

Yoga for Skin Diseases



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Introduction

The skin which covers the human body is a unique and complex living structure. Its outermost cell layers are dead and are continually flaking from the body, yet it is through them that the aura of vitality and good health is reflected to the world like a mirror. Similarly, it is only our skin which upholds the engrossing illusion of our existence that we are individuals separate from one another. Consciousness is one and universal. The individual mind is an illusion upheld solely by our perception of physical separation. My skin forms the barrier which I believe is the end of me and your skin does the same for you. Physiologically speaking that barrier is nothing but a few layers of flaking, already dead epithelial cells.

The skin is the medium for the sense of touch. It is absolutely essential for many of the most transcendental sensual experiences, both pleasurable and painful. Life without each of the other senses can at least be contemplated, but can you imagine the possibility of having no feeling or touch experience? Touch is the medium through which many emotions, energies and human feelings are communicated. Apart from the subtle aspects of the sense of hearing, we could say that touch is surely the most expressive of the sense modalities.

It is said that beauty is but skin deep. Our physical differences and personal characteristics are very much the attributes of the skin. The skin is an index of good health. A healthy person or yogi is radiant and has a glowing complexion, while a sick person is pale and devoid of prana.

Medical students learn that medical examination commences simply by looking at the patient and assessing his complexion and general demeanor. In light skinned races diagnosis can frequently be made upon the basis of skin appearance alone. Liver and blood diseases are reflected in a jaundiced skin, pallor reflects shock, anemia or blood loss, a blue countenance, termed cyanosis, occurs in heart failure and respiratory defects, a red face occurs in valvular heart disease and alcoholism, and a wan, sallow or grey complexion often accompanies kidney disease or cancer.

In considering the skin in health and disease, the first point is to realize that the skin is a distinct body organ. An organ is defined as a group of cells clustered together in order to fulfil a specific physiological function. Secondly, the health of the skin cannot be considered in isolation from the rest of the body. Healthy skin is intimately related to diet, the state of the digestive processes, the liver and bloodstream.

The restoration of skin health through yoga therapy is often directed primarily at influencing the digestive and circulatory functions. This is because skin eruptions so commonly reflect a more widespread eliminative, circulatory or metabolic problem, which must first be corrected if skin health is to be restored. It is not sufficient to merely suppress skin diseases with drugs and creams which give only temporary relief but no lasting cure.

