

AYURVEDA IN DAILY LIFE RETREAT 1

Topic for Sun 19 September: Introduction to Ayurveda

Ayurveda: Science of Life is a wholistic system of medicine. An intelligent way to live your life with clear guidelines including: individual diet and nutrition, lifestyle routines, herbal medicines, massage modalities, yoga, and detoxing practices. Currently we seem disconnected from our body's natural intelligence; there are so many fads and multiple diets offered, available on the internet and often sensationalised and sometimes ill-informed, sometimes causing problems. What do we eat for proper health, nutrition, and well-being?

To me, Ayurveda makes sense: Ayurveda is the world; it is the 5 Elements. It is our connection to nature: Space, Air, Fire, Water, Earth. These are within us and in the whole world. What we take in, or consume through our senses affects us physically, mentally, and spiritually. We are fortunate that we can control what we eat, what we take in, what we consume. We perceive everything through our senses: Space is ears and hearing, Air is touch and feeling, Fire is eyes and sight, Water is taste and mouth, Earth is smell and the nasal system.

The 5 Elements are in the 3 constitutional body types or doshas; Vata is space and air, Pitta is fire and water, Kapha is water and earth. The elements give the doshas their qualities, such as dry-moist, rough-smooth, light-heavy, heating-cooling etc. and these qualities can aggravate or pacify the doshas, and can be present in the food we eat and our lifestyle. Ayurveda works with individual body types, in harmony with nature and the 5 elements, space, air, fire, water and earth.

FOOD IS MEDICINE: We balance the doshas through the 6 tastes as related to the doshas: Vata is balanced with sweet, sour and salty tastes; Pitta is balanced with sweet, bitter and astringent; Kapha is balanced with bitter, astringent and pungent tastes in our food and our lifestyle.

Throughout life, we sometimes develop Bad Habits: such as eating on the run, eating late at night, irregular eating, not eating the right food for our body type, not being aware of what we are eating; the aroma, colours, textures, appreciation, not chewing properly, watching TV while eating, wrong combination of food, not eating freshly cooked seasonal foods.

But Bad Habits can be replaced by Good Habits. Ayurvedic Practices help to develop good habits: 1. Eating fresh, seasonal food 2. Regular eating and lifestyle practices according to the doshas and 5 elements. 3. Biggest meal in the middle of the day - when the sun is brightest - digestive fire - we will digest and assimilate food more readily at this time and not accumulate toxins. 4. Attention to food in preparation and eating with mindfulness, chewing well – creating saliva to help swallowing and digestion of food. 5. Using the 6 tastes in food; sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent to satisfy the palate, therefore we don't crave food; we feel satisfied. Taste sends a message to the brain, and from brain to stomach to prepare digestion of food 6. Use of spices for nutritional value, healing properties, the smell of spices cooking, enticing the olfactory system, brain, digestion. 7. Qualities of food (gunas) moist, cooked, warm and nourishing is good for all the doshas – digestion and assimilation. 8. Not eating late.

One of Ayurveda's nutritional, healing foods is Dahl, which uses lentils as its' base. Dahl is low in calories, high in nutrition, it is strengthening and nourishing. Dahl is easy to cook, has excellent flavour to stimulate the taste buds, it is warm, cooked, moist and nourishing, using a variety of spices and it pacifies all the doshas and therefore the elements. Lentils have medicinal properties, are easy to digest, and don't cause weight gain.

Today, the first of our series of 'Ayurveda in Daily Life' we will cook a South Indian red lentil Dahl, and Vata nourishing, mung dahl, accompanied with rice. We will look at some of the benefits of the spices we use to aid digestion, reduce gas and bloating, and learn how to make 'tarka', the mixed spices that enhance the flavour of Dahl.

