Reenita Malhotra Hora is schooled in Ayurveda, India’s tradition of wellbeing, and is a consultant to prestigious spas throughout the USA, Asia and Europe. Her work as an Ayurveda educator has taken her everywhere, from California Pacific Medical Center and UC San Francisco School of Medicine to the pages of Yoga Journal. Born in Mumbai, she now lives in Hong Kong.
For Pushpa Vij, who will always be forever young

Yaa Devi Sarvabhuteshu Vidyaroopena Sanstitha
Namastasyai Namastasyai Namastasyai Namo Namah

My respects to the Goddess who exists in life as Knowledge

– Markandeya Purana
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Ayurveda is a 5000-year-old system of medicine that has much to offer anyone in search of a healthy lifestyle today. The Sanskrit word ‘Ayurveda’ has two roots: ‘ayur’, meaning ‘life’ and ‘veda’, meaning ‘knowledge’. The systematic collection of health and healing knowledge encompassing all aspects of life and daily living has led the practice of Ayurveda to be called the ‘science of life’. A comprehensive approach, Ayurveda includes concepts of creation and energy, precepts of the moral and ethical life and recommended practices relating to nutrition, physical activity, rest, relaxation and spiritual practice. It is truly a timeless practice based on centuries of careful observation and interpretation.

In *Forever Young*, Reenita Malhotra Hora gives us a guide to the practice of Ayurveda that yokes ancient wisdom
– both knowledge and practice – with contemporary reality. She understands the challenges of modern life and provides facts and routines that are understandable, accessible and doable. She teaches that true wellbeing and beauty originate within – they cannot be achieved through anything that covers or masks who we truly are. When we feel good, we look good. Feeling good requires a commitment to what we take in (in the form of food and drink, sounds, sights); what we feel (in the form of emotions and sensations); and how we relate to everything around us. Ayurveda is about balance, relatedness, lifelong learning and daily practice.

*Forever Young*, with its time-tested approaches, practical recommendations and straightforward language, is an invaluable book for all those open to taking responsibility for their own wellbeing.

**WILLIAM B. STEWART, MD**
Medical Director
Institute for Health and Healing
California Pacific Medical Center
San Francisco, California, USA
Introduction

I grew up in Bombay – India’s most dynamic city, but also a place steeped in ancient traditions of the oldest living culture known. This contrast was also borne out in my own family, who expected that I would be educated in business and accounting before finding my place as the daughter-in-law of a Punjabi business family. I surprised my family and perhaps disappointed them by being a little too independent than they had taught me to be when I insisted on attending college in the United States. I was set on becoming a marketing professional of some sort. I saw myself as a completely modern woman.

Ayurveda was the furthest thing from my mind when I embarked on this educational adventure. After all, I had grown up with its ancient health traditions in the household. It was routine to me to practise yoga, eat chyawanprash with parathas at breakfast or oil my hair
before showering. But something happened when I went to college. In an atmosphere of intense competition and high expectations, I watched many of my friends survive on a never-ending cycle of caffeine and Tylenol. Rather than listening to the demands of their own bodies, as I had been taught to do, they were trying to override their need for sleep and for good nutrition by using synthetic solutions. And it wasn’t working – they told me over and over that they felt tired, stressed out, depleted. They looked it too. In fact, living life in overdrive has been aging people in the Western world well before their time. It was then that I began to realize how important Ayurveda is
for health, for beauty and for longevity, and that I had lived all my life taking the ancient wisdom for granted. So I surprised my family again by deciding to pursue a career in Ayurveda. After I finished college, I decided to study Ayurveda, which in India is labelled the ‘poor man’s medicine’. I knew I would become a health educator and consultant, and, above all, an ambassador for this wonderful, ancient life science that was so much a part of me and the life that all of us in India lead.

I often ask myself how I got to this point. How did I come to this crossroads of so-called modern life and the ancient traditions of Ayurveda? The answer is my family. My late grandfather, Gopal Krishan Vij, left an indelible imprint on my life and values. He was a man who lived simply and sought to achieve his full potential in whatever task he took on, from being a civil engineer to being a father. He encouraged the women in his family to be strong and smart and achieve whatever they set out to do. Along with my grandmother Pushpa, he taught us all the subtle principles of Ayurveda, so that our minds and bodies would always be healthy. My grandfather also discouraged us from vanity and self-indulgence, from devoting our energies to jewellery, make-up and fashion – he knew there was more to life than that.