Main Part

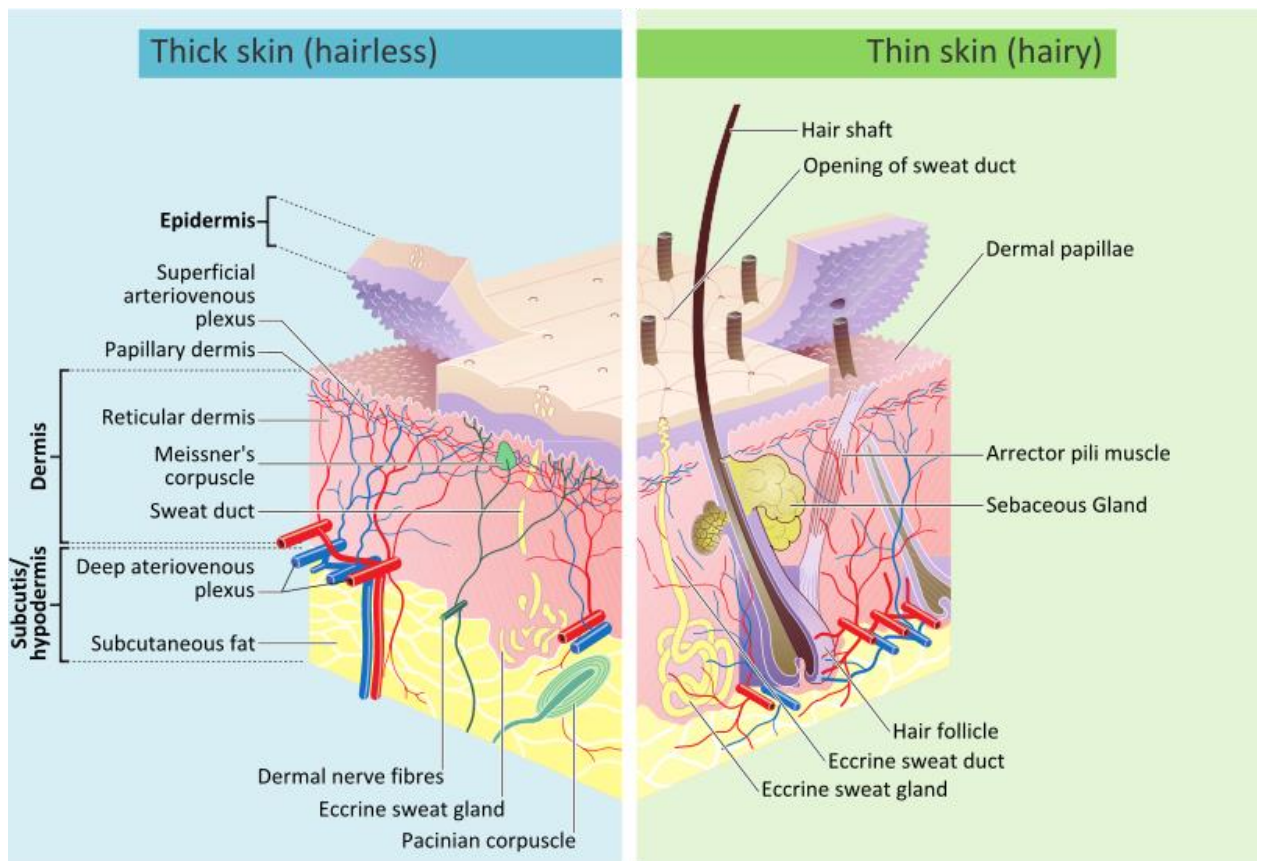
1. Structure & Functions

Skin is our largest organ—adults carry some 3.6 kilograms and 2 square meters of it. This fleshy covering does a lot more than make us look presentable. In fact, without it, we'd literally evaporate.

Skin acts as a waterproof, insulating shield, guarding the body against extremes of temperature, damaging sunlight, and harmful chemicals. It also exudes antibacterial substances that prevent infection and manufactures vitamin D for converting calcium into healthy bones. Skin additionally is a huge sensor packed with nerves for keeping the brain in touch with the outside world. At the same time, skin allows us free movement, proving itself an amazingly versatile organ.

Skin color is due to melanin, a pigment produced in the epidermis to protect us from the sun's potentially cancer-causing ultraviolet (UV) rays. Dark-skinned people produce more numerous and deeper-colored melanin particles.





Skin consists of four layers. The top layer, the one we can see and feel, is called the keratin layer. It's made of dead cells that protect the more delicate layers underneath. It is constantly being worn away and replaced by the new cells that move up from the layer below.

The layer below is called the epidermis. It is made of living cells. It also contains the pigment that gives the skin its color. The epidermis is nourished by the blood vessels in the layer below, which is called the dermis.

The dermis is a lot thicker than the epidermis and is very elastic, so skin is able to stretch and move. The sweat glands in the dermis have tiny tubes leading to the surface of the skin. It also contains hair follicles-the bulb-like structures that hairs grow from. The nerve endings that sense heat, cold and pain are also in the dermis.

The bottom layer of the dermis is called subcutaneous tissue. Fat is stored there, which keeps us cool when it is hot and warm when the outside air is cold. The fat is also a shock absorber and stores extra fuel for the body.

2. Skin Conditions according to the modern medicine:

- Rash: Nearly any change in the skin's appearance can be called a rash. Most rashes are from simple skin irritation; others result from medical conditions.
- Dermatitis: A general term for inflammation of the skin. Atopic dermatitis (a type of eczema) is the most common form.

- Eczema: Skin inflammation (dermatitis) causing an itchy rash. Most often, it's due to an overactive immune system.
- Psoriasis: An autoimmune condition that can cause a variety of skin rashes. Silver, scaly plaques on the skin are the most common form.
- Dandruff: A scaly condition of the scalp may be caused by seborrheic dermatitis, psoriasis, or eczema.
- Acne: The most common skin condition, acne affects over 85% of people at some time in life.
- Cellulitis: Inflammation of the dermis and subcutaneous tissues, usually due to an infection. A red, warm, often painful skin rash generally results.
- Skin abscess (boil or furuncle): A localized skin infection creates a collection of pus under the skin. Some abscesses must be opened and drained by a doctor in order to be cured.
- Rosacea: A chronic skin condition causing a red rash on the face. Rosacea may look like acne, and is poorly understood.
- Warts: A virus infects the skin and causes the skin to grow excessively, creating a wart. Warts may be treated at home with chemicals, duct tape, or freezing, or removed by a physician.
- Melanoma: The most dangerous type of skin cancer, melanoma results from sun damage and other causes. A skin biopsy can identify melanoma.
- Basal cell carcinoma: The most common type of skin cancer. Basal cell carcinoma is less dangerous than melanoma because it grows and spreads more slowly.
- Seborrheic keratosis: A benign, often itchy growth that appears like a "stuck-on" wart. Seborrheic keratoses may be removed by a physician, if bothersome.
- Actinic keratosis: A crusty or scaly bump that forms on sun-exposed skin. Actinic keratoses can sometimes progress to cancer.
- Squamous cell carcinoma: A common form of skin cancer, squamous cell carcinoma may begin as an ulcer that won't heal, or an abnormal growth. It usually develops in sun-exposed areas.
- Herpes: The herpes viruses HSV-1 and HSV-2 can cause periodic blisters or skin irritation around the lips or the genitals.
- Hives: Raised, red, itchy patches on the skin that arise suddenly. Hives usually result from an allergic reaction.
- Tinea versicolor: A benign fungal skin infection creates pale areas of low pigmentation on the skin.
- Viral exantham: Many viral infections can cause a red rash affecting large areas of the skin. This is especially common in children.
- Shingles (herpes zoster): Caused by the chickenpox virus, shingles is a painful rash on one side of the body. A new adult vaccine can prevent shingles in most people.
- Scabies: Tiny mites that burrow into the skin cause scabies. An intensely itchy rash in the webs of fingers, wrists, elbows, and buttocks is typical of scabies.

