents eye problems, enhances vision, reduces discharges
- Whole body - bathe at least once a day, as it is refreshing and cleansing
Benefits: Cleanses the skin of sweat and impurities; brings alertness and energy to the body and reduces fatigue
III. Exercise
Physical exercise - Everyday exercise is beneficial to everyone. The exercise you choose will depend on your body constitution type (Prakriti); Yoga stretches are recommended for all constitutions.
Benefits: Reduces fat, fatigue and lethargy; builds and tones muscles, increases endurance, improves digestion
IV. Massage
- Whole body - gently massage head and body with warm oil (oils to be used according to body constitution)
Vata - sesame oil Pitta - coconut oil Kapha - sesame oil
Benefits: Prevents aging, improves circulation, reduces Vata dosha, calms the mind, softens the skin, prevents wrinkles
V. Perfumes (essential oils/aromatherapy)
Vata - aromas should be calming and pacifying (basil, orange, geranium, clove, and rose)
Pitta - aromas should be cooling and sweet (sandalwood, mint, rose, and jasmine)
Kapha - aromas should be stimulating and spicy (juniper, ginger, eucalyptus, clove, and saffron)
VI. Mealtime
Breakfast
Vata - moderate Pitta - heavy Kapha - light or skip
Lunch (times to eat for proper digestion)
Vata - 1 a.m.-noon Pitta - noon Kapha - noon-1 p.m.
Supper (times to eat for proper digestion)
Vata - 6-7 p.m. Pitta - 6-7 p.m. Kapha - 6-7 p.m.
After meals - Take a 15-20 minute nap lying on your left side, or take a leisurely walk (1000 steps)
Nightly Routines (Ratricharya)
I. Bedtime
- Sleep - strategies that promote sleep
Oil massage (Abhyanga) on the soles of feet and scalp
A cup of warm milk (almond, coconut, hemp, etc.). Example: Golden milk (1/4 tsp of turmeric, 3-4 oz. of warm almond milk, cinnamon, and nutmeg)
Meditation
- Sex (sex can be depleting depending on the season, which weakens havoc on the nervous system)
Spring and fall sex should be reduced to twice a week
Summer sex should be reduced to once a week
Winter sex should be performed daily or alternate day
Seasonal Routines (Ritucharya)
Fall and Winter (Vata Season)
I. Diet
Foods and drinks with warm, moist, and heavy qualities to counter the dry, cold, and light qualities of the Vata season
- Foods: (just some examples) oatmeal, cream of wheat, and tapioca; stews, soups, and gravies, steamed vegetables, and basmati rice dishes; nuts such as pecans and almonds
- Foods to avoid: salads and raw vegetables; pungent, astringent, and bitter tastes
- Foods to favor: sweet, salty, and sour tastes

II. Drinks
Herbal teas made with cumin-coriander-fennel, or ginger-cinnamon
Morning drink of warm water, wedge of lemon, ginger (fresh or ground), and 1 tsp of raw honey (helps facilitate digestion for first meal of day and helps to produce a bowel movement)
A cup of warm milk at bedtime (almond, coconut, cow's milk, hemp, and rice)
Avoid cold drinks
III. Massage
Apply warm sesame oil throughout the body and take a warm shower
IV. Exercise
- Yoga - Poses: Lotus, forward and backward bends, vajrasana, spinal twist, camel, cobra and cat asanas. Sun salutations in moderation
- Breath work (Pranayama, i.e. alternating nostril breathing)
V. Sleep
Take a short afternoon nap
VI. Dress
Wear warm clothing such as red, yellow, and orange
Spring (Kapha Season)
I. Diet
- Food and drinks with hot, dry, light qualities to counter the cool, moist, and heavy qualities of Kapha
Types of food - baked, broiled, or grilled warm foods; legumes, vegetables, and hot spice, oily foods, and cold drinks
Add - pungent, bitter, and astringent foods
Avoid - sweet, salty, and sour foods, dairy products and heavy foods
II. Drinks
Drinks made with ginger, calamus and clove
Emphasize herbal teas (cumin, coriander, and fennel)
Warm water (can add lemon)
III. Massage
Use dry herbal powders such as haritaki, ginger, or heating oil
Use sesame oil as it is tridoshic
IV. Exercise
Yoga - Poses such as sun salutations, fish, boat, bow, loin, and camel poses, head stand or shoulder stand
V. Sleep
Avoid sleeping during the day
VI. Dress
Bright warm colors like gold and orange
Summer (Pitta Season)
I. Diet
Foods that are cool, heavy, bland foods and drinks to counter the hot, bright, and sharp qualities of Pitta
Salads, basmati rice, steamed vegetables, cucumber raita, Light meat, turkey or chicken. Melons, plums, pears, and apples.
Avoid - hot, spicy, sour, and pungent tastes and hot drinks
Add - fruit and more vegetables
II. Drinks
Lassi, lime juice, and coconut water
III. Massage
In the morning with coconut or sunflower oil
IV. Exercise
Swimming, walking on green grass
Yoga poses such as cow, cobra, fish, boat, tree, and moon salutations
V. Sleep
Take a short nap after lunch
VI. Dress
Cotton or silk clothing
Colors such as white, grey, purple, and green

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To learn more and connect with OTs interested in mind, body, spirit medicine, prevention, and wellness, visit the www.HolisticOT.org website, the Holistic Occupational Therapy page, group on Facebook, LinkedIn, and HolisticOT on Twitter, and join the Holistic OT e-mail list.

Resources

1. Advance for Occupational Therapy Practitioners. "Two Sister Sciences." Posted Dec. 10, 2013.
2. Kshirsagar M & Magno A (2013). Ayurveda; A Quick Reference Handbook. Twin Lakes, WI
3. Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process, 2nd Edition
4. American Occupational Therapy Association. Wellness and Prevention: Occupational Therapy's Opportunity in the Era of Health Care Reform.