Under my grandfather’s influence, the women of my family defined beauty not as something exterior, like a beautiful dress or sparkling jewels, but rather radiance that comes from health, confidence and self-esteem. My
grandfather would often describe to me his mother, my
great-grandmother, who woke early every morning to care
for her family and dressed simply in a white sari, her clean
skin reflecting the rays of the morning light: to him she was
the embodiment of this ideal. It was because of her simple
practice of Ayurvedic self-care that she not only lived a
long life but remained youthful, energetic and radiant to
the end of her days. Learning from her example, that kind
of beauty became my ideal too. In writing *Forever Young*,
my goal is to teach you the principles of Ayurveda so you
can cultivate the same radiance, wellbeing and longevity
that the women of my family demonstrated to me.

The following pages are designed to enable you to
achieve inner beauty and longevity through a balanced,
healthy, Ayurvedic lifestyle. This is a book for anyone who
wants to end the cycle of stress and exhaustion and the toll
this takes on our health and appearance by making simple,
sensible lifestyle changes. *Forever Young* is an introduction
to the principles of Ayurveda, and details how to put
them to work. In Chapter 1, you will learn about the
philosophy of Ayurveda and how it has evolved from
an ancient medicine into a staple of the contemporary
Indian household. You will learn about ojas – the life-
force or vitality that is the source of inner beauty – and
the science behind Ayurveda. Chapter 2 introduces the
doshas – the 3 mind-body energies that are a part of each
of us. You will learn how to determine which dosha is
dominant in you, the key to selecting the yoga routines
that will help you feel balanced and healthy. Chapter 3 offers recipes for traditional homemade cleansers and moisturizers for the hair, skin and body that are customized for your dosha, like a soothing milk and rice water bath (p. 58) or an exfoliating cleanser made from herbs you probably already have in your kitchen (pp. 34-37). Chapter 4 teaches you a balanced approach to fitness, focusing on yoga, which shares its origins with Ayurveda. You will learn how to choose a style of yoga practice that is right for you and the routines that are best for your body type. In Chapter 5, you will learn the principles of Ayurvedic nutrition and how to make smart choices. Chapter 6 describes seasonal practices for wellbeing, such as an at-home ‘detox retreat’, that will help you recharge your batteries. The last chapter is a guide to professional body treatments that will enhance your practice of Ayurveda.

*Forever Young* is not only an introduction to household Ayurveda, but also a potential tool for maximizing our longevity by restoring a sense of balance and sanity that is so often missing from our busy lives. The treatments and routines in this book are meant to help you be your best, feel your best and look your best – in short, to optimize the radiant youthfulness that you already have, now and forever.
What is Ayurveda?

Ayurveda is believed to be the oldest medical science in existence. Sanskrit for the ‘science of life’, it is a set of self-care guidelines that will help any person stay healthy and feel good by understanding the needs of his or her own mind and body. Ayurveda is intended to help each person be her best self – healthy, happy and radiant with beauty. Ayurvedic beauty treatments include skincare, diet, massage and exercise routines that are customized for every person to reflect their unique needs.

Ayurveda recognizes that we are all different – that each of us has a unique mind and body. After all, we look and behave differently from one another, and we all have different reactions to everyday situations. Everything from the foods we eat to the emotions we experience affects
us each in our own way. We all have our own personal definition of what it means to be happy, healthy and in balance – that is, feeling full of energy and life. And because we are each unique, we all require different treatments and remedies to help us be our best. Ayurveda as a system includes tools to help figure out what these customized treatments should be.