- Ringworm: A fungal skin infection (also called tinea). The characteristic rings it creates are not due to worms.

It is important to understand the cause of skin diseases. Every year millions of people suffer from some kind of skin disorder, skin disease or plain skin infections. However, most of them make matters worse by taking strong medicines and steroid-based ointments which act as Suppressants. Even though the effect is almost immediate, at best they give temporary relief. More importantly, they can trigger even more severe and seemingly unrelated disorders. These may be in the form of Metabolic Disorders or Skin Eruptions.

Poor diet, poor stimulation of the circulatory and excretory systems and subsequent build up of toxins are the root cause of skin eruptions. According to Yoga, the practice of Asanas, Breathing techniques as well as Internal Cleansing (Body Detoxification) techniques will serve to address skin issues. In other words, Yoga shows how to take charge of your own health issues (skin disorders included) without the need for any external aid.

3. Hypersensitivity or allergy to drugs, chemicals, etc

This type of skin eruption is very common when people are prescribed powerful drugs for common ailments which are often better managed without them.

Treatment of an iatrogenic skin rash is to discontinue the offending drug and then purify the body of drug residues through a program of fasting, asana, pranayama and shatkarmas.

4. Psychosomatic skin disease

The skin is an extremely sensitive mirror of the mind, and skin diseases, rashes and itches such as **neurodermatitis** often manifest in tense, anxious and sensitive persons. An itch is often a way of expressing the mental tensions arising from personal conflicts. It is recognized in statements such as: “What's biting you?” or “He really gets under my skin.” These rashes come and go in response to altering psychic emotional and personal stresses in life in some temperaments.

Antar mouna, witnessing the itching sensation and the underlying mental tensions without resorting to the unconscious scratching response, is the fundamental step in management of neurodermatitis. Once scratching is resisted and relaxation established, the rash soon disappears. Asana, pranayama and yoga nidra work on the underlying mental and emotional tensions. The hatha yoga shatkarmas – neti, kunjla (Vaman Dhouti) and shankhaprakshalana – are prescribed to clean the digestive system and purify the nadis in which blockage and obstruction to the pranic flow is occurring.

5. Skin infections

Skin infections are caused by various micro-organisms, including viruses, bacteria and fungi which live and multiply upon the skin surface. Certain viruses and bacteria do grow naturally on a normal healthy skin, but when the body metabolism becomes unbalanced and the level of vitality drops or wastes accumulate throughout the system, then pathogenic organisms which find these conditions more favorable begin to multiply rapidly and skin infections result.

5.1. Viral infections

'**Shingles**' is a very painful skin condition in which vesicles appear in bands on the skin surface caused by the **herpes zoster virus**. In yogic terminology this occurs because of deficiency or blockage in the flow of prana along the cutaneous nerves. This is usually found in the thoracolumbar nerve roots associated with anahata chakra. As a result, a painful band-like rash appears on the ribcage or chest wall.

'**Cold sores**', due to infection by the **herpes simplex virus** are another example. Weeping sores appear around the lips and nose during and after cold, flu or other respiratory infections. They subsequently disappear soon after the body overcomes the primary infection, but will almost inevitably reappear when another cold manifests itself. Cold sores go on appearing and reappearing when the body's levels of resistance and vitality are reduced. This tendency can be overcome by the hatha yoga shatkarmas, surya namaskara and pranayama.

5.2. Bacterial infections

These include **boils, impetigo and cellulitis** and are characterized by the production of pus. Pus is usually a thick, yellowish liquid waste and consists of bacteria and dead white blood cells. Bacterial infections signify stagnation of energy in the skin, impurities in the blood from putrefaction in the digestive system, and improper diet. The body fills with toxic waste matter and is in a low state of resistance.

