



Ayurveda - Basics

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Ayurveda – Basic Concepts

Ayurveda is an ancient medicine system of the Indian subcontinent. It is said to have originated in India about 5000 years back. The word Ayurveda is a conjugation of two Sanskrit words 'ayus', meaning 'life' and 'veda', meaning 'science', thus ayurveda literally means the 'science of life'. Unlike other medicinal systems, Ayurveda focuses more on healthy living than treatment of diseases. The main concept of Ayurveda is that it personalizes the healing process.

According to Ayurveda, the human body is composed of four basics-the dosha, dhatu, mala and agni. There is immense significance of all these basics of the body in Ayurveda. These are also called the 'Mool Siddhant' or the 'basic fundamentals of Ayurvedic treatment'.

Dosha

The three vital principles of doshas are vata, pitta and kapha, which together regulate and control the catabolic and anabolic metabolism. The main function of the three doshas is to carry the byproduct of digested foods throughout the body, which helps in building up the body tissues. Any malfunction in these doshas causes disease.

Dhatu

Dhatu can be defined as one, which supports the body. There are seven tissue systems in the body. They are as Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Mjja and Shukra which represent the plasma, blood, muscle, fat tissue, bone, bone marrow and semen respectively. Dhatus only provide the basic nutrition to the body and it helps in the growth and structure of mind.

Mala

Mala means waste products or dirty. It is third in the trinity of the body i.e. doshas and dhatu. There are three main types of malas, e.g. stool, urine and sweat. Malas are mainly the waste products of the body so their proper excretion from the body is essential to maintain the proper health of the individual. There are mainly two aspects of mala i.e. mala and kitta. Mala is about waste products of the body whereas kitta is all about the waste products of dhatus.

Agni

All kinds of metabolic and digestive activity of the body takes place with the help of the biological fire of the body called Agni. Agni can be termed as the various enzymes present in the elementary canal, liver and the tissue cells.

The Body Matrix

Life in Ayurveda is conceived as the union of body, senses, mind and soul. The living man is a conglomeration of three humours (Vata, Pitta & Kapha), seven basic tissues (Rasa, Rakta, Mansa, Meda, Asthi, Majja & Shukra) and the waste products of the body such as faeces, urine and sweat. Thus the total body matrix comprises of the humours, the tissues and the waste products of the body. The growth and decay of this body matrix and its constituents revolve around food which gets processed into humours, tissues and wastes. Ingestion, digestion, absorption, assimilation and metabolism of food have an interplay in health and disease which are significantly affected by psychological mechanisms as well as by bio-fire (Agni).

Panchamahabhutas

According to Ayurveda all objects in the universe including human body are composed of five basic elements (Panchamahabhutas) namely, earth, water, fire, air and vacuum (ether). There is a balanced condensation of these elements in different proportions to suit the needs and requirements of different structures and functions of the body matrix and its parts. The growth and development of the body matrix

of the body matrix and its parts. The growth and development of the body matrix depends on its nutrition, i.e. on food. The food, in turn, is composed of the above five elements, which replenish or nourish the like elements of the body after the action of bio-fire (Agni). The tissues of the body are the structural whereas humours are physiological entities, derived from different combinations and permutations of Panchamahabhutas.

Health and Sickness

Health or sickness depends on the presence or absence of a balanced state of the total body matrix including the balance between its different constituents. Both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors can cause disturbance in the natural equilibrium giving rise to disease. This loss of equilibrium can happen by dietary indiscrimination, undesirable habits and non-observance of rules of healthy living. Seasonal abnormalities, improper exercise or erratic application of sense organs and incompatible actions of the body and mind can also result in creating disturbance of the existing normal balance. The treatment consists of restoring the balance of disturbed body-mind matrix through regulating diet, correcting life-routine and behaviour, administration of drugs and resorting to preventive Panchkarma and Rasayana therapy.

Diagnosis

In Ayurveda diagnosis is always done of the patient as a whole. The physician takes a careful note of the patients internal physiological characteristics and mental disposition. S/He also studies such other factors as the affected bodily tissues, humours, the site at which the disease is located, patients resistance and vitality, his/her daily routine, dietary habits, the gravity of clinical conditions, condition of digestion and details of personal, social, economic and environmental situation of the patient. The diagnosis also involves the following examinations:

1. General physical examination
2. Pulse examination
3. Urine examination
4. Examination of the faeces
5. Examination of tongue and eyes
6. Examination of skin and ear including tactile and auditory functions.

Treatment

The principal objectives of Ayurveda include maintenance and promotion of health,

prevention of disease and cure of sickness.

Treatment of the disease consists in avoiding causative factors responsible for disequilibrium of the body matrix or of any of its constituent parts through the use of Panchkarma procedures, medicines, suitable diet, activity and regimen for restoring the balance and strengthening the body mechanisms to prevent or minimize future occurrence of the disease.