Ayurveda acknowledges that the mind and body are not two separate entities but are closely intertwined. We have all seen how our thinking affects our body (say, when we are worried or upset and our skin breaks out) and how our body affects our mind (like the way our self-esteem plummets when we do not get regular exercise). Ayurveda has two special terms to convey this idea. The physical or tangible body, Sthoola Sharira,
is our skin, bones and muscles – everything we would find in a Western anatomy textbook. The energetic body, Sukshna Sharira, is that with which we feel, sense, spiritualize, emote and think. So happiness and joy, emotional pain, psyche, perceptions, hunches and intuition are all considered to form part of our energetic anatomy. Ayurveda works on healing both the energetic and the physical bodies, because one can never reach its full potential if the other is not strong.

Above all, Ayurveda teaches us how to stay healthy and balanced. Ayurvedic treatments – from digestive herbal decoctions to oil massages and herbal body therapies – are intended to be gentle habits that can last a lifetime, not extreme regimes or quick fixes. Ayurveda is unlike many other health systems, which oversimplify the variety of factors that affect our health and how we feel and only address the symptoms, not the causes, of imbalance. Because many of us experience so much stress these days, and because ‘feeling stressed’ is really just another way of saying our life is out of balance, Ayurveda is more useful and important than ever before. It is the perfect antidote to stress because it addresses the whole person and how she is affected by her lifestyle.

THE ORIGINS OF AYURVEDA

Though its origins are lost to historians, Ayurveda is believed to have come from the Vedic gods over
5000 years ago, when a group of scholars and mystics met in the Himalayas to try to discover the secrets of longevity and the cures of illnesses of every kind. Through meditation and spiritual communion with the gods, the scholars and mystics arrived upon guidance for everything from everyday wellbeing to internal medicine and surgery. Ayurveda was an oral tradition in India for hundreds of years until it was collected into 3 main texts: the Charaka Samhita, the Sushruta Samhita and the Ashtanga Hridayam. The exact dates of authorship are not known, but the Charaka Samhita and the Sushruta Samhita are thought to have been written in the first few centuries BCE, with the Ashtanga Hridayam coming later, about 4900 CE. Together they form the basic compendia for Ayurvedic medicine today.

The essence of the medicine has also been captured in thousands of household traditions, some of which were incorporated into written manuscripts, and others that have simply been passed down as oral tradition. Many of the written manuscripts still exist as ‘secrets of a traditional household’; others were lost over time but the oral traditions remain ingrained into the psyche of the modern Indian way of living. While household manuscripts are often written in the vernacular, the 3 main books are written in Sanskrit verse (Sanskrit is the ancient language of India, just as Latin is of the Western world). This vivid poetry articulates Ayurvedic philosophies and concepts. For this reason, it is hard to define whether Ayurveda is
an art or a science. It might well in fact be both, as the Sanskrit verses reflect both on the theoretical aspects of Ayurveda – the art side – and the practical knowledge involved in incorporating it into daily life.

Traditionally, most Indian villages had their own Ayurvedic doctor who would advise the community about self-care practices and gather medicinal plants from the surrounding forests. This doctor would explain the meanings of the Ayurvedic sutras, or teachings, to student apprentices, who then prepared and dispensed medicines according to his instructions. In the years when India was a colony of the British Empire, the ruling powers tried to stop the practice of Ayurveda (amongst other traditional medicines) and it temporarily lost the cultural influence it once held. But after India became an independent nation in 1947, Ayurveda began to undergo a renaissance, and has since become popular all over the world.

Even today, Ayurveda is a part of everyday life in many Indian households without them even realizing it. For example, families drink water that has been stored in a copper vessel because Ayurveda recognizes that copper detoxifies the body and boosts the immune system. The sacred tulsi (basil plant), offered in prayer to the Indian god Vishnu, is typically placed in the central area of Indian homes to clarify the mind of impure thoughts and rid the environment of microbes. Finally, herbal kitchen remedies form a natural part of every Indian housewife’s repertoire: common culinary items like turmeric, ginger
and malai (dairy cream) are used for cooking, beauty treatments and to treat minor ailments.

**OJAS: THE FOUNDATION OF INNER BEAUTY**

Ayurveda teaches that health and beauty are the results of a powerful energy within us; the more of it we have in us, the better we look and feel. Maximizing this energy is the essential goal of Ayurveda. This energy is called ojas (pronounced oh-jus), which means ‘that which invigorates’. It is the life-force, the energy that flows through every person and living thing. Like Ch’i in Chinese philosophy, ojas is the force that makes us feel happy and alive. Responsible for wellness, harmony and spiritual growth, it makes our eyes shine and puts a spring in our step. A high level of ojas brings bliss and happiness, which people around us see as radiance.