Bacterial infections are best allowed to run their course, but the entire intestine should be washed by shankhaprakshalana to remove constipation and insure effective elimination via the bowels. Boils may also be caused by internal, mental or emotional conflict and confusion.

5.3. Fungal infections

These manifest as a moist itching rash and are especially common in the wet, moist and warm areas of the body, for example, between the toes and in the groin. Fungi gain access via the skin's protective barrier when conditions are favorable, for example, when there is an excess of acidity in the body. Acidity is a waste product from cell metabolism and an excess reflects underlying imbalance.

They are best managed by internal purification through shankhaprakshalana which will remove excess acidic wastes.

6. Psoriasis and Eczema

Psoriasis and eczema: These two skin disorders are a nuisance in the life of those who suffer. These diseases make skin look ugly making it dry, flaky and patches are formed. The topical medicines and ointments may reduce them but they flare back once person stop their usage.

According to Western Medicine, the exact cause of **eczema** is unknown, but it most likely appears on individuals with a family history of the disease. So there is a genetic underlying cause. Unfortunately, this chronic condition can be triggered at any time, without pre-symptomatic notice. Some of the most common triggers are environmental, such as allergic reactions to pollen, drugs, dry air, and dust mites.

Additionally chemicals in cleaning products, detergent, soaps, and perfumes can irritate the skin drastically.

On the other hand, the pathophysiology of **psoriasis** is clearer to understand. Psoriasis is an autoimmune disease of the skin that occurs when the immune system sends out faulty signs that speed up the growth cycle of skin cells. This process is considered similar to the healing of wounds. For example, when a normal wound heals, the growth of the skin cycle stops. However, for psoriasis patients, once this process is triggered, skin cells are stimulated and continue to grow. This usually does not stop until the cycle is interrupted with treatment. The main trigger for psoriasis is stress and like eczema, the cause of psoriasis is also linked to family genetics.

Triggers for inflamed symptoms can be internal and external. As mentioned above, environmental factors are the main external causes. Internal factors, besides stress, are allergic reactions to food, poor functioning liver, and a weak immune system. Common food allergies for most eczema patients include eggs, dairy, wheat products (gluten), shellfish, and corn. Weak liver function plays a significant role because the liver is largest cleansing organ in the body. Therefore, if the liver is not cleansing the body correctly or enough, the unfiltered toxins must then be released from the skin, the largest organ in our bodies. Lastly, a delicate immune system is powerless against allergens and cannot fend the body from skin irritations that occur in eczematic patients.

Yoga says that psoriasis and eczema are due to increase in toxin level and stress. With increase in stress level, inflammation increases and these diseases spread from one part of the skin to another.

From a yogic perspective, the symptoms can be perceived as a physical dysfunction of various chakras in the body. Both eczema and psoriasis are a result of the root (Muladhara) chakra and solar plexus (Manipura) chakra imbalances. Eczema has an additional chakra focal point, which is the throat (Vishuddha) chakra. Muladhara chakra governs survival, vitality, and mental stability.

Therefore stress is the biggest cause of Muladhara imbalance. Manipura chakra physically governs the liver and digestion. So, when the liver is weak, one knows that their solar plexus chakra is also out of balance leading to increase symptoms. Lastly, the throat chakra governs the endocrine system, the thyroid and parathyroid. The physical affects of a blockage in the Vishuddha chakra can result in eczema because frustration and mental distress from noncommunication can increase signs and symptoms.

Allopathic medicine provides numerous medical treatments for eczema and psoriasis, but no cure. Interestingly enough, most of the common treatments are topical ointments, steroids, or solutions to put on the affected area. However, when use of these topical prescriptions stop, the symptoms flare back up immediately. The constant use of steroids and chemical solutions have side affects that result in thinning skin, suppressing the immune system, and developing dependency upon those drugs.

From a yogic perspective, cures for eczema and psoriasis involve a whole body treatment or a more holistic approach to relief.

Yoga Therapy suggest pranayama, asana, nutrition, shatkarma, and meditation as promising recommendations. Each yogic remedy is detailed below:

- Pranayama: Bhastrika pranayama, Bahya pranayama, Anelom Vilom (AV) pranayama, Agnisaar pranayama, Bhramari pranayama, Udgeet pranayama, Kapalbhati and Nadi Shodhi should be practiced for 15 minutes. Kapalbhati pranayama removes toxins from the respiratory system and Nadi Shodhi pranayama increases the oxygen levels in the lungs tremendously which helps in cleaning the nerves. Both these pranayamas also reduce stress.

- Asana: Postures that improve the endocrine system and massage thyroid and parathyroid glands. Such asanas include Sarvangasana, Halasana, Tiger breathing (cat & cow), Janusirsasana, and the Therapy series (or Tibetan Rites). These should be practiced with deep breathing, holding postures for 3-5 breaths and up to 21 rounds for the Tibetan Rites.

