

Nourishing Mind by Nourishing Body

Rejuvenate with Ayurvedic techniques to repair the nervous system.

By Durga

Modern medicine views addiction as a chronic, relapsing disease characterized by disturbances in behavior and the brain. Food; alcohol; drugs (legal or illegal); gambling; overwork and sexual experiences, situations or relationships are just some of the addicting substances and behaviors. In the conventional and complementary medical communities, it is recognized that successful, long-term recovery from addiction requires ongoing care and support, as relapse triggers are commonplace in our daily life. Such triggers include stress, cues linked to the drug experience (for example, people, places, things or moods) and exposure to the addictive substances. This can be especially challenging when the substances or behaviors are food, sex or relationships, which are hard to avoid.

Ayurveda offers people who suffer from addiction an empowering personal program of recovery to reconstruct a healthy and happy life treating the whole person, not just the addiction, on the journey to reconnecting with a memory of a more whole self, with personal responsibility for our daily habits and ongoing health.

From an Ayurvedic viewpoint, root causes of unhealthy dependencies and addictions may arise from disturbances of *prana*, our vital life force. *Prana* governs our basic vitality and is the spark that enervates us. *Prana* that is freely moving and unencumbered helps maintain our emotional harmony, balance, creativity, enthusiasm and joy. It is the master force and guiding intelligence behind all psycho-physical functions, responsible for the coordination of breath, senses and mind.

We ingest *prana*, at the gross level, through food, heat, liquids and the air on the currents of our breath and, on a subtle level, through sensory impressions (predominantly the senses related to air and ether or space: sound and touch). When our food, water and/or air are polluted, processed and devitalized, when we are removed from nature and bombarded with sensory stimuli, our *prana* is disturbed. When we are under stress we shift into the fight or flight response and our breathing becomes fast and shallow. This further disturbs the flow of *prana* and our body's reserves of it, leading to increased fatigue, exacerbation of muscle tension and feelings of emptiness that seems to need filling...with addiction,

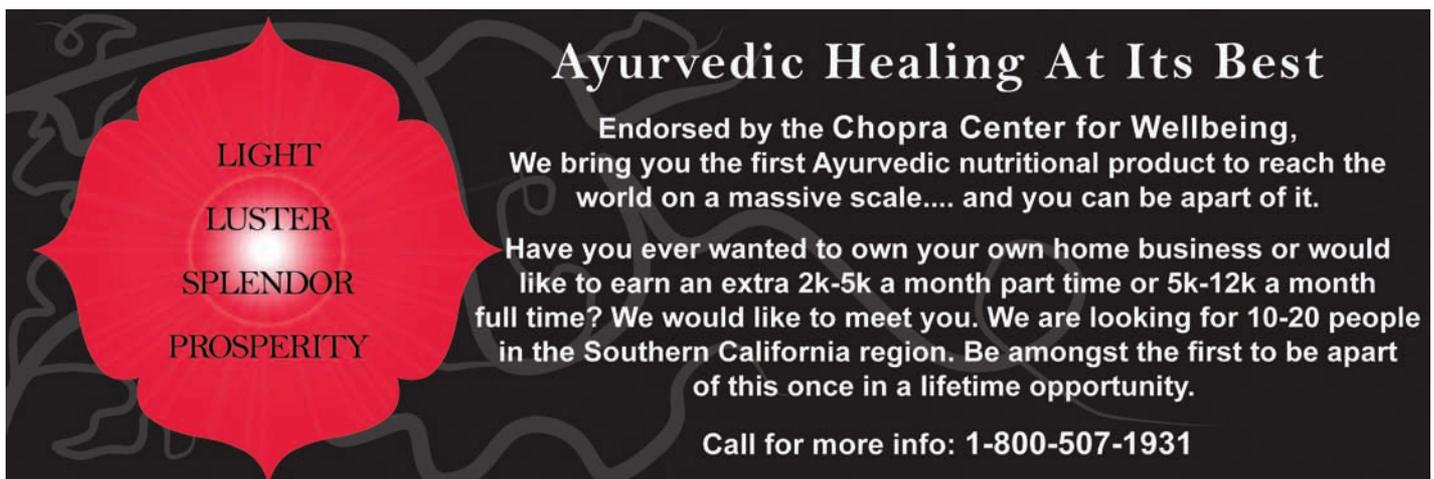
we reach for a substance or engage in a behavior to fill that emptiness.

Taking long, slow, deep breaths and increasing our immediate experience of *prana* is one way to overcome the cravings for that quick fix so many of us reach for – be it coffee, soda, chocolate, candy, sex, adrenaline-seeking behaviors, gambling, cigarettes or cocktails.

Pranic challenges:

1. If we are energy/*prana*-deficient we seek stimulation.
2. If we are hyperactive and constantly on the go, we seek sedation.
3. If the flow of *prana* is blocked and we are in pain, we self-medicate.
4. If we are under stress, we often seek instant gratification through our senses.

These coping mechanisms: stimulation, sedation, medication and gratification, are fully supported and even encouraged in our modern world of overdrive and hypersensory stimulation. The short-term pain relief created in these situations, however, is outweighed by the long-term progression of disturbed



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prana which can lead to depression, mental stagnation, denial and addiction.

