

DETOX TRADITIONS

Cultural Traditions

AYURVEDA: TRADITIONAL MEDICINE OF INDIA

According to Ayurvedic (“Science of Life”) teaching, the fundamental cause of disease is toxins in the system. Initiating any form of treatment without first removing these toxins from the system is believed to push the toxins deeper into the tissues. The problem will then manifest again in the same or a different form. The two types of Ayurvedic treatment are elimination of toxins, Pancha Karma, and neutralization of toxins, Palliation. Similarly, repression of negative emotions will result in imbalance leading to disease-causing toxins. Through awareness and observation of these emotions, they can be released. Pancha Karma (“Five Actions”): Physical elimination processes that are cleansing to the body, mind, and emotions:

1. **Therapeutic Vomiting:** to eliminate mucous-causing excess “kapha,” which leads to congestion of the lungs.
2. **Purgatives (Laxatives):** to eliminate excess bile that has accumulated in the gallbladder, liver, or intestine.
3. **Medicated Enemas:** For “vata” disorders, medicinals such as sesame oil, calamus oil, or herbal decoctions are introduced into the rectum.
4. **Nasal Administration:** to eliminate an excess of bodily humors accumulated in the throat, nose, sinuses, or head.
5. **Blood-Letting:** to eliminate toxins that are absorbed into the bloodstream from the gastrointestinal tract. These toxins can accumulate in parts of the body and cause disease.

Blood purification is also indicated, using blood-purifying herbs.

Palliation: After the elimination of the most serious toxins, the process of palliation is employed to neutralize the toxins. Palliation includes: Fasting to stimulate digestion, or the digestive fire to burn away toxins in the intestines; internal use of hot, pungent herbs; exercise; sunbathing; sitting in fresh air.

HIPPOCRATIC MEDICINE IN EUROPE

The ancient Greeks formulated the first principles of scientific medicine. They believed that maintenance of health depended on an equilibrium between the four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. Early treatment focused on cleansing and balancing techniques to re-establish humoral equilibrium.

- **Enemas and cathartics:** to cleanse the digestive tract.
- **Emetics:** inducing vomiting to cleanse the body of harmful accumulations.
- **Bloodletting:** removing “bad blood” to cleanse and balance the humors.
- **Massage:** to help eliminate wastes from the muscles and to encourage peristalsis.
- **Baths:** to purify and cleanse the body. Hot baths induce sweating, which was considered therapeutic and cleansing. In medieval times, people went to bath houses for their health; there they could receive massage, bleeding, and herbal tonics.
- **Fasting:** for balancing the humors, not as popular among physicians as bleeding, emetics, and cathartics.
- **Counter-irritation:** to create balance by releasing the humors from the body.

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NATIVE AMERICAN MEDICINE

Purification Rituals:

- **Smudging:** The smoke from burning sage, a protection herb, is waved around a person, to eliminate negative energy and drive away the forces that cause illness.
- **Sweeping:** Aromatic herbs are swept over a person to clean out the bad spirits and invite the good spirits to enter and become partners with the person.
- **Sweatlodge:** Physically this is similar to a steam sauna, which causes sweating and therefore the release of toxins from the body. In addition, a sweatlodge serves to release mental/emotional and spiritual toxins. One leaves all negativity behind when entering and emerges newborn.
- **Fasting:** Fasting is used as a way to purify oneself before ritual ceremonies such as a Sun Dance. During the four-day Sun Dance, participants dance and pray to the Creator to send the suffering of others to them. Participants endure great pain in order to assure the survival of their people.
- **Navajo Sweat-emetic Rite:** This purification ritual involves cleansing through perspiration and vomiting. Participants gather with a healer around a fire in a hut called a hogan. They drink a liquid made from emetic herbs while sweating from the heat of the fire.

