

## **Ayurveda**

**Ayurveda** - The science of life and longevity, is the most ancient healing system from India. It stresses the mind-body relationship in the maintenance of good health.

Ayurveda is classed among sacred sciences and considered as a supplement of the Atharva-veda. It contains eight departments:

- 1) *Salya*: Removal of any substance which has entered the body, like extraction of darts, splinters etc.
- 2) *Salakya*: Cure of diseases of the eye, ear etc by Salakas (sharp instruments).
- 3) *Kaya-chikitsa*: Cure of diseases affecting the whole body.
- 4) *Bhuta-vidya*: Treatment of mental diseases supposed to be produced by demoniacal influence.
- 5) *Kaumara-bhritya*: Treatment of children.
- 6) *Agada-tantra*: Doctrine of antidotes.
- 7) *Rasayana-tantra*: Doctrine of elixirs.
- 8) *Vajikarna-tantra*: Doctrine of aphrodisiacs etc.

As in other Asian medical practices, a balance of vital energy, in this case *Prana*, is considered the key. The system is based on balancing three basic life forces, or *Doshas* - *i) Vata*, responsible for all movements in the body; *ii) Pitta*, which controls digestion and energy production; and *iii) Kapha*, responsible for the body structure and stability. Illness occurs when any of the *Doshas* is out of sync; individuals must know their dominant *Dosha* and follow a diet and lifestyle that keeps it balanced with the others.

**Origin:** Ayurveda, is believed to be about 5000 years old, predating all other medical systems. The two classic Ayurveda textbooks are more than 2000 years old. *Charaka-samhita* named after Charaka who was the ayurvedic counterpart of Hippocrates, outlines the principles of health maintenance and treatment of disease. Another book named *Sushruta-samhita* describes elaborate surgical procedures, including reconstructive plastic surgery, gallbladder removal, and other operations that most people consider modern. Sushruta, the author of *Sushruta-samhita*, is believed to have lived around 6th century B.C. and is said to have imbibed his knowledge from Dhanwantri. It is believed that Sushruta's work

was also revised and supplemented by Nagarjuna between the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D.

A traditional story about the origin of Ayurveda, elucidates that Brahma imparted this knowledge to Prajapati Daksha, who in turn passed it on to the two Ashwinikumaras. From Ashwinikumaras, this knowledge passed on to Indra and then to Sage Bhardwaja. Bhardwaja shared it with other sages, one of them was Punarvasu Atreya. Atreya passed it on to his disciples. Based on the knowledge thus imparted, Agnivesha, one of Atreya's disciple authored a treatise, which came to be known as Agnivesha-tantra. This work of Agnivesha was revised and enlarged by Charaka around the 5th century A.D. in the form of Charaka-samhita.

A Couplet from 'Essentials of Ayurveda' by Dr. C.L.Gupta reads:

*निदाने माधवः श्रेष्ठः सूत्रस्थाने तु वाग्भटः*

*शरीरे सुश्रुतः प्रोक्तः चरकस्तु चिकित्सिते ।*

*(Madhava is unrivalled in Diagnosis, Vagbhatta in Principles and Practice of Medicine, Susruta in Surgery and Charaka in Therapeutics.)*

Charaka-samhita in its present form is the handiwork of another Kashmiri Pandit namely Dridhabala, who revised and updated Charaka's work in the 9th century A.D. Dridhabala, the son of Kapilaba is said to have born in village Pansinor, the confluence of River Vitasta and Sindhu.

Another legend tells us that Shesha, the Serpent-king, who was the recipient of Ayur-veda, once visited earth and found it full of sickness. He was moved with pity and determined to become incarnate as the son of a Muni for alleviating disease. He was called Charaka, because he had visited the earth as a Chara (spy). He then composed a new book on medicine, called Charaka-grantha, based on older works of Agni-vesha and other pupils of Atreya.

Laying to rest, the controversy regarding Charaka's birth place, the Buddhist literature discovered by Prof. Sylvan Levi in China, shows that Charaka's birth place was Kashmir and he was, the court-poet of Kanishka in the 1st century A.D.

### **Popularity and spread of Ayurveda:**

Ayurvedic medicine spread with the Hindu culture to Indonesia, Tibet, and eventually to the West, where some of its principles were picked up by the ancient Greek physicians. As Buddhism developed, this healing system was carried to China and other Asian countries.

During the 1800s, the British banned all ayurvedic schools in India, replacing them with Western medical schools. For the next century, ayurvedic medicine was relegated to folk practices in rural areas. When India regained its independence in 1947, ayurvedic schools were again legalised. Today there are

more than 100 ayurvedic schools in India, equal in number to the Western ones, and many Indian physicians incorporate both styles of medicine into their practices.

**When is it used:**

Unlike Western medicine, which comes into play when illness strikes, Ayurveda is incorporated into a person's lifestyle. It governs all aspects of life, such as diet, exercise and sexual practices. An ayurvedic practitioner is consulted only to identify and correct an imbalance among the three life forces.

**How it works:**

Ayurvedic philosophy holds that each person is born with a particular ratio of *Doshas*, with one dominating. This dominant *Dosha* determines personality type and also influences one's susceptibility to certain illnesses. For example, *Pitta* people tend to have fiery dispositions and are prone to developing high blood pressure and digestive disorders, so a *Pitta*-related disease may be treated with a bland diet and numerous herbal remedies. Because the mind is seen as an integral force in maintaining health and overcoming illness, meditation or yoga may also be employed.

**Diagnosis of the disease & treatment:**

An ayurvedic doctor begins by assessing the patient's *Dosha* pattern. Pulses play a critical role in this assessment - a practitioner feels pulses throughout the body, looking for *Dosha* imbalances as reflected in the nature of pulse. Seven types of body tissue - plasma, red blood cells, muscle, fat, bone, nerve and reproductive tissue - are also examined.

Ayurvedic physicians do not focus on a specific disease or an organ system, but instead treat the entire body and mind. Purification to rid the body of toxins is an important part of treatment. Methods may include sweat baths, enemas, nasal washes, bloodletting, and oil massages. The practitioner will also recommend a specific diet, meditation or yoga routine, and herbal remedies.

*चरकः न चरितो येन, वाग्भट न तु वाग्भटः*

*सुश्रुतः न श्रुते येन, सः वैद्यः यमकिंकरः ।*

*(One who has not studied Charaka, who did not study Vagabhatta and could not equal him, and who did not hear Sushruta (-Samhita), that medical practitioner is the servant of Yama.)*

**[Sources:** *Guide to Medical Cures & Treatments; Kashmir's contribution to Indian Medicine by Dr. Rughnath Safaya; The Origin of Ayurveda & Charaka Samhita by Dr. H.N.Patwari; Works of Sir Monier Moniar Williams]*