The different components of an Ayurvedic program are focused on developing a healthy relationship with *prana* to positively access this energy for healing. An Ayurvedic treatment plan includes eliminating the cause(s) of the addiction, treating the condition, detoxifying and rebuilding the body and continuing to support rejuvenation.

Rejuvenation is vital to our ability to access a free flow of *prana*. And rejuvenation of the body—including the brain—is important for working with the psychological aspects of addiction since Ayurveda understands the interconnections among body, mind and spirit.

The Ayurvedic protocol for repair of the *majja dhatu* (the bone marrow and the entire nervous system) includes lubrication and touch. *Snehana* is a therapy that involves oiling the body, both internally through eating more oil and externally, through practices such as massage. These techniques reopen the channels through which *prana* flows.



Snehana is a Sanskrit word that conveys the love and tenderness expressed by touch; it invokes feeling of love and care, comforting us and reminding us that we are worthwhile and cherished. *Abhyanga* (self-massage) is a type of *snehana* therapy in which we love ourselves. Oils used for massage nourish not only the skin, but the deeper tissues of the body, including the *majja dhatu*. In cases of eating disorders, or even for someone trying to lose weight, adding oil to the body through the skin via massage provides essential nourishment.

We can use a number of oils to engage in the loving practice of *snehana*: on the skin or with our food. Sesame is a warming, heavy oil that calms the *vata* (air/ether) *dosha*, coconut softens the body and cools the excess fire of *pitta* and sunflower provides light lubrication to balance the *kapha dosha*. Almond, olive and even jojoba can be used for massage and are neutral: neither heating nor cooling. To increase essential fatty acids and nourish the nervous system: flax, black wal-

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nut, avocado, hemp (very different in effect from marijuana), evening primrose and borage are some beneficial oils to add regularly to the diet. Generally taking one teaspoon of oil per is beneficial for *vata* (air/ether) and *pitta* (fire element) *doshas*. For people who are predominantly *kapha* (water/earth) *dosha*, one or two teaspoons each day should be sufficient.

Golden Ghee

For people who use dairy products, ghee (clarified butter) is one of the most nourishing and rejuvenating substances used for *snehana*. Ghee contains the qualities of *kapha* (the earth element) as it is heavy, slow, oily, liquid, dense, and soft. Ghee increases *ojas* (the underlying basis of all immunity and the master coordinator of mind and body) and promotes longevity. This golden oil is the classic example of food as medicine; as it is both nourishing and potentiates herbs or other medicinal substances, delivering them to their target site in the body.

Taken internally, ghee regulates *agni* (the digestive fire), which is useful for people with a predominant *dosha* or *dosha* out of balance of *vata* (air and space elements) and/or *pitta* (fire) types whose addictions may have caused dehydration and metabolic problems like hypoglycemia (low blood sugar or difficulties regulating blood sugar). In moderation, ghee balances all the *doshas*. It increases intelligence, memory and nourishes the lungs, liver, kidneys and brain (organs that can be

damaged through various addictive habits).

Use organic ghee or try making your own from a good quality organic unsalted butter. If prepared properly, ghee is said to contain no lactose; notice your own experience. It is generally not advised for people with high cholesterol or who are obese; choose vegetable oils for eating instead and to obtain the benefits of ghee, add it to *nasya* oil or use it for massage.

Nasya

Nasya nasal application of an oil or ghee lubricates the sinuses and nasal cavities. Since the olfactory nerve travels from the nostrils directly to the limbic, or emotional systems in the brain, *nasya* can also directly treat the brain itself, which is useful for both repair and for treating a person's emotional state. For addictions, calamus ghee is excellent for *kapha* and *vata doshas*. Calamus is used traditionally in Ayurveda to restore mental faculties, including perceptual acuity and power of self-expression, and it is especially good for alleviating the dullness and depression that can result from excessive use of drugs. Apply several drops to the nose two or three times a day. Gotu kola ghee is calming for *pitta* and *vata* types – this can be taken internally or nasally.

Balance Prana with Massage

Ghee, like any edible oil, can be used for massage. Massage balances the *vata dosha* which is linked to *prana*, as both are princi-

ples of air energy in the body. *Prana* is air energy that has been properly digested by the body so it can be stored. *Vata* is energy related to the air element that is more unstable and must be utilized or digested. When *vata* is in excess or disturbed, a person can exhibit tremors or fidgeting, such as those seen in people who are detoxifying from the use of substances, indicating the accumulation of excess *vata* in the limbs. Massage balances the movement of *vata* and *prana* is the essence of balanced *vata* in the body.

In its multifaceted approach to recovery from any addictive or self-destructive behavior, Ayurveda seeks to balance the entire system. Ghee is our golden food, replenishing and repairing the *majja dhatu* (nerve tissue) and feeding the brain. This golden medicine nourishes the mind, promoting intelligence and perception, allowing us to face up to our errors while giving us the strength to walk a new path in recovery.

LAYOGA

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