Introduction to inflammation and Ayurveda

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And the body's going send an inflammatory response there. You want it to. Okay, there's inflammation. Let the immune cells go in and do their healing and their job.

I might use ice. Some people use NSAIDs. Some people might use different solutions that exist to really get that inflammation down. But once that information has gone down and we've gone back to normal, we're fine.

The problem is we are living through this time of such toxin burden and it's so multifactorial. So I always talk about inflammation being caused by The environmental toxins, including heavy metals, pesticides, herbicides, what's in our water, What's In Our Air.

For some, it could be mold in their homes. I'm going through that journey after last year. And so environmental Toxins can really pile up some that you would never see or realize are in your environment.

Welcome back to the Think Well, Age Well podcast. I am your host, Dr. Heather Sandison. And today, I'm excited to talk about something that sits at the center of so many conversations around health, longevity, and cognitive function.

My guest today is Dr Shivani Gupta. She's an Ayurvedic practitioner, researcher, author, an expert at The Intersection of Ancient Healing Traditions and Modern Science.

Dr Guptas interest in Ayure Veda began with her own experience of chronic illness and ultimately led her to earn a Masters in Ayurvedic Sciences and a Ph. D.

focused on Turmeric. She is the author of The Inflammation Code, where she brings together ayurveda wisdom and functional medicine to help people like you and I understand and address the chronic inflammation that contributes to pain, metabolic dysfunction, autoimmune symptoms, accelerated aging, and often cognitive decline.

Today, we're going to explore what happens when inflammation becomes chronic, How our stress, gut health, sleep, and daily rhythms will influence inflammation over the course of our lives.

And what RU VEDA can teach us about protecting our brain and body as we age. Shivani, welcome to Think Well, Age Well. I am delighted to have you here.

Thank you. Thanks for having me. I want to start with your personal story. You came to Ayurveda through your experience with chronic illness. So what happened and how did you come to or come back to, obviously you're South Asian.

Help us understand what you didn't find in the conventional system or elsewhere. You know, I grew up living in two worlds. I'm from Houston, Texas. So when I'd get sick, we'd just go to the pediatrician.

They'd write a prescription for antibiotics. You'd take them. Eventually you'd over your cold and everything else you had, and you would be better. And when i'd go India, my grandma would always just open up her spice cabinet.

She'd be like, turmeric for this and ginger for that. And we have a lot of different unique spices in our Indian culture, in the Indian kitchen, and she'd like this will heal your gut, you'll be fine.

So I always thought, who's right? I'm going to both sides here for health and one fixes me and I feel better and the other fixes and me, I do feel so I don't know yet.

And by the time I got to college, I had ended up taking antibiotics way too many times. I think it was on a monthly basis and no one was really tracking maybe this thing could cause harm.

And so I'm in college. I would eat well, not drink the water, like pay attention. But somehow I got Montezuma's revenge, India style, again, it was probably some chutney or something like that.

And I thought, oh gosh, I'm done for, they're gonna give me antibiotics again.

Dr. Gupta's personal healing journey

I go in the doctor's office and he prescribes antibiotics and 12 medications. Some voice inside of me came screaming out and was like, hold on one second, what are we giving me exactly?

What did they give you in addition to antibiotics for traveling to Korea? Exactly. It was 12 medications for symptoms, right? Like an anti-nausea, anti vomiting, like let's just keep everything inside this girl kind of cocktail.

But the voice inside of me was like, no, and so I looked at him and I said, can you dumb that antibiotic down a couple of notches? I think you guys are using very strong drugs on me.

Secondly, you forgot a probiotic. Third of all, I'm not taking the 12 for symptoms. Let's approach symptoms a different way." And so my mom looked at me, she's like, You don't talk to a doctor that way.

That's so disrespectful. And I was like you know, this, i have to take care of my health. I can't trust anyone anymore for my help. i Have to go figure this out.

and so when i walked out of there i looked At her and i said you, know we're living in this land of yoga and ayurveda in India. And I think it has something for me and I need to go figure this out." And she's like, well, I'm not going to let you roam India alone.

So I guess we're doing this journey together. And we went north, south, east, west. We went all over India to the Ayurvedic centers. I just sat at the feet of the gurus and my question was, can you heal me?

Can you fix me because I don't understand what to do here. That's when I realized India is sitting on this treasure trove. called Ayurveda, this ancient wisdom, and those Ayurevedic centers were full of people who were Westerners, German.

It was like the whole world had showed up and understood the power of what Ayura Veda could do for you. And I was, like, how did I not apply this to myself this whole time?

