



Sung Choi
PharmD Student Class of 2027
University of Findlay, Findlay, OH, USA 45840
Email – chois1@findlay.edu

Ayurveda is the holistic medical practice from India.. Ayurveda views a human body as a dynamic equilibrium of 4 elements and correlate pathophysiological outcomes with the imbalance of those elements. This integrative approach in Ayurveda, leads to treatment regimen that emphasizes the multiple components of lifestyle changes incorporating meditation for mind-body balance, yoga for balancing various muscles within a body, and change in dietary regimen by adding medicinal herbs of food origins. Hardly a ‘pill’ is given to treat a ‘symptom’.

I am a recent convert to being a big believer of the Ayurveda approach. It is now my new way of living that I have adapted about a year ago prior to this class. My mentor and life coach at work is certified for Ayurveda teaching. She went through Ayurveda Dosha assessment with me, and she has been providing various Ayurveda remedies, with special emphasis on decreasing my pitta for a better-balanced life. I am a typical pitta overload, I have been suffering from multiple autoimmune-related symptoms such as flaring up dermatitis, rheumatoid arthritis, and uncontrolled allergy-like reactions with unknown triggers. My past life-habits had not been very helpful to balance pitta component in me because I am very into spicy foods, love caffeinated drinks (indeed heavily addicted with unbearable withdrawal if consumption is interrupted), a heavy alcohol drinker till several years ago, and am always seeking highly pressured fast pace environment. So, I was instantly drawn to this webinar on Ayurveda and was able to relate myself to pitta induced immune over-reaction. I have adapted a

handful of calming teas, specific crystal, color, multiple aromatherapeutic oils for topical use, and deep breathing practices following Ayurveda guidance to ease my autoimmune flares. I am currently in the process of learning to detoxify and meditate in the Ayurvedic way.

New way of Ayurveda’s diagnosis, associating elevated pitta with inflammation is certainly not something we find in a conventional western medicinal training. I have been in western style healthcare industry for my entire career and am, by default, a scientist trained in western style. I am fully aware that Ayurveda can be easily seen as a pseudo-science through the lens of western medicine, which I did when Ayurveda was first introduced. All it took was to be open-minded and trying it out. Ayurveda is certainly not a magic pill to instantly cure all, but I can comfortably say it is the very basis of human health, as also well described in the webinar. The more we understand about the nature of complex diseases such as autoimmune syndromes¹, of which the pathophysiological outcome is not the result of one causation, but rather the sum of all parts of the body’s reaction, aka, the result of imbalance of the body (the core of Ayurveda). This webinar does a great job to capture the essence of Ayurveda, the multi-component complexity of modern disease like autoimmune syndromes, and how the holistic point of view of Ayurveda in understanding the human body as one interconnected system to interpret and address pathophysiologic symptoms works well with such conditions.

Indeed, this holistic concept is no longer a new thing on the street. Ever since the term ‘well-being’ became popular, many non-traditional healthcare approaches have been gaining popularity amongst the general public. Yoga, super foods, healthy diets, and associated dietary supplements, meditation, and the recognition of non-western medication practices such as acupuncture, medicinal massages, or Chinese/Indian medicinal practices, are widely spread. Despite the insufficient traditional way of evidence-based analysis (efficacy and safety studies), the general public has embraced and adapted such ways to manage their health. To respond to that, the US medical system, notorious for slow reimbursement of new health treatments, has been recognizing and reimbursing these practices.



Unfortunately, the US is currently experiencing growth pain in adapting such a new way of health management. In other words, the demand for non-conventional, integrative health has been established, but the supply and associated regulatory oversight are not yet fully in place

After the webinar, I definitely wanted to try out one of herbs mentioned in the webinar on my own. Ashwagandha was my particular interest because it was presented to balance out overacting pita effectively, in alignment with my on-going issues. Ashwagandha is also reported to have various endocrine health benefits², some of which are highly prevalent in the US aging adult population including myself. However, in reality, it was not very straightforward as picking up the supplement from drug store, try it out, and become healthy ever after.

