

Two Sister Sciences: Ayurveda and Yoga Work Their Way into Mainstream Medicine

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Ayurveda and yoga are working their way into mainstream medicine by incorporating these two sister sciences into mainstream culture. Ayurveda focuses on herbs, lifestyle modifications, diet/nutrition, and body work. Occupational therapy and other like practices view a person based on his or her complete mental, physical, and spiritual well-being. Combining Ayurveda, yoga, and OT can empower everyone to take responsibility for their own health and well-being.

OT is also a unique profession as it is humanistic, holistic, and client-centered. Patients and clients are seen as individuals with their unique skills, values, needs, and problems. As an occupational therapist, a certified Ayurveda wellness counselor and yoga teacher, I've merged these practices to use specific therapies that get to the client's healing at a deeper level.

Two Sister Sciences

Yoga and Ayurveda are two sister sciences that have developed together and have repeatedly influenced each other throughout history. Ayurveda is widely regarded as the oldest form of healthcare in the world, dating back approximately 5,000 years ago. Like yoga, Ayurveda is becoming well known in the West today as a system of holistic medicine. This science is emerging into the American culture.

Ayurveda views a person based on his or her complete mental and physical well-being. Data collected by Sports Marketing Surveys USA on behalf of Yoga Journal in a 2012 study indicates that 8.7 percent of U.S. adults, or 20.4 million people, practice yoga. According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), in 2007 the National Health Interview Survey included a comprehensive survey on the use of complementary health practices by Americans and found more than 200,000 U.S. adults had used Ayurveda in the previous year.

The Maharishi Ayurveda health program is the fastest growing system of alternative medicines in the United States, with over 3 million practitioners. Many bestselling books popularize the commonsense principles of Ayurveda. More than 600 scientific studies in 27 countries at 220 institutions have verified its effectiveness in many areas of health and beauty.

Yoga is blossoming in the twenty-first century. Americans are beginning to understand this practice isn't just solely designed for physical fitness, and they are becoming more open to what is defined as the inner practices yoga has to offer. Some of the inner practices include meditation, breath work, practicing truthfulness, etc. When practiced, Yoga can offer you tools, strategies, and techniques to enhance body awareness and calm the mind. Through these experiences a fundamental shift can occur, healing the body, mind, and spirit and freeing it from disease.

When yoga is merged with Ayurveda the science is complete. Ayurveda is the science and yoga is the practice of the science.

What Exactly is Ayurveda?

Ayurveda is the world's most ancient system of preventive health care. The fundamentals of Ayurveda can be found in Hindu scriptures called the Vedas, which are the ancient Indian books of wisdom. Ayurveda is a Sanskrit word from the Indian language, which is "Ayur," meaning life, and "Veda," meaning wisdom, knowledge, or science. It is considered the "science of life" in Indian traditions. Those who practice these natural approaches follow guidelines on how to live a balanced life.

Ayurveda values the uniqueness of each human being. It recognizes that each person has a unique body type and psychological personality. Once you understand your body constitution, health is maintained by living a life of moderation in a balanced manner. When the body is balanced you will know how to spot early "warning signs" in order to nurture the body in the right way to prevent disease and stay well. Dr. Vasant Lad states, "Ayurveda helps a healthy person stay healthy and a person with a disease regain health." By living an Ayurveda lifestyle, human happiness, health, and growing wiser is achieved.

This science considers all the levels of the individual (body, mind, and spirit), offers natural ways of treating diseases and promoting health, emphasizes prevention, and empowers everyone to take responsibility for their own well-being. Ayurveda principles reflect the current trends in healthcare that reward prevention and self-care in the new medical model.

Body Constitution (The Tridoshas)

According to Ayurveda, from the moment of conception, a person attains an individual Prakriti (body constitution). Prakriti means nature or one's natural state. It is the body's natural form of physical build and constitution. There are three constitutional states, known as doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) that govern all the biological, psychological, and physiological conditions. When these doshas are out of balance, disease manifests.

Vata is the energy of action, transformation, movement, and communication. Pitta is the energy of transformation, conversion, and digestion. Kapha is the energy of constriction, lubrication, and nourishment. To understand this more clearly, some characteristics of a Vata body constitution include a person who is always on the go, has innovative ideas, thin, petite, or tall, has variable digestion, bones are prominent, and is always cold. A Pitta constitution is one who typically has red hair, well developed muscles, organized, structured, and has a strong digestion. A person who is Kapha presents with characteristics such as large bones, sometimes overweight, loyal, grounded individuals, confident, and has radiant skin.

Incorporating Ayurveda into OT Practice

How Ayurveda is finding its way into the mainstream is evidenced by common products found in the grocery store, drugstores, spas, and gyms. Some examples are ghee butter, Neti Pots, sesame oil, dry brush, saunas, spices, herbs, kefir, mung beans, yoga mats, oil massage therapies, detoxing teas, cleansing therapies, and mala beads.

Ayurvedic principles can support a person in all areas of their life and teach them life skills to improve sleep, work performance, and social interactions. An occupational therapist trained in

Ayurveda can educate, counsel, and assist in the implementation of strategies to create balance in one's life through treatment of the doshas.

For example a person whose Vata dosha is imbalanced could have excessive mental instability and would benefit from warmth, spices, rest, meditation, eating grounding foods (i.e. root vegetables), yoga poses that are restorative, and a daily regular routine. A Pitta dosha imbalance could present as aggressive, resistant to change, and argumentative and would benefit from cooling foods and spices, yoga poses (i.e. twists), and activities that are not competitive. Lastly a person with a Kapha imbalance will present with excessive lethargy and a propensity to be overweight. This individual would benefit from having a proper food regime, exercise routine, and activities that are meaningful to them.

Occupational Therapy at a Deeper Level

As an occupational therapist, Ayurveda and Yoga has allowed me to practice holism at a deeper level. I have been able to utilize traditional occupational therapy approaches with these two new emerging sciences to discover the root cause of my client's issues. I have been able to use manual therapy (i.e. body work using Ayurveda techniques) to relax a client prior to a therapeutic exercise program incorporating yoga poses. I am able to educate and guide clients through meditation and simple breathing techniques to manage their stress.

Clients have come to me for nutritional support in which education on proper foods, herbs, spices, and cooking strategies have been implemented to assist in healthy weight loss, cleansing to reduce inflammation in the body, and creating a general sense of wellness. My pediatric caseload has been introduced to yoga asana, meditation, daily and nightly protocols, and breath work to increase body awareness for sensory modulation, to improve balance and attention, reduce anxiety, and increase clarity of mind for proper daily functioning. Lastly the older adult population has been introduced to activities that bring them joy through lifestyle modifications and yoga philosophy for continued purposeful meaning in life.

Ayurveda Resources

If you would like to learn more about the science of Ayurveda please refer to the following resources. I hope you feel inspired to explore these emerging sciences and find them beneficial in your occupational practice.

Schools

Kerala Ayurveda Academy, Wellness Naturally

Locations: Seattle, WA; Fremont, CA, and Los Angeles, CA

Websites

www.ayurvedaacademy.com/academy/index.php

www.ayurveda-retreat.co.uk/about/about-ayurveda/ayurvedic-medicine-21st-century

www.joyfulbelly.com

<http://theraj.com/about/ayurveda.php>

www.yogajournal.com/press/yoga_in_america

<http://nccam.nih.gov/health/ayurveda/introduction.htm>

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