

# Understanding Trauma and Its Impact

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Ideas about trauma have changed over the years. The term *post-traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD) is associated with veterans. We owe a debt to this community for helping us understand that trauma can be like a ripple in a pond, connected to both what came before a traumatic event and what comes after.

Our memories and life experiences before trauma can become tainted and distorted by what we perceive to be an isolated event and our relationships, ambitions, and identity are altered in various ways after the trauma. But trauma can be much more complex and nuanced than an event or experience we can easily identify.

Trauma is like a spider web and sometimes it is unavoidable. There are the traumas of poverty, racism, discrimination, injustice, war, social isolation, substance abuse, loss of loved ones, loss of rights, accidents, etc.

Some traumas are central to our lives; some peripheral. They vary in degree, frequency and consequence, depending on how much they affect our physical selves and our core identities, but their effects are often cumulative and difficult to untangle.

As an Ayurvedic doctor and certified yoga therapist, I help individuals address the roots of trauma and the opportunities for healing at physiological, psycho-emotional, and spiritual levels. In Ayurveda, the causal chain originates first in the spiritual body, then funnels into the psycho-emotional body and finally manifests in the physical body. By the time we have physical symptoms, we have likely experienced imbalance on the psycho-emotional and spiritual levels.

Ayurveda considers all symptoms, be they digestive, affective, neurological, endocrine, respiratory, etc., to be complex manifestations of a cohesive root cause.



Ayurvedic science provides the tools to determine root causes and dislodge imbalance at its source, rather than just treating symptoms. This is accomplished via tailored treatments; personalized recommendations for diet, lifestyle, and daily routine; custom-made herbs and medicinal oils; supplements; manual therapies; detoxification; yoga practices and ritual therapy.

## A FIVE-ELEMENT SYSTEM

Ayurveda is a five-element system of medicine (air, space, fire, water and earth), and the constitution of each individual is comprised of combinations of elements in differing ratios. Our constitutional baseline represents our unique state of health and reflects our body habitus, psycho-emotional inclinations, and orientation towards work, relationships, and self-identity.

The five elements combine in pairs of two, to comprise bioenergetic systems (*doshas*). Each person has some quantity of each *dosha* (air+space = *vata*; fire+water = *pitta*; water+earth = *kapha*). Our predominant

*dosha(s)* influences the symptoms we experience when diet, lifestyle, trauma, or other environmental factors cause imbalance. Trauma will aggravate *vata dosha* because it is associated with experiences like shock, fear, loss, crises of faith and isolation. Aggravated *doshas* cause disorder and possible disease if left untreated.

The role of the Ayurvedic doctor is to work collaboratively with the patient to resolve imbalances in a gradual and lasting way. When approaching trauma, we address related physical symptoms, such as: pain, insomnia, depression, anxiety, poor digestion, weight gain or loss, fatigue, or emotional overwhelm. We work our way through the accumulated effects of trauma that may be lodged in the deeper tissues of the body-mind, causing chronic problems.

Ayurveda is a compassionate pursuit of ever-increasing self-awareness through the vehicle of health and well-being. We can be physically “healthy” and feel terrible. Likewise, people with chronic illness may experience a good quality of life. We must work through both circumstances we can change and those we cannot. We *have* circumstances, but we *are not* our circumstances.

We may not be able to reverse a traumatic experience or its effects, but we can seek greater physical vitality; psycho-emotional stability and spiritual resilience in spite of the traumas we have endured. Ayurveda has many tools to facilitate the journey of healing by addressing imbalance at the source, compassionately guiding the individual on their individualized path, and unwinding the effects of trauma within the body, mind and spirit. ❧❧

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