

I love Ayurvedic treatments. In fact, they're my favorite when I make my annual pilgrimage to Miraval, a spa in Tucson.

So it was a lovely thing to recently find myself stretched out in a reclining chair, nearly asleep with a wrap over my legs and flute music on the CD player, awaiting my Ayurvedic practitioner. But I wasn't in Arizona, I was in Charlotte. The Cm Spa, located in the big pink building in South End, offers one-stop shopping for wellness: You can get chiropractic and nutrition advice from Dr. Bryan Edmiston... VIP facials... chocolate, coffee, or grape wraps... and a wide variety of massages, including LaStone and Cranial Sacral.

It already sounds pretty great, but Cm Spa has recently upped their game by adding a full Ayurvedic treatment program, headed by Dr. Aruna Patki. A highly credentialed Ayurvedic practitioner, Dr. Patki is schooled in the eight-year intensive

Ayurvedic medicine program in India (the equivalent of an M.D. in western medicine) and has given consultations to thousands of patients on both the east and west coasts, including one of the country's most prestigious Ayurvedic Medicine addresses on New York's Fifth Avenue before moving to Charlotte eight months ago. She specializes in Panchakarma therapy for rejuvenation and detoxification, and in Ayurvedic manipulative therapies, i.e., the fun stuff. It is a gift to Charlotte that such a highly-trained practitioner has landed here, and Dr. Patki offers us all an opportunity to learn about the ancient alternative medicine practice of Ayurveda.

To describe Ayurveda is pretty much like describing the history of Indian thought. A Sanskrit word meaning 'science of life', Ayurveda is a 5,000-year-old natural healing system and the sister science of yoga, another ancient practice that westerners once shunned and now embrace. The World Health Organization has recognized Ayurveda as a safe and effective health care system.

Most of Dr. Patki's clients start with a consultation (\$125 for the initial consultation! \$70 for follow-up visits) so that she can explain the principles of Ayurveda and determine which of three doshas, or body constitutions, are dominant in the patient. To do this she asks questions, takes your pulse, evaluates how you walk and may even look at your tongue, although she confesses, "I can usually tell just by looking." Vata people tend to be thin, Pitta people moderate in size, and Kapha people heavier.

Um, I'm not an Ayurvedic physician, but I think in my case we can eliminate Vata right up front. But there's more to it than body size. Ayurveda is truly holistic and your dosha is a combination of how you think, act, look and feel throughout the day. Everything is taken into consideration from how often you urinate to how often you lose your temper.

"Your constitution was fixed at the time you were conceived," says Dr. Patki. Although we're born with one of the doshas predominating, all three exist within us and exert their influence at different times of the day and during different seasons of the year. The important thing is to keep the five energies of your body (ether or 'empty space', air, water, fire, earth) in balance, and this balance can be achieved in many ways: exercise, nutrition, herbal supplements, cycles of rest and, of course, the Ayurvedic treatments themselves.

The purpose of Ayurveda isn't just to cure disease, although Dr. Patki says that, at least in America, most people wait until something is 'out of whack' before they seek help. In its highest form, the purpose of Ayurveda is to encourage wellness and promote longevity. "Very few patients walk in saying, 'I feel great,' but the prevention is always better than the cure," she says.

Once you show up with an ailment, Dr. Patki suggests a series of lifestyle changes to help bring you back into line. Now that the mind-body connection has been accepted globally, even western doctors acknowledge that stress is at the root of many diseases, and Dr. Patki points out, "Minor changes can help you relieve stress." If you want to go deeply into this, Om Spa offers 3-day and 5-day Panchakarma programs (\$595/\$995) for complete detoxification and balancing. If you want to just dip your toe in the Ayurvedic waters, check out the list of treatments.

Ah, the treatments. They are what bring me to this comfortable lounge where I am napping in an ergonomic chair awaiting Dr. Patki. In addition to its regular spa menu, Om Spa offers 15 Ayurvedic treatments ranging from the Heart Basti (\$80) which is designed specifically to de-stress the heart, to the Pinda Sweda (\$125), where herbal powders and medicated rice are tied into a bag and then rubbed vigorously over the body for deep detoxification. Anyone who doubts that Ayurveda is a whole body experience need only to glance at the list of services offered – everything from nasal oil drops for sinusitis to herbal massage for joint pain is included.

But I am here for Shirodhara (\$110), a hot oil treatment that the brochure promises is "great for people who work under lots of stress and need instant, deep relaxation." Bring it on! Dr. Patki leads me back to a massage table that has been draped with black plastic and she helps me situate myself so that a hanging brass urn is dangling just over my forehead so a fine stream of warm aromatic oil will run onto my 'third eye'. It sounds bizarre, but I know from past experience that when the warm oil hits my forehead I go immediately to my happy place. I am so blissed out that I scarcely notice when Dr. Patki begins the second part of the treatment, a face massage. She found a couple of pressure points – man, do my sinuses suck – that got my attention, but afterwards I felt like my whole head had opened up and I was breathing better. Relaxation precedes therapy in many Ayurvedic treatments. "The mind and body influence each other so deeply," says Dr. Patki, "that you can't treat one without the other." Heaven knows that's true for me; grab me by my third eye and the rest is bound to follow.

Gotta say a word about the oil. Shirodhara, and many Ayurvedic treatments, are all about oil. You're offered the option of draping your head but what's the point in that? I like my Ayurveda straight up, but after the treatment, I have so much oil in my hair that water literally planes off my head in the shower. I showed up at my son's soccer game that night deeply relaxed but looking like an extra from *West Side Story*. The next day, after several shampoos, the oil was out and my hair felt great, so I count Shirodhara as relaxation, detoxification and a hot oil scalp treatment all in one.

Our editor Katherine underwent the dosha evaluation, and we are not surprised to hear she is a pitta, the dosha

of energy, fire and change. Her prescribed initial treatment for ailments was pitta type experiences – also the Shirodhara but without the facial massage – the full on relaxing version – and a detoxifying, get-the- stress-out Pinda Sweda. Katherine reports that she literally left the planet and this was simply the top healing spa experience she’s ever had, although soccer carpool was even more embarrassing for her since she went right from the treatment to the soccer field dripping in oil.

Ayurveda goes far beyond typical spa services. Sure, you feel great afterwards, and – once you get the oil out of your hair – you even look great in that happy, well-tended way that spa devotee always seem to have. But Ayurveda is ultimately about health and wellness, about preventing disease and expanding both the length and quality of your life. “You need to do something good for yourself every now and then,” says Dr. Patki. “Listen to your body. It will tell you all you need to know.” And if you’d like to take our advice too, get an appointment with Dr. Patki before the word of her gift of healing gets out and she gets completely booked up.

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