

Skin Health According to Ayurveda**

by

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Skin is the largest organ of the body. It helps us to maintain body temperature, protects us from infection, and much more. In Ayurveda, pitta dosha (or the fire element) is responsible for maintaining the health of the skin, in particular bhrajaka pitta (one of the subdoshas). Bhrajaka pitta of the skin is also responsible for helping the body to process the oils, pastes, and medications that we put on our skin.

Ayurveda divides our body into seven layers of tissue according to how those tissues are nourished by the food we eat. These are: plasma, red blood cells, muscle, fat, bone, nervous system, and reproductive organs. Ayurveda also teaches that there are seven layers of skin that correspond to those tissues. Plasma is what creates the superficial skin layer. A person with healthy plasma (profoundly influenced by having a healthy diet) will have beautiful, soft, smooth skin. An unhealthy diet often leads to poor nutrition of the tissues, as well as an accumulation of toxins that eventually circulate in the plasma. If skin is a weak organ for you, the toxins lodge in the skin cells.

Between the toxins and disturbed fire element, symptoms emerge such as eczema, dermatitis, acne, psoriasis, and other physical symptoms. Emotions are also involved. For example, if one is angry and flushed, the blood rushes to the surface of the skin, leaving the lower layers of skin undernourished. If one is anxious or fearful, the skin looks pale.

Be aware that anything that you put on your skin is absorbed into the body—and can influence even the deepest levels of your body, including the nervous system and reproductive tissues. Most teachers in Ayurveda caution students not to put anything on the skin that you would not eat. Unfortunately, even the best of skin care products are required by law to contain enough preservative to make the product last on the shelf for two years. Most preservatives end up in our tissues, accumulating to a certain degree.

But also, the skin is a reflection of your diet. Maximizing the digestion is very important in Ayurveda in order to minimize the production of toxins. As we learned in the last e-mail on upper respiratory conditions, toxins lay the groundwork for infection and, by the way, something like 80% of all long term chronic diseases (e.g., arthritis, coronary artery disease). Maximizing digestion is about choosing wholesome foods, preparing them with consciousness, and

eating them at the proper time and in the proper setting. The Wise Earth Tradition of Ayurveda addresses these issues beautifully by teaching us to cook with a positive attitude and awareness. For most this is a long process of learning that starts with setting the intention and then proceeding slowly, step by step. One way of making a first step toward understanding the Ayurvedic perspective on diet is by attending our New Year Yoga and Ayurvedic Cooking workshop: <http://www.ayurvedacentern.com/classes.html>.

One change that is relatively easy to accomplish is to keep hydrated with hot, warm or room temperature water. Iced drinks diminish the fire in the body and increase toxins. Try to acquire a taste for drinking hot water, especially in the cold seasons. It stokes the fire and burns toxins.

Another change is to maintain healthy attitudes, thought processes, and emotions. Ayurveda tells us how to improve quality and quantity of life. Those who are older in years but “young at heart” are often quite positive in their approach to living. Their skin often reflects this positive approach.

Because the skin is a vehicle for nourishment and a sign of health, beauty is a large topic in Ayurveda. There are many personal care products, oils, supplements oriented toward the care of the skin – not only for appearance sake, but primarily because it is a health practice in a holistic way. For example, it is ideal for many to do self-massage with plain organic sesame oil prior to the shower. If you want, you can use an herbalized oil to further balance the imbalances. Working the oil into the skin nourishes and balances all the tissues of the body. Some other products available at our store are:

Blood Cleanse, an herbal remedy by Banyan (<http://www.banyan-botanicals.com/prodinfo.asp?number=1211&variation=&aitem=3&mitem=25>), cleanses the intestines and blood of toxins, having a beneficial effect on skin conditions, among others.

Neem is a very bitter herb that has both detoxifying and cooling effects, making it a great topical in the form of **Neem Oil** (<http://www.banyan-botanicals.com/prodinfo.asp?number=3313&variation=&aitem=16&mitem=18>). The oil helps it serve as a vehicle to deliver the neem to the deeper levels of skin and tissues. We also sell shampoos and soaps that have the Ayurvedic ingredients to properly nourish the skin.