Normally treatment measures involve use of medicines, specific diet and prescribed activity routine. Use of these three measures is done in two ways. In one approach of treatment the three measures antagonize the disease by counteracting the etiological factors and various manifestations of the disease. In the second approach the same three measures of medicine, diet and activity are targeted to exert effects similar to the etiological factors and manifestations of the disease process. These two types of therapeutic approaches are respectively known as Vipreeta and Vipreetarthkari treatments.

For successful administration of a treatment four things are essential. These are:

1. The physician
2. The medicaments
3. The nursing personnel
4. The patient

The physician comes first in order of importance. S/He must possess technical skill, scientific knowledge, purity and human understanding. The physician should use his/her knowledge with humility, wisdom and in the service of humanity. Next in importance comes food and drugs. These are supposed to be of high quality, wide application, grown and prepared following approved procedures and should be available adequately. The third component of every successful treatment is the role of nursing personnel who should have good knowledge of nursing, must know the skills of their art and be affectionate, sympathetic, intelligent, neat & clean and resourceful. The fourth component is the patient himself who should be cooperative and obedient to follow instructions of the physician, able to describe ailments and ready to provide all that may be needed for treatment.

Ayurveda has developed a very vivid analytical description of the stages and events that take place since the causative factors commence to operate till the final manifestation of disease. This gives this system an additional advantage of knowing that possible onset of disease much before the latent symptoms become apparent. This very much enhances the preventive role of this system of medicine by making it possible to take proper and effective steps in advance, to arrest further progress in

pathogenesis or to take suitable therapeutic measures to curb the disease in its earliest stage of onset.

Types of Treatment

The treatment of disease can broadly be classified as

Shodhana therapy (Purification Treatment)

Shodhana treatment aims at removal of the causative factors of somatic and psychosomatic diseases. The process involves internal and external purification. The usual practices involved are Panchkarma (medically induced Emesis, Purgation, Oil Enema, Decoction enema and Nasal administration of medicines), Pre-panchkarma procedures (external and internal oleation and induced sweating). Panchkarma treatment focuses on metabolic management. It provides needed purificatory effect, besides conferring therapeutic benefits. This treatment is especially helpful in neurological disorders, musculo-skeletal disease conditions, certain vascular or neuro-vascular states, respiratory diseases, metabolic and degenerative disorders.

Shamana therapy (Palliative Treatment)

Shamana therapy involves suppression of vitiated humours (doshas). The process by which disturbed humour subsides or returns to normal without creating imbalance of other humours is known as shamana. This treatment is achieved by use of appetisers, digestives, exercise and exposure to sun, fresh air etc. In this form of treatment, palliatives and sedatives are used.

Pathya Vyavastha (Prescription of diet and activity)

Pathya Vyavastha comprises indications and contraindications in respect of diet, activity, habits and emotional status. This is done with a view to enhance the effects of therapeutic measures and to impede the pathogenetic processes. Emphasis on actions such as dos and donts of diet is laid with the aim to stimulate Agni and optimize digestion and assimilation of food in order to ensure strength of tissues.

Nidan Parivarjan (Avoidance of disease causing and aggravating factors)

Nidan Parivarjan is to avoid the known disease causing factors in diet and lifestyle of the patient. It also encompasses the idea to refrain from precipitating or aggravating factors of the disease.

Satvavajaya (Psychotherapy)

Satvavajaya concerns mainly with the area of mental disturbances. This includes restraining the mind from desires for unwholesome objects and cultivation of courage, memory and concentration. The study of psychology and psychiatry have been developed extensively in Ayurveda and have wide range of approaches in the treatment of mental disorders.



Rasayana therapy (use of immunomodulators and rejuvenation medicines)

Rasayana therapy deals with promotion of strength and vitality. The integrity of body matrix, promotion of memory, intelligence, immunity against the disease, the preservation of youth, lustre and complexion and maintenance of optimum strength of the body and senses are some of the positive benefits credited to this treatment. Prevention of premature wear and tear of body tissues and promotion of total health content of an individual are the roles that Rasayana therapy plays.

Diet and Ayurvedic Treatment




In Ayurveda, regulation of diet as therapy has great importance. This is because it considers human body as the product of food. An individual's mental and spiritual development as well as his temperament is influenced by the quality of food consumed by him / her. Food in human body is transformed first into chyle or Rasa and then successive processes involve its conversion into blood, muscle, fat, bone, bone-marrow, reproductive elements and ojas. Thus, food is basic to all the metabolic transformations and life activities. Lack of nutrients in food or improper transformation of food lead to a variety of disease conditions.

National Level Institutes for Ayurveda in India

1. [All India Institute of Ayurveda, New Delhi](#) 
2. [Rashtriya Ayurved Vidyapeeth, New Delhi](#) 
3. [National Institute of Ayurveda \(NIA\) Jaipur](#) 
4. [Institute of Post Graduate Teaching & Research in Ayurveda, Jamnagar \(Gujarat\)](#) 

Source: [Department of AYUSH, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India](#) 

Related Resources

1. [Disease-Wise Information in Ayush Systems \(376KB\)](#) 
2. [Myths and Facts about AYUSH \(7.4MB\)](#) 
3. [Quality Control in AYUSH \(21.4MB\)](#) 

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