

# THE LONGEVITY FORMULA

Ayurvedic Principles to Reduce  
Inflammation, Increase Cellular  
Repair, and Live with Vitality

AVANTI KUMAR-SINGH, MD



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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

**B**efore we begin this journey together toward health and longevity, I'd love for you to keep a few things in mind. First, the longevity practices included in this book draw from Ayurveda and yoga, the rich heritage of my ancestors. While these practices have been adapted for modern use, their roots lie deep in time-honored wisdom. Although the origins of this wisdom go beyond the scope of this book, I encourage you to research them for yourself for a deeper, more well-rounded perspective on why these practices work and have withstood the test of time.

Second, I recognize that not all practices will be available to or helpful to everyone, although I have tried to make them as accessible as possible to all. In addition, the information presented does not constitute health or medical advice. The content of this book is for informational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any condition or disease. Please consult your physician before beginning any new practices or suggestions.

Finally, given the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of scientific research, it's possible that new discoveries may emerge between the writing and publication of this book. The insights and data presented here are reflective of the latest research available at the time of writing. I've endeavored to strike a thoughtful balance between modern science and ancient wisdom, integrating insights from both worlds to offer you a comprehensive guide. This book aims to be rigorous yet accessible and informative yet practical for real-life application. And while I believe I've met all of these criteria, ultimately you will be the judge of whether I've hit the mark.

# INTRODUCTION

## How Did We Get Here?

**W**e're sicker than we've ever been while living longer than we've ever lived. This strange conundrum has created a major health crisis, especially in the Western world. There's been an increase in preventable chronic diseases, made worse by the yearslong COVID-19 pandemic. And this all comes with a cost.

As we age, we tend to take more trips to the doctor and emergency room and have more prescription refills, hospital stays, and post-discharge rehabilitation. One in six Americans has a chronic disease, defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as a condition lasting one year or longer that limits activities of daily living and/or requires ongoing medical attention.<sup>1</sup> According to the National Council on Aging, 80 percent of adults over the age of sixty-five have at least one chronic disease, and 68 percent have two or more.<sup>2</sup> By 2027, national health spending is projected to reach 19.4 percent of GDP (\$6 trillion), largely due to the aging population and age-related diseases.<sup>3</sup>

We need a better way.

Although as a collective we are living longer, we are not staying healthy just as long. And contrary to what you may have come to know, there's a difference between life span and *health span*. Life span is how long you stay alive, while health span is the period of life spent in good health. With the right tools, your health span never has to

stop, regardless of your age. It is possible to experience longevity and live vibrantly and functionally well into your elder years. This occurs when your health span *equals* your life span.

From a Western perspective, aging is synonymous with deterioration, whether it's the loss of physical and mental function, our importance in both professional and personal roles, or our family and community support. As we age, we tend to lose our purpose as citizens, instead spending our days popping pills, living in nursing homes, and getting sicker as we await the inevitable. The quality of life we once hoped we'd reach by "working so hard" never seems to come. As a result, many elders in Western society can feel like they've been duped, yet they are too sick to do anything about it.

From an Eastern perspective, however, elders are still able to function as they age, even if they are a little slower or weaker. Aging isn't something to fear but rather something to embrace with open arms. Elders remain important figures in their communities and families, and are sought out for advice and insight by those who are younger. As a result, elders tend to still feel a sense of purpose, often live in groups, and spend their time focusing on feeling good instead of fixating on what feels bad.

It's no secret that there's a vast difference between Western and Eastern medicine, and I've been lucky enough to experience both as an emergency room physician and a practitioner of the healing system of my ancestors. Instead of choosing just one, I've opted to embrace both, bridging the gap between them for lasting, vibrant health. And it all starts with something called Ayurveda.

## **What Is Ayurveda?**

Over five thousand years old, Ayurveda is considered one of the oldest systems of healing and was first recorded in India in the Vedic texts in 3000 BCE. The essence of Ayurveda, translated as "the science of life" or "the knowledge of longevity," is that we are not separate from nature; instead, we are a microcosm of the macrocosm. Because it contains the roots of many other healing systems, including traditional



Chinese medicine and Western medicine, Ayurveda is considered by many to be the “mother of all healing.”

While Ayurveda has been around for centuries, many of us don’t understand its multitude of longevity and health benefits. In this day and age, we often only look to and consider the data and scientific studies to tell us what to do to relieve our symptoms and decrease illness. But what if we also started to look to collective human experience to tell us what to do to heal and increase our overall health?

Unlike other modalities, Ayurveda *shows* us how to live with the daily and seasonal rhythms of nature, how to use food as medicine, and how to increase the flow of vital energy (prana) to balance our symptoms through medical, naturopathic, and anecdotal means. It is a universal, collective truth that has been passed down for thousands of years and is a part of our essential essence and humanity, whether you intentionally use it or not. Contrary to what many people believe, however, Ayurveda is not opposed to Western medicine. In fact, because it is holistic, Ayurveda welcomes the integration of drugs, procedures, and surgeries when they will help the patient. In addition, Ayurveda is not synonymous with natural, alternative, or complementary medicine. It may use such treatments, but it also uses conventional treatments.