Ojas connects people and living things and is present in every aspect of life, from our emotional wellbeing to the foods we eat. For example, soil with strong ojas is rich in nutrients. It has the capacity to nurture a healthy apple tree that will root itself deep in the ground and grow to a substantial height. Filled with a high level of ojas, this tree bears lush, nutritious fruit. A woman who eats the fruit absorbs not only vitamins, but ojas, which provides her, both mind and body, with strength and longevity. When her own ojas potential is maximized, she is energized, inspiring everyone around her. The wheel turns full circle
when the apple core goes into the compost heap and is recycled back into the environment, feeding the soil that gave life to the original tree.

When our ojas is low we are like dried leaves – tired, worn out, brittle. We experience a breakdown in the normal functions of the mind-body system and become susceptible to illness, both emotional and physical. The best way to keep our ojas up is to live a balanced lifestyle that is pure and close to nature. An overactive lifestyle (rajas) or a dull, inert lifestyle (tamas) both cause stress and deplete ojas. We must strive for a state of purity and balance, a third way of life called sattwa. Ayurvedic routines for personal care, both on a daily basis (dinacharya) and seasonally (ritucharya), help us stay in balance. Inner beauty will unfold naturally if you protect the mind and body against unhealthy influences and live in harmony with the natural laws of the universe.

**DOSHAS: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF BALANCE**

We know that living in balance is the way to achieving and maintaining high ojas, the ultimate destination of our Ayurvedic journey. But what does it mean to live in balance? Ayurveda teaches that each of us is a unique individual, in how we think, move, act, how we react to stress, in the foods we like to eat, in the activities we enjoy. So balance would mean something different for each person. Ayurveda can help you determine the make-
up of your mind and body – your natural tendencies and preferences. With this knowledge, it is simple to learn what to do (and what not to do) to even out those characteristics and achieve balance.

Ayurveda tells us that each person, like the world itself, is composed of 5 elements: space, air, fire, water and earth. The qualities of these elements are apparent in our physical bodies and our energetic bodies. For example, the light and mobile quality of air gives us the ability both to move our bodies and to be flexible in our thinking. The smooth and liquid quality of water gives sheen to our hair and makes for a nurturing disposition. But these 5 elements do not exist separately within us. Instead, they unite to form 3 distinct energetic forces called doshas. Each dosha is a combination of 2 of these 5 elements, and all are present to some degree in each person.

Air, which provides movement and space, which provides vastness, unites to form the vata dosha, which has an overall light, cold, dry and dispersing quality. Vata initiates movement in the mind – thoughts, ideas and creativity – and also physical movement, impulses in the nervous system, blood and lymphatic circulation, walking and even gesturing with the hands.

Fire, which provides heat and water, which provides fluidity, unites to form the pitta dosha, which has an overall heating, oily, sharp and penetrating quality. Pitta controls transformations in the mind such as intelligence, reasoning, passion and the operation of the senses, as
well as physical transformations such as metabolism, hormonal activity, enzymatic behaviour and body temperature.

Water, together with earth, which provides solidity, unites to form the kapha dosha, which has an overall heavy, cold, oily and cohesive property. Kapha provides nurturing and lubrication to the mind and helps preserve the memory. It also binds and lubricates the physical tissues with mucus, body fluids and plasma, making the body stable and firm.

A proportion of each of these doshas in a person defines her prakruti, or mind-body constitution. Understanding your prakruti is like knowing how to read the blueprint for your own health, although a complete understanding of your prakruti is gained through meeting with an experienced Ayurvedic professional. In the next chapter you will learn more about prakruti, the 3 doshas and how to get a sense of what your own dominant dosha might be, which is the first step towards Ayurvedic healing.
The Ayurvedic concept of prakriti, which translates literally from Sanskrit as ‘nature’, refers to our mind-body constitution – the unique characteristics each of us is born with, perceptible through emotions, behaviour, body type, metabolism and health tendencies. The overall nature of a person’s constitution is largely determined by which of the doshas (vata, pitta or kapha) is predominant. All 3 doshas exist in varying levels in each of us. Imagine a pie chart with three sections – the proportions are different for each person, but always add up to 100 per cent.