So I healed my gut, I learned my body constitution, learned the self-care rituals from Ayuro Vida, And I really became such a super fan of it, a student of, it and I thought, let me take this wisdom and figure out how to teach it in a way that all of us in the West will apply it.

Because the problem is Ayurveda is vast and deep and it's, I could do my master's degree a hundred times and i'd still be scratching the surface of what that wisdom is.

But I though, i am born in America. I think I can figure this out and bring it to us, in way, that we can apply. And then now fast forward decades later that I've been teaching Ayureveda.

I am a woman in midlife who's like, oh gosh, we needed this wisdom so bad for this moment. I'm so glad I teach this and practice this, and have resilience and such vibrant health so that I can teach to the world.

What is inflammation to you and how does this low-grade chronic inflammation change how we age, particularly when it comes to the brain? For sure. So I wrote my book, The Inflammation Code, that just published this last year.

You know what it means to write a book and the work it takes, so thank you. And you've been a beautiful guide on that journey. As I've written and shared that book my goal was for everyone to understand the role inflammation plays.

Now, in this moment, we are talking about inflammation more. People are more aware of it, but I think we still don't fully understand it. And so most of the time when people find me, they'll say, you know, I'm really struggling.

I've got brain fog, got this joint pain, whether it's their hip, knee, back, They say, I've got indigestion. Like something's wrong with my digestion.

I eat and something is wrong. Am I either bloating or something off there? I don't have the same energy. Don't I have same memory. Walk into a room and forget things.

This brain fog is real and I can't remember names. Mid-sentence I forget what I'm talking about. Can't reach for those names that I used to have always parked in my mind.

And so I always say, look, when we start to have that feeling of something is off, instead of saying, this is aging, I guess that's just what it is. I want you to pause.

And whenever your brain says, This is Aging, pause and say No, no, No. This Is Inflammating. It's inflammation that is wreaking havoc inside of me. i'm not going to assume this as aging and just assume that this the sentence I have now for the rest of my life and I just have to live with this.

And I myself do this, I'll have a day sometimes where I will be so tired, my sleep will have been off and I'd be like, is this aging? And that's the sentence that really wakes my mind up and says, no, let's pause and look at this.

And think that helps because oftentimes we're not catching these symptoms that come along until they really start to stack up. So when we talk about brain health, brain happens to be a personal obsession of mine.

That's why I've always been so interested in your work. Because we want to keep a brain that is flourishing, that's vibrant, and that works well all the way through the end of our life.

And I find it disturbing that two-thirds of all Alzheimer's patients are women. I think it's disturbing because it is called type 3 diabetes. I come from a family of all diabetics.

And so growing up, what I saw when I went to India was all the grandparents, all aunts and uncles, and then now I see it in my generation, family struggling with diabetes and the after effects of that.

Heart attack, stroke, leg amputation. I watched this pattern and thought, okay, so you're telling me my job is to go to school, be successful, work hard, end up obese, diabetic, sick, and that's the end game in the last quarter of life, guys?

I was like, some formula is not working for us in this family. I'm going to go find a better way. And so Ayurveda really shows us that a lifestyle put in place around truly living an anti-inflammatory lifestyle or a longevity-focused lifestyle can change that whole equation.

style, focusing on gut health as the center of all health. And modern science has proven the circadian clock to be true. Modern science is proven that there's a gut brain access and gut microbiome, and we do need to honor the

gut as a center all of health." Ayurveda talks about a Sathvik diet, a diet where we truly honor how we eat and when we not just what we, because we're all going to have different diets that support us at different life phases.

Ayurveda talks about self-care rituals that are detoxing on a daily basis to reduce what we call ama or this toxin burden that accumulates in our body over time.

And we know that toxins and burdens relate to the brain as well. Then Ayyurvedha teaches about our individual mind-body constitution. Ayirvedhas call that the Doshas.

In my book, I renamed it Elemental Design because I wanted everyone to understand how it really encompasses our whole life.

What chronic inflammation does to aging and the brain

Finally, Ayuvedda talks a lot about herbs and spices because Herbs and spices are very powerful botanicals, and we can use them in a very targeted, precision way to get the support we need while we're still working to build that beautiful lifestyle that'll help us when it comes to the inflammation and the inflaming.

You know, kind of at a high level with inflammation, it serves us in some cases when it's not a runaway train, right? So how do people determine when inflammation is something we want to resolve or suppress, or if the real issue is our inability to turn it off?

And when is there a context where it is like something that we actually want It's a great question. Inflammation is a good response from the body. We do talk about it like it's only the enemy.

