

The Healing Touch of Ayurveda

by Tharuka Dissanaike



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The stress and tensions of everyday life in this fast-paced modern world are enormous. From the crack of dawn to long past sundown people seem to rush

around at the workplace and even at home, battling city traffic and juggling the rising cost of living. There comes that time, that moment, when you realize you are too stressed up. Often it is in the wake of a diagnosis of some stress-related illness. Then, to add to your already tautly stretched lifestyle, there is the doctor's prescription to worry about.

Centuries before life on earth developed to this hectic pace, Ayurveda had the answer to all the ills of stress. This ancient science of medicine, practised in Southern India and Sri Lanka, used to be restricted to the traditional villages, until recently. Those people disgruntled with Western medicine, began seeking 'natural cures' as those offered by Ayurveda. Ayurveda Physicians treat a very wide range of illnesses from broken limbs, snake bite asthma to cancer.

Most importantly, for today's tension-driven world, it offers a means of relaxation and development of physical immunity to stress-related diseases and also offers cures for hypertension migraine, paralysis, rheumatism, high blood pressure, diabetes, etc.

At the Ayurvedic Dispensary and Health Centre at Mt. Lavinia, methods of 'Pancha Karma' are used for relaxation and rejuvenation and treatment of various other ailments of the body. Pancha Karma literally means the five methods of detoxification or purification of the human system. This therapy is one of the most important and advanced among Ayurvedic techniques. The Centre offers a range of services from simple head massages to seven or fourteen-day treatment courses. It was established a little over a year ago to provide services for an ever increasing European and Japanese clientele, but today, equipped with more trained staff it caters to a wider range of local and expatriate clients. The Centre is managed and marketed by Connaissance Hotel Management (Pvt) Ltd and they also have two Ayurvedic Centres in their resort hotels, Culture Club and Le Kandyan.



As one enters the modest abode which houses the Ayurvedic Centre in Mt Lavinia, one is greeted by the strains of soothing Indian music “Healing music”, said Dr P Serasinghe, Consultant Ayurvedic Physician at the Centre and the herbal aroma of Ayurvedic concoctions A symbolic depiction of the great God Brahma looks down from the doorway. Inside the spacious hallway used as a waiting room for clients, is a small shrine with statues of Lord Buddha and pictures of the Goddess of Wealth, Luxmi and the God of Medicine, Dhanvanthari. “When patients come for long term treatment, we start by making offerings to the Gods”, Dr Serasinghe said. He is a university educated Ayurvedic practitioner who has studied Ayurveda in South India and Sri Lanka.

According to him, an ayurvedic massage, sambahana, is the most rewarding way to relax after a hard day at office or at any time of stress. There are basically two types of Ayurvedic sambahana offered at the centre. One is the general ayurvedic massage using herbal oils, the other is a specialised oil treatment called Abhyanga. After both these massages the client will have a herbal bath, facial cleansing using powdered sandalwood and turmeric and body cleansing using mainly powdered mung dhal (green gram). Clients could have steam baths for an additional price. Herbal tea is served for those who seek treatment. The general sambahana routine takes roughly one and a half hours. All the time while undergoing treatment clients can listen to healing music. There are male and female trained attendants to cater to clients of both sexes. “Repeating this sambahana routine, regularly, even once a

month is sufficient to keep a person in good health”, Dr Serasinghe said.



The centre has two rooms for massage and bath routines and another room for the steam bath. The steam is sent from underneath a wooden bed. The person will lie on a wooden sheath, on a bed of leaves, and steam made by boiling together various roots will be sent from underneath the bed. The mixture for the herbal bath and the oils and powders used at the centre are all made by Dr. Serasinghe according to ancient ayurvedic recipes from ingredients found mostly from the forest land around the Culture Club Resort.

In addition to the sambahana, the centre offers specialised treatment courses lasting several weeks or months. The selective ‘Pancha Karma’ programme which is recommended for general good health is a process of an oil and sweda or sweat treatment, followed by mild internal cleansing. This type of treatment is determined by the physician by examining the patient. A more advanced procedure is the complete detoxification and immunity development programme, where methods of ‘Pancha Karma’ are selected by the physician by determining the client’s body type, constitution and condition. Pancha Karma as said earlier, denotes five methods of cleansing or purification. These include therapeutic vomiting, purgation, nasal administration, oil treatment and decoction and also blood letting using leeches. There are also other methods of oil pouring, where ayurvedic oil is prepared to drip

onto the shirodhara (forehead) or sarvangadhara (body). Herbal sponging of the body using leaves, seeds or a special type of milk rice is also a specialised treatment offered at the centre.

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The advantages of the Pancha Karma treatment are many. Primarily it reduces stress and induces relaxation and restfulness. There is a general reduction of stress-related diseases. The ageing process is slowed down. Immunity develops. Externally it promotes a clear complexion and healthy, wrinkle-free skin. Ayurvedic treatment is not simply a cure for ills but is better used as a way of preventing diseases and keeping healthy.

The charges at the centre for a general sambahana plus bath and cleansing is Rs 500/-, Abhyanga treatment with herbal bath costs Rs 750/-, massage with steam bath. costs Rs 750/-. The long term treatment procedure is determined according to the client. Dr. Serasinghe also offers additional treatment through yoga and meditation, aroma therapy, gem therapy, astrology and vital point (marma) therapy.

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