

Embracing Ayurveda To Optimise Your Health Span

By Kate Aitken

I've been exploring the wellness space for well over a decade, gaining knowledge across diverse modalities and tapping into the latest trends and advancements that the 'new-and-improved' world promises to offer. However, it wasn't until I discovered the ancient wisdom of Ayurveda that I began to understand what real health felt like.

Ayurveda is a 5 000-year-old modality. Although incredible breakthroughs

have since been made in the field of medical science and surgery, many will agree that we've failed in trying to solve lifestyle diseases, and are in an era of rapid health deterioration and chronic illness.

So many are focused on lifespan, and modern drugs can perhaps give us that. However, I'd rather have health span. We all deserve to feel vital, to grow old gracefully and with dignity and, under most normal circumstances, we deserve to part ways with life because of old age (that was a thing back in the day!), not because of chronic lifestyle conditions, which - in many cases - could be avoided.

Ayurveda, simply translated, means the 'science (veda) of life (Ayu)'. It is the rich and rewarding process of getting to know ourselves so intimately that we make diet and lifestyle decisions that are best for us. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

In Ayurveda, a 'swastha' is a 'healthy person', and one can only be considered healthy if one has:

- balanced energies of the body (doshas)
- a proper digestive mechanism (agni)
- healthy body tissues (dhatus)
- proper elimination of waste (malas)
- a healthy and content soul (atma)
- healthy sense organs (indriya)
- a healthy mind (manas)

This is perfect health!

And that's the trouble with all the health fads and latest 'cure-all' supplements: no human is exactly the same as another, and we therefore need to understand our unique nature - known as our 'prakruti' in Ayurveda - in order to thrive.

As we can see, Ayurveda extends well beyond physical health. Dedicated students are promised physiological and spiritual wellbeing - arguably what we're all after.

The topic of Ayurveda is extensive. The first step in approaching and getting to understand this in-depth science, at least at the surface level, is to understand your prakruti, and for that we refer to the three dosha functional concept.

The three doshas are made up of the five elements called ‘panchamahubutas’, which make up this entire universe and everything we come into contact with. They are: space, air, fire, water, and earth. Each of the doshas, however, has dominant elements which give them their primary qualities:

- Vata (space, air)
- Pitta (fire)
- Kapha (water, earth)

One can have a ‘sama prakruti’, where all three doshas are found in one person in equal proportions, although this is highly unlikely. Most people have two doshas that dominate, for example: vata-pitta, or they can have one dosha that dominates, for example vata, pitta, or kapha.

There are many online tests that can help you determine your prakruti. I recommend the Maharishi Ayurveda dosha test at mapi.com/a/dosha-quiz/questions. It’s important to know that you can be a pitta dominant prakruti, but you could be suffering from vata diseases because of dietary and lifestyle choices to date. Although these need to be addressed using recommendations for that imbalanced dosha (vata, in this case), when you answer the questionnaire, try to connect to the blueprint you were born with, as that will be your prakruti.

Although all of us have all three doshas, if - for example - you discover that your prakruti is predominantly pitta, you might finally understand why hot weather makes you feel short-tempered and annoyed, or why spicy foods agitate you. You might finally understand why alcohol just doesn’t agree with your system, or why running marathons makes your body inflamed. You might get why you appreciate efficiency at work, and why you gravitate towards people who are concise, well considered and get on with the job. You’ll also understand not just your physical appetite, but also your appetite for ambition. And you’ll get why you feel so passionate about things that are close to your heart. Even though the health benefits of fermented foods have been shoved down your throat, you’ll finally get why they just don’t work for your unique body. And so the list goes on!

Importantly, you’ll finally understand you.

Once you understand yourself, you will be able to make dietary and lifestyle choices that support your prakruti and thereby optimise your wellbeing. Using the above examples, a simple lifestyle swop might be opting for surfing or swimming instead of going on long runs, or you might choose a diet rich in diverse fruit and veg and walks in cool, damp forests as a way to nurture your microbiome, rather than eating heating ferments that aggravate your system. You will no longer be making decisions based on what someone says ‘works for everyone’ – you’ll be making educated decisions about what works for you.

This is really taking ownership of your health, instead of outsourcing it. This is empowered wellbeing – and it is where your journey to ‘health span’ begins!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Kate Aitken is an internationally accredited health coach and Reiki II practitioner. She is particularly passionate about ancient healing modalities, and is currently studying Ayurveda and Panchakarma through The School of Ayurveda and Panchakarma in Kerala, India. Follow her [@_well_rooted_](#) on Instagram, or get in touch at kate@wellrooted.co.za.