First, most, if not all, herbs are treated as food items. In other words, no rigorous safety testing is mandated in order to be available in the US market as long as the main component of a given product has been used as dietary items in the past. It makes sense in some way because, for example, no one is going to argue against the safety of blueberry consumption, knowing blueberry has been consumed for thousands of years by both humans and animals without safety concern. However, on the other hand, this simple approach by the FDA fails to address the fundamental difference between food items per se and processed food items. For example, having one full container of blueberry consumed every day sounds harmless, but does the same safety standard apply to one pill of blueberry concentrate that is the equivalent of 100 containers of blueberry? Many dietary supplements that are advertised as a superfood are either the concentrated extract or pills/capsules packed with condensed dry-power that allows the user to consume a large quantity of a given food item in a convenient way, that is not feasible when the same food item is consumed in its natural form. Long-term safety of such a large quantity of consumption is lacking but was overlooked by the FDA because of the simple annotation of herbs as a daily food item. Reactive FDA response, aka, taking actions only after enough health concerns

are identified for a given dietary supplement does not provide enough of a safety net in my opinion.

Second, the preparation of herbal products is treated as food processing, not as medicinal preparation. As a result, the manufacturing process and quality standard are not regulated as strictly as western style medication (aka drug). Although there is a voluntary quality certificate to follow a high-quality manufacturing process for drugs such as United State Pharmacopeia (UPS) seal, the vast of dietary products do not have this seal. The situation is worse if the product is manufactured outside of US and imported back to the US market. Foreign imports goods (food items) receive much lesser scrutiny than the products made in the US. No traceability on how the product was manufactured other than the origin of country of the product. Presumably due to the cheap production and raw material costs, many herbal products are made abroad even though it is sold under a US brand name. Even though it is made in the US, herbal materials are mostly imported from abroad, likely from developing countries with lesser regulation on environmental pollutions and food safety. Because of the nature of herbal products being plants, environmental pollution and growth conditions can easily contaminate herbal products. Pesticides, heavy metals, microbial growths, arsenic toxins, and hazardous chemicals with questionable quality can be easily combined with herbal materials without proper oversight. How do US customers know that a neatly packaged herbal supplement made with foreign imports with no traceability of agricultural growth, handling and environments, is safe to consume? This is in particular concerning for any product advertised as immune boosters because the very customers who are seeking to boost immune via such products are most vulnerable to such contaminants. Although I was able to find a short-term safety study on Ashwagandha³, I was also able to find reports^{4,5} of incidences of liver injuries caused by Ashwagandha dietary supplement. On a personal note, this was the primary reason why my healthcare provider is against me starting any type of herbal medication, including Ashwagandha supplement, because of my compromised hepatic functions, in spite of all the benefits that can be brought by Ashwagandha.

However, such concerns do not disprove the



authenticity of Ayurveda's healthcare approach or beneficial effect coming from the medicinal herb itself. As mentioned, I find that we are in the growth pain of disproportionality between demand and poor supply. I firmly believe that time will resolve it. History repeats itself. It took generations for our society to build the safety system for western medication to be safely administered, and the same will go with medicinal herbs, maybe much faster after lesson-learned from the past. I am a strong advocate that the medicinal herb should be held accountable to the same regulatory oversight as western medication. Once we overcome the current imbalance of supply issues, medicinal herbs can stand side by side with western medication for its pivotal role of prophylaxis and general well-being.

Modern medicine has already turned a corner and in the transition from a reactive treatment of focusing symptoms to a proactive prevention and integrative well-being management of body as a whole system. Dietary herbs play a significant and safe role in health support that can be incorporated into daily routine. Although slow, globally nations are already building standardized regulations for such items. In the meantime, my stand will be to prioritize herbal medication that can be consumed as dietary components, not as processed condensed pills of unknown origin. Trying to find the source of materials from a trustable market and, if applicable, finding the local origin will assure additional safety of herbs' integrity. Try out non-systemic route if unsure of the compatibility of a given herbal medication and commodities or medication currently being taken. For example, turmeric, a well-known immune booster and my second choice of medicinal herb to help aiding autoimmune disorder, can be topically applied to assist dermatologic flares by autoimmune diseases⁶. Aromatherapy oil and topical ointments are widely available in any Ayurveda healing centers, or, can be home-made by mixing a cream base mixed with herbs.

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