Combatting Aging
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AYURVEDA

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Stave off the debilities and diseases of old age with right living routines and rejuvenation therapy

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Ayurvedic medicine has delineated rejuvenation as a speciality whose main purpose is to maintain health and virility as age advances. We all age, but we don't need in the process to enter an epoch time of disease. We can age gracefully and avoid diabetes, heart diseases, hypertension, auto-immune diseases, obesity, cancer, etc.

Rejuvenation therapy, or rasayana, is one of the eight clinical specialties of ayurveda, which include internal medicine, surgery, opthalmology, etc. The purpose of rasayana is to prevent aging, impart longevity, build immunity against diseases, improve mental faculties and add vitality and luster. The rasayana treatment should be customized for each person, based on age, constitution, adaptability, body tissues, microcirculation, digestion and vitality. Methods include achar rasayana (behavioral modification), pancha karma vigyan (detoxification program) and the taking of specific herbs and preparations for the body. In modern herbology these rasayana herbs are referred to as adaptogens for their ability to adapt according to the body's needs.

The first task is to follow a good daily routine, called dincharya in ayurveda. Nine suggestions for a good daily routine are: 1. Wake up early, before sunrise. The sun activates the pineal gland to send massages to the pituitary gland, which in turn messages the adrenal glands to release adrenal cortisol, which wakes us from deep sleep. 2. Drink one to three glasses of warm water in the morning. This encourages

peristalsis to begin and helps bowel evacuation. 3. Oral and physical hygiene is of utmost importance. A daily shower encourages digestive health and a healthy heart in addition to general cleanliness. Brushing and flossing is important for healthy teeth and gums. 4. Get in touch with your senses by massaging your body with oil customized for your body type. To sharpen your sense of smell, put a few drops in your nose. Wash your eyes with trifala water. To make trifala water, open one capsule in one cup distilled water, boil for ten minutes, then strain through a coffee filter. You can use an eye cup available at drug stores. Care for your ears by putting a couple of drops of olive oil in each, or dip a Q-tip in olive oil and lubricate your ears. 5. Walk daily for 30-45 minutes, depending upon your schedule, and meditate regularly. 6. Eat a healthy breakfast according to your constitution, adjusted as needed to correct any imbalances. 7. Fried, processed and artificially sweetened foods should be avoided at all times. 8. Sexual activity is considered sacred in ayurveda. It is an aspect of the pursuit of kama, pleasure, one of the four legitimate goals of life according to Hinduism which also include wealth, dharma and liberation from rebirth. Ayurveda advises frequent sexual activity in winter, and at intervals of 3-4 days during other seasons. 9. Finish your day by calming your mind with meditation and pranayama, breathing exercises.

Use a commonsense approach to your seasonal routine, or ritu charya. During the summer, dress lightly, eat fruits and vegetables and drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration. During the winter, dress warmly. Especially, keep your vital organs, such as the heart and lungs, warm. Eat more nuts and seeds to get extra oils and energy for winter, and lubricate your skin with oils or cold creams. In spring, dress up neither too light nor too heavy. It is the seasons for allergies, so avoid mucous producing foods such as excessive sugar, dairy products, fried and heavy foods. Also, fasting on vegetables, fruits and rice proteins can be helpful. Autumn is considered best for internal cleansing.

Over time, we accumulate toxic materials in our bodies that lead to diseases. We may eat properly, do our yoga, exercise and meditate, but still not avoid this accumulation. This is why the pancha karma cleansing routine is advised. These treatments mimic the body's natural ways of detoxification. There are three phases: poorva karma, preparation for detoxification; pancha karma itself, involving five methods of cleansing; and pashchtya karma to help restore the function of the body to its natural state with rejuvenating ayurvedic herbs called rasayana herbs.

The following are the principle rasayana herbs and preparations. Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera): Research on ashwagandha has shown it to be a stress adaptogen, to promote healing and to have diuretic and anti-cancer properties. I

have used ashwagandha extensively in my practice for insomnia, fatigue, stress, depression, anxiety and cancer. My son uses it for body building. It can also be used as an adjuvant in chemotherapy and radiation treatment. Amla (Emblica officinalis): Amla is an excellent rejuvenator. It has powerful antioxidant properties and counters the toxicity of heavy metals such as nickel, cobalt, arsenic and mercury. It also provides protective properties after one has been exposed to toxic or carcinogenic chemicals. It has powerful anti-cancerous properties and, like ashwagandha, has been used in cancer therapy to cut down the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation. Sitawari (Asparagus racemosus) has tonic, adaptogenic, alterative (curative) and aphrodisiac activities. It is used to treat debility and chronic diseases like infertility, impotence, menopause, lung abscesses and chronic fevers. Trifala (a combination of Terminalia chebula, Terminalia billerica and Emblica officinalis): Trifala is another prized adaptogen. The combined herbs are synergistic and have digestive and eliminative actions. It has anti-parasitic, anti-yeast, anti-bacterial and antihistaminic properties. It improves the flow of bile, lowers cholesterol and can be used as adjuvant in chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Shilajeet-mumiyo (mineral pitch) is a rich source of naturally occurring minerals. Russian athletes used it as non-steroidal body builder and a stamina enhancer. Ayurvedic medicine considers it as an aphrodisiac, a tonic for the kidneys and prostate. It helps with benign prostate enhancement and is an immune enhancer. Pippli (Piper longum): Pippli helps in digestion, enhances acid and enzyme secretions. It significantly enhances the absorption of nutrients, herbs and drugs and has shown anti-allergic, anti-asthmatic and powerful anti-parasitic actions.

Thus, by eating well, following a good daily and seasonal routine, occasionally undergoing a cleansing regime and following up with the right rejuvenative herbs, you can optimize your health as you age.

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