But yes, when, for example, if I'm at the gym and I tear something or I hurt something, we're going to see redness, swelling, pain, all of a sudden. And the bodies going send an inflammatory response there.

and you want it to. You want the body to say, okay, there's inflammation, let's really let the immune cells go in and do their healing and to their job.

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So I always talk about inflammation being caused by the environmental toxins, including heavy metals, pesticides, herbicides, what's in our water, or what is in air.

For some, it could be mold in their homes. I'm going through that journey after last year. And so environmental toxins can really pile up. Some that you would never see or realize are in your environment.

then it's our food supply. Right now, our foods supply isn't as nourishing as it should be. We're not getting the vitamins and minerals we should. Instead, it is laden with pesticides, herbicides.

I mean, there are so many things in the environment, phthalates, so remember them all heavy metals. Well, right, hundreds of thousands, well, at least hundreds and thousands of toxins and infections.

It's wild to think about. Exactly. And then you move on into what are we eating? Are we are eating a more ultra processed diet? are We eating some of the seed oils that don't serve us as opposed to those healthy fats?

then stress alone can cause inflammation in the system. And we're living through a society where our own mental stress is oftentimes the cause of that physical stress.

In my book, I called it mental inflammation, because I thought, gosh, we don't have a term. We just think stress as bad. How can someone tell me to stress less?

Stressing less is difficult. I'm going to keep piling things on the plate and life is going keep bringing what it brings me. But if we have this awareness that when I get really stressed out, I am going cause a physical stress response, then we kind of have the opportunity in any moment to say, you know what, i'm not going let this stress take over and harm me from the inside.

And so that's where we start to talk about chronic low-grade persistent inflammation that so many of us suffer from. And it's coming from all these different factors that are external and some internal, right?

If we're carrying our own traumas and issues from the inside and our mental health and mental inflammation struggles. That adds up to the type of inflammation, that is really damaging from inside.

And so that's the kind that I'm always trying to talk to people about and say, look, we're all at some level dealing with chronic inflammation. And the problem is when you start to look at that 10, 20, 30 years down the road from where you are, 50, 60, 70s beyond, that where we start those end game type damages that you don't want to try to have to reverse.

they're much harder. This mental inflammation concept, I really loved that idea and the terminology there because it was in a way that I had thought about it before.

And what it made me think of was, can the reverse happen too, right? We know that the stress, overwhelm, worry can translate into measurable physiological inflammation and we see the results at the cellular level, but also inflammation in the body, the chronic pain, And that feeling of inflammation, right, that a lot of times creeps up on people, it also changes how we think, feel, respond, and our capacity levels.

I love that about Ayurveda, is that it has these feedback loops and it's a much more complex system that actually I think is a model that more closely approximates the reality than conventional medicine.

And you know, any of the integrative modalities are looking at the body as a whole, right? When it comes to traditional Chinese medicine, naturopathic medicine and chiropractic medicine.

We're all looking the system saying this is mind, body, spirit. It's not just a physical body and our mental health, it's all interconnected. There's even energetics involved here.

And so when we look at the body and understand that, yes, it can be top down, but really more of the time it's bottom up. And we've seen that work with polyvagal theory.

If you've read books by Mast and Kip and some of these incredible practitioners in our space, they talk about how if our body is under that stress, is going to affect mental health.

We know if gut health is off, brain health, mental will be off. So anytime my teenage daughter comes to me and says, this friend has anxiety, I'm like, we should look the gut.

And she's like, I'm sick of that answer from you, mom. And I was like well, it's the truth. If we can heal the gut and win, that is the easiest path through compared to going a ton of therapy, which of course I love therapy.

I think it is super effective. But if we could win at gut health and really shift brain, why wouldn't we go at it? Everything, right? We really cannot talk about inflammation and brain health without talking about the gut.

It would be a disservice, both from an Ayurvedic perspective, but also modern science is finally catching up to that. How do you think about gut-brain access, not just as it relates to anxiety and depression, what about cognitive resilience?

You know, when we talk about gut in Ayurveda, we think of it as your gut digestive fire, this fire that lives inside of you. And these fires are your Gut Fire, your Brain Fire your Nervous System Fire.

Everything has a fire or a metabolism or an energy to it. And once you understand that with gut, we think of it like a campfire. So let's say you were going camping and you went out and wanted to find the right branches.

You would find small, medium, and large. That's gut microbiome diversity. We wouldn't find just one kind. you would build a boundary around it. that's your gut lining.

we would really honor that we don't want this fire to spread everywhere in all directions. When you go to build this fire, you're going to do it honoring that this campfire is going serve you.

