

DEPRESSION AND MENTAL HEALTH IN AYURVEDA: THE WORLD'S OLDEST HOLISTIC HEALTH SCIENCE

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Introduction

***“Samadoshah samagnishcha, samadhatu malakriyah,
prasannatmendriya manah, svastha ity abhidhiyate.”***

“The one whose ‘doshas’ are balanced, whose metabolism is balanced, whose tissues and eliminations are normal, and whose senses and mind are centered in the Self, is considered healthy and remains full of bliss.”

Shushruta Sutrasthanam 15,41.

This important quotation defining health according to Ayurveda, written thousands of years ago, reveals the natural condition of the mind as a state of happiness. Why is it then, in today’s world, is there an epidemic of so-called ‘depression’ and stress-related conditions?

The Three Main Classifications of Mental Disturbances

According to Ayurveda, Vata (air and space), Pitta (fire and water) and Kapha (water and earth) are the three main psychobiological expressions of Nature, individually and cosmically.

Vata dosha is more light, dry, dispersing, subtle, cold, mobile, minute and changeable, and therefore is associated with conditions such as worries, anxieties, fears, phobias, terrors, delusions, compulsions, irrelevant talk, monologue or dialogue with self, attention deficit, bi-polar disease, social anxiety and auditory hallucinations. Vata governs all nervous system functions.

Pitta dosha, being hot, sharp, penetrating, sour, intense and spreading is responsible for comparison, control, criticism, jealousy, frustration, obsession, territorialism, anger, rage, violence, suicide, murder and visual hallucinations. Pitta is more associated with digestive and hormonal functions.

Kapha dosha is more cool, slow, heavy, static, inert, smooth, gross, soft and immobile, and is therefore is more associated with sadness, melancholia,

prolonged crying, stubbornness, dark depression, hiding, hoarding, catatonia, overeating and kinesthetic hallucinations. Kapha mainly governs adipose, blood sugar and cardiac circulation

While every person experiences feelings of anxiety, anger and grief at some times of life, ones' philosophies help support adjustments to the diurnal, lunar, seasonal, and life and death cycles with wisdom. Personal philosophy is at the root of all life experience, whether sweet or bitter, and is developed through time by a process of self-awareness of these psycho-physiological 'doshas', as they were called by classical physicians, denoting vulnerability or fallibility of human life.

Dinacharya – the Ultimate Solution

Beginning the daily habits with awareness—rising with the sun, eliminating toxins, cleaning the body and beginning our personal practice of worship—helps recognize our place in the family, community and cosmos. The rising sun is a special time of illumination, to help us activate our gifts in the world. Cumulative benefits help purify the mind, emotions and body day to day.

Choosing right foods for our appetite and metabolic needs is a fundamental alignment to show respect of our body and life. Anti-depressant drugs disturb the natural chemical balance of the brain functions and often cause terrible 'side' effects, sometimes death.

Study and work are the main arenas of improving our lives by helping others, thus maintaining our responsibilities as citizens to remain healthy, happy and prosperous. In prior times, the patient suffering from psychosis was assigned service tasks to generate 'merit', to help displace the 'demerit' of repetitive negative or 'untrue' thinking.

'Right use of time' means to eat when hungry, rest when fatigued and make time to play for nurturing creativity. If any of these important psychobiological needs is unfulfilled or over fulfilled, imbalance occurs.

Circadian rhythms become disturbed by sleeping late, eating stale foods, having sex at a wrong time such as during the menses, with an inappropriate partner or

for inappropriate reasons such as self-indulgence. Misuse of any of the senses leads to imbalance, as does the misuse of the mind, such as wishing another ill.

Psychosis is termed 'unmad' from Sanskrit, implying 'forgetfulness of God'.

Meditation

Meditation is often referred to as the first and last medicine of Ayurveda. It can be practiced by a child and until one's last day of life. Meditation is neither religion nor doctrine, but rather one's own personal process of self-realization. 'Handicap' is no bar to meditation. Meditation is the self-enquiry that leads to philosophy and is the means and end of human contentment. Meditation is to rise above the mind's actions and reactions to the inner stillness of the 'all-knowing'.

The path of yoga or the union of the soul with the oversoul was described by Patanjali, a great sage, as having pre-requisite steps. When healing ourselves of mental disturbances, first we learn to observe avoidance of negative influences and choosing of uplifting influences, thus generating healthy nervous systems. Then begins a process of purifying and strengthening the body to prepare it for remaining still in meditation. Meditation then leads to the liberation from all sufferings and delusions.

These steps are undertaken in any treatment program of mental illness to help restore the mind to its natural state of happiness. We all encounter challenges on the path of life. Few succeed in meditation on the first day. Through daily meditation practice, spiritual qualities such as forbearance, forgiveness of all wrongs real and imagined, patience, confidence and self-actualization result through the inexorable law of cause and effect.

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