Most of us have a prakriti that comprises more of 1 dosha than the other 2. Our emotional capacity, physical
characteristics and behaviour mostly reflect the qualities of our dominant dosha. Some of us exhibit more than one of the dosha characteristics, in that 2 of the 3 doshas exist more or less equally in a higher proportion relative to the third. These are ‘mixed-dosha’ types. It is quite common, for example, to be a vata-pitta type, exhibiting the physical and emotional characteristics of both doshas. In other cases, one dosha might dominate physical traits and another show itself in emotional traits, or both characteristics could be a mix of both doshas. Very few people actually have equal proportions of all 3 doshas. For the purposes of this book, you will identify
the one predominant dosha that characterizes your mind and body and will learn what to do to keep that dosha in balance.

To increase ojas, our core energy, we need to constantly harmonize our prakruti, our essential nature. So understanding prakruti and the elements that compose it becomes the natural first step in our journey to cultivate inner beauty. While everybody is born with a basic prakruti that is unique and will stay constant through life, the day-to-day interplay of dosha tendencies is likely to vary based upon influences from food, lifestyle, environment and seasons. We can examine our lifestyle to see whether we are ‘living right’ and maintaining harmony in our lifestyle, or whether our lifestyle is driving any of our doshas into excess. Once this happens, we can begin to use the diet, skincare regimen and fitness programmes or yoga techniques that work best to keep our doshas in balance.

As prakruti varies from individual to individual, so does the definition of balance. As stated earlier, according to Ayurveda, balance does not mean ‘all things being equal’ or all of us having equal amounts of each dosha within us. Instead, it is a state of equilibrium where our current dosha levels match the specific proportions of our natural mind-body make-up. When in equilibrium, the doshas help us be our best selves. But when they become aggravated, they create problems such as sluggishness, dehydration, inflammation and other sensitivities. If you consider that ‘dosha’ literally translates from Sanskrit as
‘fault’, it becomes clear that maintaining the equilibrium of the doshas is a challenge for us all, especially given the demands of modern living.

When first introduced to the concept, many ask the question: Which of the doshas is the best? In fact, they are all the best when they are in harmony, and they are all the worst when they are imbalanced. No matter what our dosha, the goal is to bring it into equilibrium and live closest to prakruti, our natural state of inner beauty.

VATA

The characteristics of vata (vayu = air and akash = space) can be likened to those of a desert or outer space – a vast amount of space with air moving through it. Unobstructed, the air can change its course with complete freedom and flexibility. People with a vata-dominant prakruti are creative and free-spirited. They have amazing power of thought and sometimes a bent towards spirituality. They make talented artists, composers, writers or scientists. Saraswati, Vedic goddess of knowledge, personifies the inner beauty of the vata dosha. She is the consort of Brahma, creator of the universe, and represents learning, creativity, knowledge and vitality of the intellect. In mythology she is always depicted holding a veena (wind instrument), a book and a beaded necklace, each bead representing a branch of ancient Vedic knowledge. Physically, vatas tend to be small-boned, with a tendency towards dry, thinner skin;
drier, more brittle hair; cold extremities; and erratic eating patterns, behaviour and habits. Vata doshas might have a hard time sitting still.

PITTA

The pitta constitution (tejas = fire and jal = water) is like a volcano – it has a liquid heat smouldering deep inside, which sometimes accumulates and comes rushing out with dynamic intensity and drive. People with a pitta-dominant prakruti are intense, organized and execution-oriented, with a fantastic sense of purpose. They are able
to process thoughts in a logical manner and make excellent leaders, managers or mathematicians. Parvati (Durga) is the goddess of strength and power and well represents the beauty of the pitta dosha, which can at once be destructive and dangerous as well as powerful and seductive. She is the consort of Shiva, the destroyer of negativity, and is his counterpart in providing humanity with the power of active energy to choose good over evil, and so maximizes ojas. Physically, pittas tend to have oily skin and hair with a ‘patchy’ quality to it (this can mean an uneven skin tone, combination skin that is more oily in the T-zone, thinner
hair, and/or a certain flush to the skin). Their hair and skin react easily to hormonal sensitivity and they are generally more prone to feeling hot and irritable.