- Nutrition: Eat to balance Pitta dosha and some food stuffs to avoid are: eggs, milk, wheat products, nightshades (tomatoes, eggplants, and bell peppers), overly sweet, overly spicy, corn, and shellfish. Flaxseed oil taken orally or applied externally often eases symptoms of eczema.

- Shatkarma: Vaman Dhouti or yogic vomiting is one of the shatkarma or yogic cleansing methods. Vaman Dhouti balances Pitta by reliving the stomach of gird symptoms like heart burn, acid reflux, and the like.

- Meditation: of all the remedies provided by Yoga Therapy, there is nothing more powerful than meditation to reduce stress. Stress is one of the critical factors that aggravate both diseases.

- Amaroli should be practised in conjunction with yogic sadhanas, including inverted asana. Expose the affected areas to direct sunlight every day, and try to bathe these areas in salty seawater as often as possible.

7. Acne

Acne is the scientific term for what we normally call pimples, blackheads, whiteheads or nodules that form on the face, chest, upper back or shoulders. Acne sufferers experience persistent, recurring reddish blemishes on the face, chest, shoulders, neck, upper back or buttocks. When these blemishes are spots that have a dark, open center, they are called blackheads. Whiteheads are spots that bulge under the skin and have no opening. Pimples, on the other hand, are whiteheads that rupture. The boil-like lumps are called nodules.

Stress, increase toxin content, disruption in bowel movement are some of the reasons for acne.

Practice asanas which help increase blood circulation to the head and face area. Some examples are Bhujangasana, Matsyasana, Halasana, Sarvangasana, Trikonasana, and Balasana. These postures also increase oxygenation to the system; as such are called chest openers. All inverted postures and forward bends, which increase blood supply to the head, calming stress and inducing body's parasympathetic response can help achieve clean, glowing skin.

Practice of facial yoga exercises everyday will help tighten the face muscles. Massage jaws to reduce stress, massage eyebrows for a dose of instant relaxation.

8. Melasma

It refers to a very common skin disorder faced especially by women - dark spots or patches forming on the skin. They appear mostly after menopause, during or after pregnancy or even as a result of the prolonged use of birth control pills.

Yogic solution is Surya Namaskar - It keeps the skin free from all impurities, improves blood circulation and gives it a natural glow.

The other yoga poses that will help in fighting with these dark spots are:

- Bhujangasana

- Sarvangasana can also help clear these imperfections by increasing blood flow.

9. Leucoderma

Leucoderma is a skin condition, characterized by formation of white patches on the skin. It is also known by the name **Vitiligo**. It is the deficiency of pigment melanin that causes the development of white patches on the body. It is more common in women. Hands, neck, back and wrist are most affected. Initially small white spots appear, and gradually develop into white patches. These can occur all over the body. These patches are pale in the beginning, later on they become whiter with time, as the 'melanin' pigment is worn-out from the skin. The patches can be caused due to plenty of reasons but the most common among them is worm infestation and/or calcium deficiencies. These patches eventually increase in sizes and produce lot of psychological stress in the person. It is an autoimmune disease

and can have genetic predispositions. Excessive mental worry, burn injuries, defective perspiration mechanism, ailments like typhoid that affect gastro-intestinal tract, acute or chronic gastric disorder, worms or parasites in the alimentary canal and impaired hepatic function are the main causes of leucoderma. There is no cure for leucoderma, but there are several treatments, including dyes or psoralens used in combination with Ultraviolet a light treatment. However recent days shows a considerable amount of cure by following many yoga asanas.

10. Skin cancer

This usually occurs on the face or forearms of fair skinned persons following many years of exposure to direct sunlight in a tropical country.

The practice of amaroli (massage with three to seven day old urine) in conjunction with dietary modification and pranayama frequently proves successful in its prevention and cure.

11. General yogic program for skin health

Specific modification in individual cases may be necessary under skilled guidance.

1. Surya Namaskara: to the point of total body sweating, while facing the newly rising sun. The sweat should be allowed to dry on the body while resting in Shavasana.