You're gonna cook on it. Your gonna use this for your nourishment and nutrition, which is what our gut does for us. And when you use that gut digestive fire you probably gonna not let it burn all day long 24-7 snacking and trying to heat food every minute.

You're going to eat your two or three square meals a day. In Ayurveda, we teach about the three-square meals. We teach intermittent fasting is very important and really honor building a healthy campfire because without one, are you going digest your food?

Are you gonna benefit from it? are going get any nourishment? No.

Gut health, digestion, and the gut-brain connection

And once that agony is robust again, which modern day life I find is always trying to find ways to create gut dysbiosis, that battle between the good and bad bacteria can oftentimes be really off and we don't even know it if we aren't doing proper stool testing to really discover what's going on.

But let's say you understand how to build this gut digestifier and honor it with the prebiotics and the probiotics and fiber and good diversity of your food.

In IRB though we teach about circadian diet. eating a seasonal diet, because our food receives that food the best in the proper season on a local basis, which that's a whole conversation of how are we sourcing our foods and where on the planet is it coming from, within what season, and are really meant to absorb that foods well if we're eating so out of season all the time.

But once you build that campfire, the goal is that when Shivani eats a meal, that it's balanced, it has all the taste, has the nutrition, and that the body is then going to turn it into OGES.

OGEs is what we teach as the byproduct. It's this resilient nectar of vitality that we have. And so as we age, oftentimes gut dysbiosis, stressors, inflammation, different factors can come along, surgery, trauma, anything big that happens, can throw you off your pedestal.

And you know in your body when you're like, I don't feel good anymore. I do not feel that glow, that vitality. Something is off. And I feel the same. In Ayurveda we teach you just go back to the campfire.

Rebuild each aspect of a healthy gut and that again will give you that vitality and resilience that you want to have. I love it. Yeah, what a great analogy.

Before someone has obvious cognitive changes happening, are there more subtle signs that inflammation might already be affecting the brain, either brain fog, word finding difficulty, fatigue, irritability, mood changes, poor focus?

What symptoms do you pay attention to that might trigger you to think through this inflammation process as contributing? You know, you just name them all.

All of those descriptions you gave were all the symptoms that I hear women specifically share with me. They're like, I can't remember mid-sentence they'll stop and they can remember a specific word.

Memory. Can't Remember everything on the list of things to do. Brain fog for sure. Just sitting there unable to focus, unable figure out what is next that has to happen.

certainly irritability and these things you're talking about are so common. And so as soon as those symptoms or those struggles start to come up, I think it is time to pause and say, is inflammation playing a role?

How is my gut health? Did something change recently that could have caused more inflammation in the system? Most people I'm talking to get their blood work done once a year.

And I was like, that is not enough, guys. We need more data on ourselves. I am getting huge bloodwork done two or three times a years. Within a six month period sometimes you can see a huge shift.

So at least much earlier in game you catch what is going on here. Is it a micronutrient shift? Is vitamins and minerals? Where do you sit with your vitamin D levels?

I mean, we really need to get a little more granular with our health because previously we could assume that our food and nature was just giving it all to us.

And unfortunately, we're not living in that time anymore. I tell people, I'm eating such a healthy diet. Like I literally Instacart into my home, everything organic and fresh, and we only eat fresh food.

One of the rules of Ayurveda is you don't eat food past one day old. Nowadays we have a word for that, histamine. We talk about high histamines foods, meaning don t eat after a day, old and most people are talking about let's meal plan one-day a week.

Let's just cook it all on Sundays, then eat it for the next seven days. In Ayurveda, we teach that that's dead food. It lacks prana, it lacks any good energy.

And when you put that in your body, your bodies gonna have a hard time digesting it. Imagine if I made food today and then a week from now I served it to you and it's kind of dead and congealed and just not fresh anymore.

Let's say by chance I microwaved it on top of it, I don't let anyone use a microwave in my home. We're only baking things or pan heating things. These are all little habits, but they can all add up to how we digest our food, how We absorb it, How we get the benefits, which is then going to all Add up, to contributing to our brain health, right?

It's just that the visual that was coming up for me of you like serving me a plate of food that's like gray and like sad. But it's obvious when you think through it.

But this is a great example of something that I think modern longevity medicine kind of overlooks, right? There's all these meal delivery services where things are being made on Sunday and delivered on Wednesday and eaten on Friday.

It doesn't give us that vitality. I'm curious, for people who don't know much about Ayurveda, are there other things that Ayureveda kind gets or teaches us about aging well or living well?

that modern longevity medicine and kind of like that biohacking culture is still overlooking. Absolutely. So IRV that teaches us, we each have our own individual mind-body constitution.