In 2017, the Nobel Prize was awarded to scientists for research on circadian medicine, the principles of which are found in the Ayurvedic clock that details how to live in sync with nature (see chapter 8). Evidence of the “gut-brain connection” has been duplicated in dozens of studies as well, giving scientific evidence that digestion is indeed the seat of health (more on this later). And the tools of yoga are perhaps the most well-studied and well-accepted Ayurvedic remedies used in today’s Western medicine. There is undeniable proof of the healing effects of breath, postures, and meditation on practically every system in the human body and mind, and Ayurveda has noted these benefits for millennia.

## Ayurveda Is Connection

If I asked you what nature is, you'd probably tell me that nature is the sun, moon, plants, trees, lakes, oceans, animals, and insects, right? And you'd be correct; nature is all of these things. But what if I told you that we, as human beings, are also nature? In Ayurveda, nature is everything outside of us and it also *is* us. We are one with all of nature at the most fundamental level because we're made of the same raw materials: the five elements—space, air, fire, water, and earth—in different combinations. In other words, we as human beings are a microcosm of the macrocosm of nature.

### DID YOU KNOW?

When we connect to nature, we are actually connecting to the pulse, or resonance, of Earth, which was discovered by the physicist Winfried Schumann in 1952. The consequently named Schumann resonance, a frequency of 7.83 hertz, is the exact same frequency as the alpha waves emitted from the human brain. In alpha state, we are more relaxed and our physiology becomes balanced. Conversely, decreased time in alpha state causes imbalance, stress, and anxiety, which then weakens the immune system. This link between Earth's "pulse" and humans was further proven in a study by Rutger Wever twenty years later. Wever looked at what happened when subjects were housed in an underground bunker for four weeks and blocked from receiving Earth's natural frequency of 7.83 hertz. Over time, they developed headaches and became emotionally distressed. However, their symptoms were lifted when Wever added the Schumann frequency back into the environment through a manmade transmitter tuned to 7.83 hertz.<sup>4</sup> In essence, when we are connected to the pulse of nature, our health is supported.

Unfortunately, many of us have lost our connection to nature and, as a result, our health. Many of us go to work early in the morning when it's still dark outside and leave late at night when it's dark again, quite literally never seeing the light of day. We stare at our phones and screens all day and become blue-light toxic, which signals the wrong hormones—that is, hormones released at the wrong times and for the wrong reasons—and prevents our bodies from functioning properly. We eat strawberries and blueberries in winter by freezing them in the summer. We eat mangoes that don't grow where we live by having them flown into our grocery stores. We cook with microwave ovens and consume processed food that has been stored in boxes or wrappers to save time. We climb rotating stairs and walk on moving belts for exercise. The list goes on and on. Our days have been designed around technology and convenience that was meant to improve our lives but instead has destroyed our health. All because we have lost our connection to nature.

One of the keys to healing with Ayurveda is maintaining our connection to nature and living in harmony with the daily and seasonal rhythms that are created by the movement of the Earth in relation to the sun—rhythms of nature created by nature. When we rise, sleep, eat, play, and work in harmony with the light of day, the dark of night, and the change of seasons, we are connected to what is outside of us—the sun and the moon, plants and trees, lakes and oceans, animals and insects . . . all of nature.

When we don't live in harmony with nature, we progress from toxin overload to symptoms to illness and, finally, to chronic disease. In Ayurveda, the road from health to illness is not a straight one but instead a progression through six stages that lie on a continuum. Health and illness are not black-and-white constructs in Ayurveda but instead have many shades of gray.

The road from health to illness starts with the buildup of toxins (ama). When toxins overwhelm the human system, symptoms appear. These can be low-grade, nonspecific symptoms such as “not feeling well” or “not feeling right,” or more specific symptoms such as anxiety,

depression, gastrointestinal (GI) distress, weight gain, headaches, sinus congestion, joint pain, and so on. If we course-correct and begin to decrease the toxic load at this stage of the process, we can avoid progression to illness and chronic disease. Ultimately the journey in Ayurveda is the daily practice of course correction between toxin elimination, which creates health, and toxin accumulation, which creates illness.

Ayurveda takes the five elements of nature and combines them into three energies (doshas). Space and air combine to create the energy of Vata, which is all about movement. Fire and water combine to create Pitta, which is the energy of transformation. And finally, water and earth combine to create Kapha, which is the energy of structure. Each of these energies has a primary function that correlates back to the elements that combine to create it. These three doshas are how a traditional Ayurvedic practitioner (vaidya) classifies a patient in order to recommend remedies for imbalances showing up as symptoms.