NATURAL HYGIENE

The Natural Hygiene school of thought states that health depends on maintaining balance in one's diet, environment, activities, and psychology. Periodic fasting is viewed as part of a healthy lifestyle. Fasting is done with water intake only, along with rest. Therapeutic fasting, monitored by a health care professional, is designed to create conditions of the maximum physiological rest possible, increasing the body's ability to heal itself.

TRADITIONAL HERBAL MEDICINE (CROSS-CULTURAL)

The traditional belief is that the failure of the eliminatory functions leads to the conversion from acute to chronic illness. Therefore, chronic illness is treated by gently opening up the channels of elimination.

- **Mild laxatives:** to ensure bowels move effectively. Often started before cholagogues are administered.
- **Gentle cholagogues:** to massage liver into improving detoxification.
- **Mild diuretics:** to help move fluid and acid-waste accumulations. Often started before lymphatics are administered.
- **Lymphatics:** to increase lymph drainage.
- **Expectorants:** to help clear congested airways.
- **Alteratives** (a.k.a. blood cleansers, depuratives): to nudge eliminations into whichever channel(s) is (are) appropriate at the time. These remedies act differently depending on the condition. They may have diuretic or laxative effect, or increase circulation (blood flow or lymph drainage.)
- **Diaphoretics:** used cautiously with heating treatments to induce therapeutic fever.

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TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Acupuncture: Over two thousand years old, this method seeks to restore and balance the flow of energy through the body.

Religious Traditions

JUDAISM

Shabbat: Also known as the Sabbath, this is the period from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday, during which no work is allowed. Instead believers attend prayer services, visit friends and family, read the Torah, and rest.

Rosh Hashanah: This is a two-day celebration of the Jewish New Year, during which no work is performed. It begins a ten-day period of repentance leading up to Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur: This is a Day of Atonement, from sundown to sundown the following day. During this time, believers do not eat or drink, do not work, and repent for misdeeds of the preceding year. They sing the “kol nidrei,” asking for absolution from religious vows they have failed to keep in the past year.

Fasting: Many of the minor Jewish festivals include a period of fasting and abstinence from work.

CHRISTIANITY

Sabbath: Like Judaism, Christianity teaches that the seventh day of the week is a holy day on which no work should be done. The Old Testament teaches that God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day.

Lent: This is a six-week period of fasting, reflection, and repentance lasting from Ash Wednesday to Palm Sunday. It serves as spiritual preparation for Easter. Fasting is observed differently by different Christian denominations; some followers may give up meat, for instance. Advent: This is a four-week period of preparation for the celebration of Christmas. Orthodox believers observe Advent with a forty-day fast from meat and dairy products.

Fasting: Many other Christian observances, especially among Orthodox believers, incorporate fasting along with prayer and repentance. There are many examples of fasting in the stories of the Bible. Before Jesus became a teacher, he spent forty days alone in the desert, fasting and praying.

ISLAM

Ramadan: During the month of Ramadan, adult Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, and sex from sunrise to sundown. It is a period of reflection, repentance, and purification. The month ends with the sight of the new moon.

Ashura: Muslims fast for two days preceding the festival of Ashura.

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HINDUISM

Mahashivaratri: This new-moon festival starts with a 24-hour fast. Offerings are made to the god Shiva, and the fast is broken at sunrise.

Rama Naumi: This festival celebrates the birth of the god Rama. During the eight days preceding, devotees fast for varying lengths of time.

SHINTO

Purity is very important in Shinto. Before entering a shrine, worshippers perform a ritual rinsing of the mouth and washing of the hands to symbolize internal and external cleansing. In one purification ritual, a priest recites prayers and passes a purification stick over the head of the worshipper to draw out pollution.

BUDDHISM

Meditation: Meditation is used to free the mind from passion, aggression, ignorance, jealousy, and pride.

Chanting: Chanting is an important form of Buddhist practice used to focus the mind. For example, monks perform the chanting ceremony called “Paritta” for protection from negative influences.

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