We are all different. And so once you know your individual body type, you can really navigate from that place. And so I have a quiz on my website at drshivani.com and they can go on there and take the elemental design quiz.

And people always email me back and their like, how did you know that about me? How did, you that as a fire type,

that is the personality I And it's so illuminating because once you understand your type, you can leverage it.

So for example, I am a fire type. I have a very strong digestive fire. That means I'm easily hangry all day long. And it's one of those things where you can lean into your traits versus if I were Vata or the more air type, then I'm probably not meant to cold plunge or do a lot of these things we're talking about in modern biohacking as being amazing for everybody.

And then if you're a more earthy type as well, we're not gonna put you into situations where we are going to extremes. You're meant to be constantly kind like you would be to Mother Earth.

And so when we were talking about modern longevity and biohacking, I think we so excited about what's new and technologically advanced and we forgetting that it's all foundationally based in the same wisdom that all the ancient wisdoms talk about.

We all talk more time in sunlight, put your feet in the grass. So we're buying all these devices for grounding that give us the sunlight benefits, that gives us these shifts in our biology, when in fact, going outside for free into Mother Nature gives this almost all of it.

And it's almost like we're complicating it, making it way more expensive and adding these huge checklists into our lives in this search and this craving for longevity.

And I'm a culprit of it too. I go to the conferences, I get excited, and I buy the things. So I am not saying it is easy to say no to all the cool stuff.

But what I say is if our search is for beautiful brain health, beautiful gut health and beautiful vitality, that can easily be achieved. by understanding your body type, navigating from that place, living according to your circadian rhythm based on your individual design, and then building your lifestyle and self-care rhythms around that.

Because it is that simple. It can be easy. it doesn't have to be expensive and complicated. Right, right. It's like that. Okay, you're looking at a $2,000 red light and it's, like, well, do I watch the sunrise?

Do I watched the sunset? You know, what are the other options? When we talk about making things more individualized and thinking through doshas and constitutions and our elemental type, are there principles that on the flip side you believe are essentially universal, regardless of constitution?

Like maybe Sarcadian rhythm or daily rituals. Yes, there is. So, for example, everything I teach in the book actually applies to everybody. These are the real tenets and principles of Ayurveda that apply to all of us.

Recognizing inflammation in brain fog and fatigue

We all should rise with the sun, set with sun. We can all eat well and really focus on gut health. So a lot of it is universal. One thing I find interesting right now, as I hit the midlife transition, is this conversation around circadian shifts of menopause that I'm trying to bring forward.

Because if we understand the circadian shift of life, we can really understand menopath transition better, and it can support us with brain health as well.

An IRV that we teach that the first piece of your life, first, almost third of, your first section, I'll call it, cause it's not a whole third, is your guffa time of life.

So birth till about puberty, initial years is growing, building your bones. It's the earthy time. Then once that's done puberty till, about 50 is what we call the bitha time, of like the fire time that when you're going to build your career and your marriage, relationships, everything you are going, to be building.

your family, all the stuff. It's like metabolism, fire, energy. During that time, we actually have great estrogen on

board, supporting us to stay warmer and grounded and more supported.

And then after that bitha time of life, let's say forties and fifties nowadays and beyond, that midlife transition onwards into postmenopause, That's the vatha season of love.

And vata's traits, interestingly, are dryness, cold, movement. It's also variability and change. Its energy and movement, and so the vatha traits correlate really interestingly to the symptoms that we experience in perimenopause and menopausal And we can even correlate these to the brain.

So what are we seeing? We're seeing more anxiety, insomnia, dryness in all areas. Everyone's like my hair, skin, my eyes, vaginal dry-ness. Everything just changed.

My hair too. everything's shifting. my bones, My joints, everything went dry all of a sudden. We're seeing that our brain is having a hard time focusing.

So the brain fog, the irritability, it's like your brain's different every day. And you thought you slept well, but you're just not sure what level of brain power you are going to get on that next day, and that's a very vatha type of idea.

Imagine if you were living in an earthquake zone and every time your house just moved a little bit, all of a sudden you'd have to find different approaches to managing your home life if that is what you would live through.

That's what the season can look like. And so as we talk about brain health and really having a brain for longevity, I think it's so important to understand how to balance the Vata season.

I'm ready to call it the vata syndrome of menopause. Okay, let's talk above that. Because I just think what I heard you describe, and it made me a little anxious even, just thinking about moving into that phase of life, it was the dysfunctional vatsa stage, right?