2. Asanas:

- Tadasana allows to focus on deep, rhythmic breathing - drawing oxygen into and out of the body releases harmful toxins and keeps vital systems running optimally.
- Uttanasana clearing everything out and blood is switching directions. Because forward-bending poses fight against gravity by turning the head toward the ground instead of toward the sky. Blood flows into the face faster, bringing with it oxygen and other helpful nutrients that fight free radicals, encourage skin cell renewal, and give the visage a rosy glow. Uttanasana is the easiest of the forward bends; those who practice yoga regularly can also try Parvatasana and the hip-opening Balasana.
- Bharadvaja's Twist - twisting positions are great for digestive health, which is important for moving toxic properties out of the organs.
- Utkatasana make the heart beat faster, increasing the circulation of blood flow throughout the body and prompting the skin to sweat out impurities.
- Viparita Karani - Inversions such as Headstand and Shoulderstand increase blood flow to the face. They also require clear focus, regular breathing, and a great deal of endurance - all of which help to clean out the body. Viparita Karani is a less challenging version of Shoulderstand that supposedly aids everything from digestion to insomnia.
- To improve the digestive process - Wind-Relieving Posture (Pawanmuktasana - Apanasana), Kneeling Pose (Vajrasana), Bow Pose (Dhanurasana)

3. Yoga Mudras for healthy and Shiny Skin:

- Varun mudra/Jal-vardhak mudra can be done anytime at anyplace. To do this mudra, join little finger tip with thumb tip and press the thumb gently by keeping remaining fingers straight. Sitting cross legged pose is the best pose to do this mudra but you can also do it in any pose. While doing this mudra, take care that you don't pressurized the nails as it can cause dryness to the skin. Varun mudra balances the water content in the body and thereby cures all the problems caused by decreased level of water element. Practicing Varun Mudra increases softness and glow of the skin as well as decreases dryness of the body. It also helps to purify blood, prevent the sign of aging, relieve dehydration & stomach infection, release constipation, activate kidney malfunctioning, relax muscles cramp as well as prevent gastroenteritis pains & muscle shrinkage.



- Prithvi Mudra - to do prithvi mudra, join the thumb tip with the tip of the ring finger and apply little pressure. Keep the other 3 fingers comfortably straight. Morning is the best time to do this mudra but you can do it anytime and anywhere throughout the day. This mudra can be done by sitting in Sukhasan/Padmasan with both the hands keeping the palms (back) on the knee and elbows straight. Don't force the fingers to be straight while performing this mudra. Prithvi mudra is required to be done by the people who feel lack of energy and suffer from deficiency of minerals & vitamins. Practicing this yoga improves the glow and complexion of the skin. It also helps to increase weight (in weak and lean bodies), make the body strong, strengthen weak organs, improve spiritual power & memory, increase blood circulation as well as elevate tolerance & patience.



4. Pranayama: Bhastrika and Nadi Shodhi pranayama should be practiced each morning. Kapalabhati pranayama on empty stomach. Kapalabhati, an effective detoxifying technique, is aptly named so as Kapal means forehead and Bhati means glowing. Through forceful exhalation in this process, detoxification happens, the first effect of which shows in the form of naturally glowing skin. Antaranga and Bahiranga Kumbhaka and Maha bandha (Jalandhara, Uddiyana and Moola) may be integrated into the pranayama practice. For persons, who usually gets more problematic in summer, especially with oily skin - cooling pranayamas, such as Sheetal

and Sheetkari, can help provide a cooling effect to the skin and retain its glow.

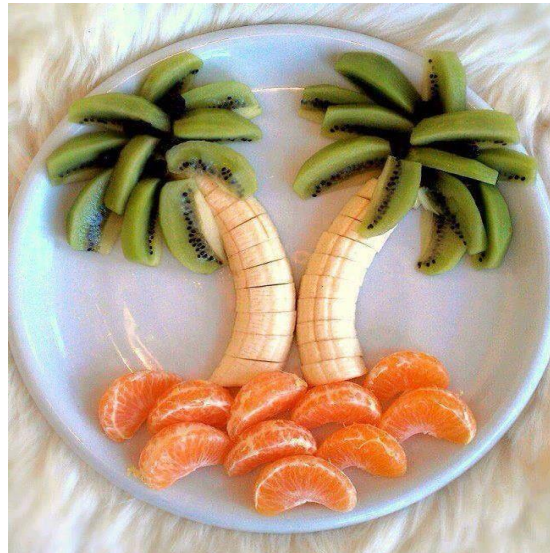


5. Shatkarma: Neti, Kunjal and Laghoo Shankhprakashana should be performed daily. Purna Shankhprakashana should be undertaken in an ashram environment, preferably at the commencement of therapy.
6. Dhyana and Dharana - the more you do, the more you will radiate from within and without.



7. Relaxation Yoga Nidra daily.
8. Diet: a light vegetarian diet, rich in alkaline foods (juices, fruit and vegetables). Oil, sweets, refined, fried and spicy food should be avoided and salt and dairy foods restricted. At the commencement of treatment, a raw

food diet should be followed for at least five days. Then, for a month either lunch or the evening meal can be missed. Drinking lots of water: Lukewarm water with lemon and honey helps detoxify all system while keeping the skin clean and healthy. Also, the Patanjali Yoga Sutras mention Shaucha, or cleanliness of the body, mind, and speech, as the first of the five rules of yoga.



