



Opinion

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Panchakarma – What Benefits Will I Experience?

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According to classical medical thinking of Ayurvedic medicine, the body functions through various channel systems called „Srotamsi“, containing both microscopic and macroscopic structures such as the respiratory system, lymphatic/circulatory system, reproductive system, and nervous systems, among others.

These channels function as innumerable psycho-biological processes such as enzyme production, neuro-transmitter secretion, hormonal intelligence, respiratory capacity and digestive assimilation/elimination, immune power among others. These act rhythmically and in concert with one another to perform complex decision-making regarding the supply of nutrients, filtration of toxins, excretion of wastes and much more.

If these waste materials are insufficiently metabolized, toxins or incompletely processed foods and experiences can become deposited in weak areas of the body. If unaddressed these can become a disease. Weak zones occur in the body due genetic factors or more commonly, lifestyle factors, such as unhealthy food choices, stress, or environmental influences. These toxins or unprocessed metabolic deposits can cloud the normal psycho-biological cellular intelligence.

Panchakarma Therapy of ancient Ayurveda, the world's oldest holistic health science, is the accumulated experience of millennia to help the accumulated toxins to be expelled, thus supporting metabolic restoration and acuity.

Some benefits of Panchakarma:

- Helps restore metabolic power.
- Eliminates toxins, strengthens tissue functions.
- Helps balance all three doshas.

- Improves mental clarity, awareness, and forgiveness
- Reduces dependence on alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.
- Helps implement healthy diet and lifestyle.
- Reduces stress, improves relaxation & tolerance.
- Slows the ageing process and increases the lifespan.
- Increases the skin's glow, luster and immunity.
- Boosts body immunity and energy level.
- Improves strength, endurance, energy and vitality.

Panchakarma therapy is both preventative for healthy people to maintain and improve excellent cellular function, and curative for those experiencing disease. It is a highly complex and sophisticated science of purification of the body/mind channel systems and is therefore best supervised/performed by a senior clinician.

The medical scriptures of Ayurveda (yes, it is a spiritual science of the soul's human experience and not a mechanical approach to health) give the example of a diseased person's body as a soiled cloth, unable to accurately render the dye colors. To succeed in assimilating the true color (spiritual truth or self-realization), the cloth must first become clean.

Panchakarma science describes the preparatory actions required to cleanse the body before starting a rejuvenation process, when the herbal and mineral medicines can penetrate to the deeper tissues. The detoxification process involves three main stages:

- Purvakarma - preparatory actions performed before the detoxification processes, such as dietary adjustments, pre-oleation and abhyanga (oil massage).

- Panchakarma - the main detoxifying actions, which are five in number (basti, virechan, vaman, rakta moksha, nasya). The practitioner can choose any of these detoxifying methods according to the disease, the current state of the „doshas“ (humors) and psychological preparedness.

- Rasayana - restorative, rejuvenating measures including diet, supplements and lifestyle choices implemented following the detoxification process.

The Purvakarma steps help soften and oleate the channels and toxins, so the toxins can more easily detach and be eliminated during treatment phase, thus increasing bodily metabolic fire or „agni“. Later, the whole body is oleated internally and externally with medicated oil or ghee, called „snehan“.

“Administering small quantities of medicated oil or ghee internally does internal oleation. The physician determines the duration of internal oleation and the quantity and type of medicated oil or ghee after analyzing the body constitution of the patient. The patient has to eat liquid food or light food on the day prior to internal oleation.

After consuming the medicated oil or ghee the patient is encouraged to sip warm water frequently. When medicated oil or ghee is completely digested, the patient is advised to consume light food”, says Dr. Savitha Suri, experienced panchakarma practitioner.

Following individualized oil massage therapy, the body or body part is exposed to heat through steam bath or other heating methods according to the physician’s choice. This process of exposing body to heat is called as „swedan“ or sudation (sweating) therapy. Both snehan and swedan help to soften the channels and unclog the toxins. Elimination of toxins becomes easy when channels are soft, and toxins are loose. Utvartana or introduction of dry herbal medicines via the skin may follow.

A strict diet and lifestyle are to be followed throughout these three stages of treatment. During the rejuvenation phase, the digestive power is brought back to normalcy. Medicines are

administered to rejuvenate the body or to treat the disease. During the three phases of panchakarma, these restrictions are to be observed:

1. Avoid cold exposure internally and externally.
2. Avoid sex, bad news, loud noise, stress.
3. Avoid daytime sleeping - rest when tired, but don’t sleep.
4. Avoid suppression of natural urges such as sneezing, coughing, flatulence, etc.
5. Avoid being awake at night after 10pm.
6. Avoid indigestible foods; favor foods that balance the doshas.
7. Avoid strenuous exercise (restorative yoga in moderation at a right time is OK)

Some contra-indications for Panchakarma therapy are:

- Menstruation, pregnancy, lactation.
- HIV, AIDS, tuberculosis.
- Morbid obesity, emaciation.
- Hypertension, congestive heart disease, angina.
- Active infection, open lesions.
- Cancer of skin, lungs, testicles, lymph.
- Intense grief.

In these cases, palliation of the dosha precedes panchakarma treatment.

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Conflicts of Interest

None.