So what does a really functional post-menopausal stage of vato life look like? So a balanced vata person is energized, they're light, They have so much beautiful movement and creativity.

This is someone who always wants to get into different things. They actually download the creative energy of the universe and bring it into life. And so when you look at the menopause stage that we have, it's meant to be the wise woman stage.

We're meant be empty nesters and free. to just share our wisdom, pursue our creative pursuits. And that is a very Buttha-like lifestyle. But a lot of times, instead of entering that season with that attitude, we're entering with the responsibility of teenagers, the responsibilities of elder parents, careers that are still growing and in a different phase.

So we are in the Fittha transition heading towards vata, not wanting to be in the vatha phase of life yet, still trying to grow with fire metabolism and movement.

And we're like, why is everything variable and changing? We're going to control that as opposed to really nourishing and understanding how to ground in that energy and be vibrant.

So Ayurveda says the way to balance vatta is the opposite of all those traits of dry, cold, variable. It's grounding, warmth, moisture. nourishment. And so if the season is like very, very much a struggle for you, a simple way to approach that is healthy fats in your diet, healthy fat in every meal, more nourishing and grounding foods.

You talk a lot about the ketogenic diet. It makes total sense because if we ground to everyone's energy, They're going to feel more supported in the system.

Their energy will be more supportive. We want to get everyone out in Mother Earth, feet in grass, use the grounding tools that we have. we want really support sleep with a deep focus on that sleep being healing.

The glymphatic system clears overnight in what we call the Bitta window, 10 to 2 at night. It's very important. And so skipping that is really dangerous for our health.

It's detrimental. And, so when you're a vata, I really talk about those three square meals, shutting off electronics in time so we can make sure we get to sleep on time.

Circadian rhythm, menopause, and daily Ayurvedic routines

So it's simple habits, but building that structure really helps ground the vatha energy. Yeah, this circadian biology. I want to dive into that. And you just mentioned the different times of the day and night and how they correspond to the doshas, the timing of sleep and meals and movement and light exposure.

How does that impact inflammation and cognitive function? So we talk about it as different types of day correlate to those different elemental design types.

So, we teach that two to six during your day is your vatha time of So even two to six in the morning is a very light time of day. We teach waking up before six AM is the most beautiful time to do.

meditation, deep breathing, which we call pranayam, your morning prayers, journaling, all those things. So if you can rise with the sun and be up before six, that is a very beautiful time for all of that.

There's a lightness to the day. Then we teach that six to 10 is more gaffa time of day, so waking up too late in the six-to-ten window will actually make you more groggy and more tired.

And a lot of people do, they sleep in and then they're like, wait, why did I feel more And so instead, we teach waking up as close to six as you can, and then making sure you move your energy first thing in the morning.

We teach exercise or yoga or walking first things is the best time of day. Then we use 10 to 2 is The Fire, the time-of-day. So 10-2, you're meant to eat your biggest meal of the day, typically lunch in that bigger window, is meant be hearty and bigger, not just some salad and chicken.

Chicken and salad idea, a lot of people eat salads for lunch because they're trying to be healthy. And I read this as please don't do that. Like eat your really robust meal at that time slot.

Then what if you need a nap after? I know, I that's the only problem. So I eat a good meal, but I try to make it not full of too many carbs because then I'm going to get sleepy and tired afterwards.

But they're basically saying, don't eat your biggest meal at dinner, because oftentimes we get home and eat the biggest and then that messes up with our sleep.

So make sure if you're trying to get your calories in more during lunch and a good amount of dinner but not as much. And so let's say 10 to 2, we also teach that your hardest to digest foods are easiest to digest when the sun is highest in the sky.

If you are going to eat nuts and seeds, put those in that window of the 10-2 or close to it if possible. And then we teach that two to six is your Vata time of day again, distracted.

It's your time where it's hard to do the bigger focused work. Your time to that was really your morning into your afternoon. And so imagine after two, we're all like, I need a treat.

I needs some coffee. i need to pick me up. Everything's going downhill in that time slot. So instead of forcing yourself to big work or focused, a lot of times it is better to just do your easy checklist items, your errands, tasks that you need just to get out of the way.

And then six onwards, it's really your guffa time of day, 6 to 10 PM, we're meant to wind down. We're mean to have

our dinner 6-7 PM. Stop all work before that, which in modern day life we generally don't do that.

Then we are meant wind our home, our personal life, whatever that is, and then switch into our self-care rituals and self hygiene rituals for a better night's sleep.