I mention this because many of my students tell me that they've taken "dosha quizzes" but have no idea how to use this information. If you haven't taken a dosha quiz, please resist the temptation. And if you have already taken a dosha quiz, please ignore the results you received for now. In this book I have purposely presented these concepts in a way that is more accessible and useful, emphasizing the qualities instead of the doshas themselves because understanding the qualities is how you heal with Ayurveda (more on this in chapter 4).

So what does all of this have to do with longevity? I'm getting to it, I promise.

I have spent my entire life devoted to the art and science of healing, first as a Western doctor and then by dipping back into my roots as an Ayurvedic practitioner. Though I had already written a book about Ayurveda, I started thinking about this book on longevity as I was approaching my fiftieth birthday. I was reflecting on my life thus far—the career path I'd chosen, the practice I'd built, the book I'd written, the podcast I'd created, the family I'd grown, the friends I'd made, the relationships I'd maintained, the places I'd traveled, the experiences I'd had—and I was eager to step into the next phase—or era—of my life.

Four months into writing this book I felt a small nodule in my right breast. No other signs. No other symptoms. I thought it was nothing more than a cyst, as I had a history of fibrocystic breasts since my early twenties. When I went in for my routine mammogram, I wasn't alarmed when the radiologist said he wanted to do a breast ultrasound, as this was the drill I'd gone through many times before with my "dense" breast tissue. However, when the radiologist began taking more images and measurements during the ultrasound than normal, I became increasingly worried because I knew he had found something wrong.

Two days later, I had two biopsies in my right breast and another in my right axilla. A week later, I was meeting with a conventional oncologist, an integrative oncologist, and a breast surgeon. Much to my dismay, my body was diagnosed with breast cancer, and suddenly everything I believed was put into question. How did *I*, someone who practiced integrative medicine, who had so many tools for healing, who had lived her life based on the principles in this book, now have a breast cancer diagnosis?

I have never smoked, I hardly drink, I eat a healthy vegetarian diet, and I manage my stress well. I have no family history and no genetic factors for breast cancer. With this surprise diagnosis, everything in my world shuddered to a halt. I was confused, scared, and overwhelmed by all that comes with the word *cancer*. All we ascribe to it. All that it means in our Western world. Instead of panicking, I stilled myself and asked what my body was trying to tell me. Had I been so busy building a life and a family, writing, teaching, doctoring, and going, going, going that I had stopped paying attention to my healing? Had I inadvertently stopped connecting with nature and myself?

As I examined my life, I realized that though I integrated healthy tools, I also lived in a polluted urban city that didn't often connect me to nature on a daily basis. I had an increased toxic load, a crammed schedule, and more stress than I probably liked to admit. I had emotions I had never dealt with—anger and loneliness from my childhood, anxiety and fear from the health challenges of my now

adult children during their teen years, and deep grief and sadness from the loss of my beloved dog, Mia, just four months before my diagnosis. While building my successful life, I'd let slip some of the very principles I know to be true.

I thought about the progression from health to illness that Ayurveda teaches; perhaps the elimination of toxins through my daily meditation, healthy diet, and deeply meaningful work couldn't keep pace with the accumulation of toxins created by my environment, schedule, stress, and undigested emotions. Regardless of the reasons behind it, my diagnosis was a reminder for me to return to my roots, return to what I know, and heal my body and mind.

First, I decided to clear my schedule of everything—social events, patient consultations, student workshops, podcast recordings, and even writing this book. For almost six weeks I stopped everything and focused solely on treatment and recovery. In stopping everything, however, I realized that I also stopped the flow of life. I had stopped moving with life and had stopped the flow of prana, the ever-moving, ever-creating life-force energy that permeates all of us. Like a river, if it is blocked, it will create new pathways to continue its path forward. If it is allowed to flow freely, it will wash away what is not needed and provide water and nutrients to what is. When we move with nature, we move with life. It is imperative that we move with the vital life-force energy that is within us and that wants to flow through us. This is what creates health. Because all of life is a healing journey.

Longevity requires this movement: movement of our physical bodies, movement of our thoughts, movement and evolution of our souls. Longevity also requires connection: connection to nature; to ourselves; to others; to a higher power; to the universal life-force energy, prana. The secrets to longevity are actually in plain sight when we look to ancient healing modalities like Ayurveda.

This is what this book will teach you. Beyond the science of longevity and the mechanisms of aging, you'll learn how to move the life force within you to create health and live better longer. It took a

cancer diagnosis to remind me how magnificent the body really is and how we all have the capacity to heal, whether it's from a stomachache or a disease.

As I write this, I am still in treatment, but I am confident that I am learning and relearning what I need to live a longer, better, healthier life and that if I return to what I know—*that I am nature*—the healing will come.

I hope it comes for you too.