12. Further recommendations

- cold bath and skin rub each morning
- sparing use of soap and cosmetics
- skin rashes should be kept clean and dry as far as possible and open to the sun and air. The area should be washed free of debris once a day with a mild non-irritant soap and dried carefully.
- avoid constipation and keep the digestive system clean
- amaroli, application of fresh midstream urine, is highly effective in elimination acute skin rashes. However, the diet should be pure.

13. Skin Disorders: An Ayurvedic Perspective

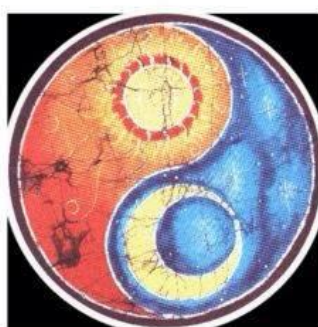
According to Ayurveda, the branch of medicine, which dates back to 1000 B.C, excess sugar in the body is a major cause of skin disorders. The skin cells so affected by the excess sugar, provide an ideal breeding ground for the bacteria, which multiply rapidly using these skin cells.

Ayurveda has documented the "miraculous" properties of medicinal herbs and clays that counteract the excess sugar in the body. They combine with the skin cells to inhibit multiplication of the virus. The absence of a breeding ground results in the elimination of the virus.

Traditional medicine works on attacking the cause; Modern medicine works by attacking the effect.

Nature has provided a wealth of herbs medicinal in nature that can correct almost ANY kind of skin disorders or disease of the skin. Even for keeping the skin toned, soaps or packs made of these medicinal herbs have an invigorating and soothing effect.

According to Ayurveda all the three Doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) are involved either solely or in combination in different conditions. The Dhatus (tissues) that are involved are Rasa (plasma) Rakta (blood), Lasika (lymph) and Mamsa (muscle). As the disease progresses more tissues or Dhatus may get involved.



Causes

Ayurveda talks about various causes of skin diseases. Some of them are listed below:

- Intake of food articles of opposing qualities. Egg, yoghurt and fruit, dairy products and sour fruits
- Suppressing any natural urges.
- Physical exercises after a heavy meal
- Travelling or going out in sun after a heavy meal
- Improper application and administration of Panchakarma (Ayurvedic detoxification).
- Receiving massages and oil therapy while Ama is still present in the body.

Ayurveda has systematically **described and categorized skin disorders** as follows:

- Maha Kusthas: Major skin disorders. These are seven in number.
- Kshudra Kusthas: Minor skin disorders which are eleven in total.

The above division is based on the pre-monitory symptoms, main symptoms and signs, appearances and progress of the skin disorder. The division is also based on various surgical or medical therapies given.

Dosha involvement

The skin conditions are also divided based on the Doshas involved and the signs and symptoms vary accordingly.

- Vata disorders: The condition may be accompanied by black/brown discoloration, dryness of skin, rough texture, pricking piercing pain, stiffness of the local area, numbness, fissures, cracks, nervous involvement etc.
- Pitta disorders: The condition may be accompanied by coppery or bright red discoloration, burning sensation, sweating, pus formation, oozing of liquid, fever, inflammation, ulceration etc.
- Kapha disorders: The condition may be accompanied by pale or white discoloration, swelling, fluid retention, itching, oiliness, heaviness etc.

Balancing Pitta: From the perspective of Ayurveda, one of the major reasons for skin diseases is the disturbance of Pitta dosha. When heat in the body becomes excessive, skin eruptions may arise. Pitta vikruti (imbalance of the dosha) is prone to acid peptid disorders, liver and gall bladder problems, ulcers, colitis, and headaches. Therefore, Pitta restoration is crucial for symptomatic relief. Balance can come from eliminating foods that trigger more heat in the body such as garlic and chilly peppers.

Acne vulgaris

Acne is caused due to an imbalance of Pitta and Kapha Doshas. The tissues involved are skin, blood, sweat and fat.

Ayurvedic remedies for acne:

- Follow a detox to remove Ama from the body.
- Follow a Pitta-Kapha pacifying diet
- Avoid excess of sour, spicy and salty foods
- Favor tastes like mild sweet, bitter and astringent.
- Take aloe vera juice three times a day.
- Helpful herbs are Triphala, Neem, Manjistha, Shatavari, Turmeric.
- External application of paste with sandalwood and rose helps to reduce acne to a great extent.
- Useful yoga positions are Lion pose for the face.
- Moon salutation help to pacify Pitta in the body
- Breathing exercises like Shitali and Shitkari Pranayama are also very beneficial.
- Regular massage of the face with some Pitta reducing oil followed by steaming of the face also helps to control acne formation.

Leucoderma

According to Ayurveda leucoderma is categorized based on the Dosha dominance.