And so in Ayurveda, we teach certain habits like dry brushing and abhyang massage, full body massage with a healthy food grade oil. And when we do that, that's so grounding and nourishing.

That's oiliation of the joints, oiliation of body. and it gives you such a higher quality of sleep. And so that ritual anytime within the six to 10 period is wonderful.

Then again, 10 to two at night is your fifth time of day, fire time. Honoring that is really key when we talk about inflammation and cognitive health, because that's when were going to clear glymphatic system, clear lymphatic rejuvenate, heal.

So much happens while we're sleeping. And what I'm learning is we are thinking we were sleeping well, but oftentimes we aren't. I ask everyone to really measure their sleep and even go after sleep.

Studies get deep into sleep because oftentimes you think your sleep is good. and it might not be good, and that's a problem. And then you hook around into the next day.

I really think of the quality of next is based on that sleep hygiene and sleep pattern of that night before. One thing I forgot to mention is we have morning self-care rituals.

So waking up any morning practice you have is wonderful around prayer, meditation, meditation, pranayama, deep breathing, all these things. But after your quiet time in the morning, we recommend waking up, make sure you go to the bathroom.

We want to make no one on earth is constipated. That's why in Ayurveda we usually have a glass of water on your nightstand in a copper cup or just a covered cup.

And we want you to hydrate first thing to really rehydrate your tissues and create that opportunity for peristalsis and going to bathroom in And then we also recommend copper tongue scraper oil pulling, which are some of the more popular habits out of Ayurveda that people have actually heard about.

Copper tongue scrapers taking this tongue, scrapper gently scraping the tongue seven to 14 times first thing in the morning. and it's gonna clear all the organs of the body.

It gently removes ama, or the toxin burden, that accumulated overnight. Because in Ayurveda, we teach that all of organs with the bodies are reflected on the tongue, just like in reflexology, they're reflected in the bottom of our feet.

So that's a simple habit. It takes 20 seconds. it's inexpensive too, because once you buy your tongue scraper, it really lasts you for life. But that one habit can really help create that gut digestive fire that we were talking about and support our long-term health.

And then the last one is oil pulling. Oil pulling is where we put any food grade organic oil in our mouth for five to 10, 20 minutes. I know that sounds like a long time, but you can do that while you're also doing your other habits, while your making your morning coffee or getting in the shower for the day.

But by putting that oil in your mouth, it's going to accumulate all the toxins that accumulated overnight. When you spit it out, make sure you put it up in the trash can, not your toilet sink or shower because you'll clog the pipes of your home.

But we want to get rid of that toxin burden and increase that communication between oral microbiome and gut

microbiomes. Lots to do. This is so fun. But I'm inspired.

I used to scrape my tongue and I don't even know what happened to this tongue scraper. Yeah, this is exciting. And I see some people are like, well, I'll just brush my time, but like there's a reason that that's it for the teeth, right?

You did your PhD on turmeric, so we have to take advantage of your expertise, your deep expertise here. What makes turmeric and curcumin different, the same, and so interesting biologically, particularly in this context and talking about health and inflammation and brain, cognitive function as we age.

For sure. I'm obsessed with turmeric for the brain. There's so much wisdom there. So much current science that shows that curcumin has a powerful role when we talk about brain health and neurocognitive health overall.

To start, turmeric is a root and out of the entire turmeric plant, only three to 5% of it is the curcuminoids. And so a lot of people find me and they're like, I take juice shots.

I am eating my turmeric sprinkled on my chicken all the time. and I'm like guys, that's wonderful. Eat it like a food. It is wonderful, but kitchen culinary turmeric, is very different than supplement therapeutic grade curcupinoid, given at a high potency in the right proportion.

And so that's where I love to really dive into the science because that three to five percent is really important in what it can do. One more thing people should understand is when you're consuming turmeric, whether in your kitchen or in a supplement form, you want to take it with black pepper or a healthy fat.

Black pepper increases that absorption up to 2000 percent and the healthy fact helps it cross the blood brain barrier. There should not be both. There shouldn't be black pepper and a healthy fat.

And you can do both, exactly. So for so many, I created a turmeric that has black paper in it, and I say, just take it with a meal with healthy, fat and you're going to get both benefits that way.

I think this is just like where we want to dive in really deeply, like dose, formulation, absorption, quality. If you go to Amazon and put in curcumin or turmeric, so much comes up.

And so how do people choose the right one at the rate dose when they're shopping? For sure. I mean, there's so to say on it. So curicumin is such a powerful anti-inflammatory.