KAPHA

The soothing and stable qualities of kapha (jal = water and prithvi = earth) resemble those of clay – sand and water coming together to form something that can take shape and create vessels that have holding power without being easily disturbed. People with a kapha-dominated prakruti are nurturing, compassionate, meticulous and
Reenita Malhotra Hora

have a wonderful ability to put physical structure to ideas and plans. Such people make great healthcare workers, caregivers or workers in any occupation that requires persistence, physical stamina and precision. Physically, they are heavier, stable people with skin that is cool and moist to the touch, thick hair all over the body and thicker, spongier skin. Kaphas tend to feel cold and break out into cool, clammy perspiration. The kapha dosha is synonymous with bounty, especially that which lasts a long time. Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, exemplifies the beauty of the kapha dosha. The consort of Vishnu, the preserver of the universe, she is bountiful and earthy, always depicted with jewels and ornaments. Lakshmi is responsible for showering wealth and stability upon society, and exudes the golden lustre of ojas.

DOSHAS THROUGH LIFE

Each dosha is a type of energy that exists in the world around us, and each of these energies has a special influence on us during different stages of our lives. During childhood and youth, for example, kapha enhances chubbiness, so a plump baby is considered to have strong ojas. From puberty to menopause, pitta increases acidity and heat in the body, giving us strength to carry on through those changes. Good stamina, leadership and forbearance in transitional periods are all examples of strong ojas during the pitta phase of our life. Later in life, vata predominates, bringing with it
wrinkles and drier skin, and challenges with digestion and sleeping. But this is also the time when our spiritual abilities are at their highest potential – it is the best time to develop a practice of meditation. Wisdom and spirituality are examples of strong ojas during this stage. Understanding your prakruti and how to increase your vitality will ensure that you look and feel your best at every stage of life.

**Doshas out of Balance**

When doshas go into a state of imbalance or excess, we experience low ojas. Imbalances (vikruti) refer to an excess, or accumulation, of any one or more of the doshas, causing negative forces and toxins to begin spreading through the body. Minor excesses of vata, pitta or kapha are often manifested as dryness, a general sensation of heat and heaviness in the mind and body. We may become intolerant of foods with similar dosha qualities as our predominant dosha. Left unattended, these imbalances can develop into illnesses, so it is important to be aware of their symptoms.

The pressures of modern life wreak havoc with our doshas. In ancient times, people modelled their lifestyle on nature and the seasons. Today, environmental influences like light, heat and water that once ruled our work and sleep patterns are now under our control. Conveniences like eating seasonal fruit year-round, driving instead of walking and unhealthy diet and exercise habits distract us
from our natural rhythms. As a result, it is easy to find ourselves feeling rundown, stressed and out of balance. Ayurveda recognizes the need to rejuvenate from within by setting the dosha composition back to prakruti, its natural starting point. This does not mean returning to the ways of our ancestors but, rather, gently adjusting our lifestyle to bring us back into balance.

Our predominant dosha is understandably the one most likely to become imbalanced. For example, vatas who are out of balance might have lower immunity and a tendency to catch colds on a regular basis. Each dosha expresses imbalance in a different way. Learning to read these signs will help you get back in balance quickly.

Vata is the most volatile of the three doshas. Too much vata energy creates dryness in the colon, causing pain, fatigue and lowered immunity. It sets into the mind as anxiety, fear and an inability to focus. People with vata imbalance tend to be ‘spacey’ and forgetful. They lack the ability to focus and behave erratically. Low skin elasticity begins to manifest as wrinkles. This is exacerbated by delicate nerves and disturbed sleep patterns. Pitta imbalances raise heat in the mid-digestive tract. Too much pitta energy manifests itself emotionally as anger, intolerance and criticism or physically as acidity, inflammation and sensitivities. People with pitta imbalances are prone to acne, heat toxins, any kind of ‘-itis, food sensitivities (or allergies), cosmetics, dust and pollen.