Banyan makes a beautiful **Neem Soap** (<http://www.banyan-botanicals.com/prodinfo.asp?number=8554&variation=&aitem=2&mitem=6>) for skin conditions, but the favorite around here is a **Rose Citrus Soap**

<http://www.banyan-botanicals.com/prodinfo.asp?number=8553&variation=&aitem=1&mitem=6>), good for dry skin.

We also have considerably less expensive, but very nice soaps and shampoos made by Auromere: tulsi-neem, sandalwood-turmeric. I use these myself. As always, you may order these products directly from other sources, however, given shipping and price differentials I think you will find them to be less expensive at our store, even with sales tax.

I resisted putting facials on our treatment menu for so many years, because I know that many people look at such offerings as appealing to the superficial aspect of beauty. I want the Ayurveda Center to be a healthcare facility. After having done the Ayurvedic facials here at the Center for a couple of months now, I can honestly say, the Ayurvedic Facial Massage is indeed a health treatment that has as side effects greater luster, softness, and appearance of the skin. People have reported feelings of openness of the heart, relaxation and peace; detoxifications of the skin and upper respiratory pathways have occurred. Plus it is a very pleasant hour! People have loved it. I am told it is very different than the facials offered in an esthetician model; those facials have a different goal. Following is a description of these new offerings.

Performed by Mary Roberson, LMT, Ph.D., the Ayurvedic Facial Massage is the ultimate in luxury and pampering while also providing balance and rejuvenation to the skin, as well as the body and mind. The rest of the Ayurveda Center staff is currently in training and will be offering these services, as well, beginning in February.

Using wholesome products, essential oils, hydrosols, and massage oils, the massage begins with cleansing of the face, followed by an exfoliating massage. Then a detoxifying clay mask is applied. Next comes a thorough neck, shoulder and face massage. A final nutritional mask is applied to nourish and regenerate the skin. This is accompanied by Ayurvedic treatments for the senses. Hot towels are applied between each phase of the treatment. While the masks are drying, one receives hand and foot massages. Since the hands, feet, and head reflect to the entire body, the treatment has benefits that go beyond the facial to relax and renew the body and mind. Last, toner and moisturizer are applied. This 60-minute service is \$75.

For a 90-minute service, one receives the facial services in the context of a modified abhyanga (full body one person Ayurvedic massage with herbalized oil) for \$105. For a facial plus one hour Swedish full body massage, the price is \$125. These combined services will be available beginning in February.

Where possible, we order organic herbs, essential oils, hydrosols, massage oils, etc. I have created facial formulas for (a) dry or mature skin (vata), (b) sensitive skin (pitta), and (c) oily skin (kapha). We'll do a brief evaluation to decide what is best for your skin, including the possibility of a combination of those formulas. We mix the ingredients for the masks, exfoliation, and toner on the spot, so no preservatives!

If you have problem skin (e.g., acne, eczema), you may want to consider purchasing an Ayurvedic consultation to address diet, lifestyle, and perhaps herbal recommendations. I will then make up a set of customized skin care products for you to use at home. Since you will not be paying for packaging or marketing, these materials will be substantially less expensive than you can buy at the store.

I am already thinking ahead now toward gearing up for our Valentine marketing campaign. If you are thinking this might be a nice Valentine gift for your sweetheart, you may want to take advantage of our introductory price and buy an early gift certificate prior to December 31. However, if you don't make that deadline, even at \$75 – the facial is a great deal.

In summary, give yourself (or someone you love) the gift of health by considering the health of skin in your diet, lifestyle, skin care products, and treatments.

**** None of these items or the descriptive statements are intended to treat, diagnose, cure, or prevent any disease. They are not meant to be substitutes for your regular medical care. The statements in this handout have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. However, this knowledge has been used for thousands of years with a positive track record. These procedures are very gentle and, like most all Ayurvedic remedies, are meant to have no side effects. However, if you have any question about the safety of these items for you or the person you are gifting, please consult with a physician.**

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