Symptoms:

- Vata dominant: skin is dry with light brown pigmentation.
- Pitta dominant: skin shows copper discoloration with burning sensation and the hair follicles may be affected.
- Kapha dominant: this usually shows as whitish discoloration of skin with thick skin and itching.

Ayurvedic remedies:

- Presence of Ama has to be established and treated.
- Panchakarma is indicated in such conditions. Elimination therapies are very useful. Panchakarma therapies are administered based on the Doshas involved.
- Panchatikta Ghrta (Clarified butter with five bitter herbs) is also useful in this condition.
- Specific herbs used in this condition are Bakuchi (*Psoralea corylifolia*), Kakodumbara (*Ficus hispida*), Neem, Manjistha (*Rubia cordifolia*), Turmeric, Triphala.
- Diet and Nutrition should be followed based on the Dosha involved.

Psoriasis

According to Ayurveda there is an involvement of all three Doshas (Vata, Pitta ad Kapha). The Dhatus or tissues involved are skin, blood, muscle, lymph, and later bone. Ama plays a big role in its pathogenesis.

Symptoms:

- Vata dominant: skin is dry with excessive scaling. The spread is irregular, quick and is aggravated with Vata increasing conditions like stress, irregular sleep and lifestyle
- Pitta dominant: skin shows copper discoloration with burning sensation and the hair follicles may be affected. This is accompanied with bleeding and pustule formation.
- Kapha dominant: this usually shows as whitish discoloration of skin with thick skin and itching. The lesions spread slowly.

Ayurvedic remedies:

- The treatment commences with elimination of Ama and stimulation and strengthening of digestive fire.
- This is followed by elimination therapies (Panchakarma). This involves internal and external oleation. For internal oleation Panchatikta Ghrta is used. Oil used for external oleation depends on the Dosha involved.
- Herbs useful during the treatment of psoriasis are Manjistha, Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Gotu kola, Guggulu, Bhumyamalaki (*Phyllanthus niruri*).
- External application of Jatyadi oil (jasmine oil) helps with the lesions. Paste of jasmine flowers also has the same effect.

- Another topical Ayurvedic remedy involves neem leaves and cow dung. Extracts of neem leaves, cow dung, and cow urine are mixed in equal volumes. The cow dung extract should be mixed with water and filtered as to only retain the liquid parts. This mixture is then applied on the affected skin and left for several hours before bathing. In severe cases of psoriasis, the application can be done two to three times a day. Although rather repulsive, this method is said to be time tested and quite effective, with absolutely no side effects.

Eczema

Eczema which is also called dermatitis affects all ages. There are various forms of dermatitis for example atopic eczema, contact dermatitis, infantile eczema adult eczema etc.

Symptoms:

Ayurveda again classifies this condition as follows:

- Vata related eczema: accompanied with fissures, cracks, pain, dryness, scaling and aggravated with stress related conditions.
- Pitta related eczema: accompanied with redness, burning sensation, pustule formation, inflammation, fever and aggravated with heat related conditions.
- Kapha related eczema: accompanied with itching, swelling, fluid secretion.

Ayurvedic remedies:

- This condition is treated with administration of Panchakarma which again involves external and internal oleation which is followed by elimination therapies
 - Useful herbs in eczematic conditions are Khadira (cacia catechu), Guduci, Turmeric, Neem, Manjistha, Bhumyamalaki, Chamomile, Dandelion, Burdock root, Aloe Vera.
 - Neem paste and jasmine flower paste or oil is used for external application.

It is strongly recommended that you consult a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner before starting any detoxification process to eliminate Ama or taking Ayurvedic herbs for skin disorders. The treatment protocol may change based on a person's body constitution and disease.



Conclusion

In today's modern world, people tend to face a series of physical problems, skin problems being one of them. Even with the production of so many chemical and herbal cosmetics which promise a guaranteed recovery from the skin problems, they don't really always work. And when they don't the reason given is that different skin types react to different chemicals differently. Other than the common acne problem, most of people suffer from chronic skin issues like melasma, eczema or psoriasis.

Life style such as unhygienic personal and surroundings, day time sleeping, irregular diet, stressful life, other chronic diseases with following depression, unhappiness, frustration, and underlying psychosomatic issues are related to cause various skin diseases.

From a yogic perspective poor diet, poor stimulation of the circulatory and excretory systems and subsequent build up of toxins are the root cause of skin eruptions.

It is a well-known truism amongst holistic therapists that the skin is a mirror of digestive health. Diseases such as eczema, dermatitis, psoriasis or urticaria are often found to be related to significant digestive problems, food intolerances and /or parasites in the gut. Chronic itch, without a skin rash, is another extremely annoying condition, which is most commonly caused by liver toxicity. When these issues are methodically identified and treated, the skin problems improve dramatically.

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