It functions on the NF kappa B pathway. It impacts interleukin 6, interlucin 1 beta, TNF alpha. it works on a master switch of inflammation as opposed to NSAIDs which just go after one pathway of inflammations.

That's really powerful to understand is a lot of people who say I have joint pain. I just take my NSAIDS every day. I'm like, you could be taking turmeric and approaching this from a very global holistic perspective and healing inflammation at the root.

And then we don't have to deal with this level of chronic joint pain.

Turmeric, curcumin, and anti-inflammatory botanicals

So that's a big one I love about turmeric. Another one is it functions on the nRF2 pathway. We are seeking to take so many superfoods for their antioxidant benefits.

Curcumin goes in there and says, You need to make more antioxidants and tells that to ourselves. Our cells are making more glutathione and the antioxidants that we need.

then it also functions on the metformin path. And so it helps when it comes to our metabolism and when is comes our health overall. What I love about curcumin when comes brain is it has an impact on amyloid plaques, tau

tangles, our microglia, BDNF.

It helps with neurogenesis and mitogenesis. So I get so excited. I presented at different medical conferences on the power of this one spice to really go in there and support the body from underneath.

Like, let's get underneath the problem and lift it up. I know that when it comes to curcumin, because it has such a powerful anti-inflammatory effect, that's why it's being so widely studied.

And that is why you see so many supplements on the market. Everyone is like, oh, I should just take some turmeric. But like you said, there's a huge vast difference in quality.

So when I finished my PhD, everyone would ask me, okay, you're saying I can take turmeric for everything. Which one should I take? I went to the store and I looked and everyone had differences on their labels.

It's really hard just to look at the label and understand. Many products just say curcuma longa, that's the regular turmeric plant. That's not even the extracts from curicumin.

Then we want the curcupinoids at a 95% standardization, but there's again so much variability and quality in how people source and how they formulate.

And so finally, everyone said, if you're going to say this to us for the rest of our lives, you should just make your own because I don't know who's to take.

And I ended up creating my own formulation. My dream was I want to put this in the hands of every single doctor. So if are struggling with your health and you go to orthopedics or functional medicine and they say you can take turmeric for that, then we have one that's really built for potency at such a powerful level.

In my formulations, I made one called turmeric gold that is following the science. 500 milligrams curcumin, 4 milligrams black pepper extract. I added turmeric back in for the synergistic effect, but that taken twice a day is what we call the standardized dose that we see in so much of the literature.

And we have seen that curicumin is so powerful for neurocognitive health, cognitive function, memory, all those things amongst everything else. And then I created a second formulation that has baswalia, dried ginger, amla, all the ancient Ayurvedic herbs that you would give holistically in synergy with the curcumin to create a powerful result.

And what's beautiful is we know basulic acid functions on the five lox pathway. We know curicumin is very heavy on cox-2 pathway amongst all of the others.

So there's such powerful synergy for the chronic inflammation piece with acute inflammation in there. There's a lot of new science now that's proving what ancient Ayurveda said to be true.

And then there's also a lot of great structuring science happening in India right now around the Ayurevedic botanicals, where they're understanding that to bring those botanicals forward, we need to study them.

Just like pharma would study any ingredient, We need those scientific studies to create that comfort. and that understanding of how to use these different herbs and what the molecules are that are really performing these major lifts that we're asking for when it comes to our health.

So to me, I could nerd out on turmeric for hours. I get really excited. And I love when someone teaches about brain health the way you do because there's so much opportunity here to help people and support them.

Curcumin and turmeric are one key one that I happen to love the most. But I find in Ayurveda, we have so many. Like everyone should have ginger, lemon tea incorporated in their week.

Ginger is so powerful for gut and for brain as an anti-inflammatory. We should all look at ashwagandha if it's a fit for

us. Taking some of these different adaptogens can really help us as well.

But for me, turmeric will always be my number one. Well, that was my next question. It's like, what other foods, herbs, spices are kind of emerging out of this Ayurvedic tradition?

And you mentioned ginger and ashwagandha. Are there others that you can kind rattle off that people might want to consider for healthy, not just inflammatory balance, but just for a healthy aging?

Absolutely. I mean, there's Brahmi. Brahmin is Bacopa complex, so good for the brain. Tulsi is a beautiful one. we call Tulsi here in the West, but Tul-si tea is very good as an adaptogen, very calming to the system.

We have one called Shatavari. Here in The West we pronounce it Chatav-ari, and that one I put into a tea called Menopause Support Tea because it's so beautiful as a rejuvenative tonic for male and female sex organs.

So it really helps us during this transition of perimenopaus into menopauze. There's just so many beautiful herbs. Fennel after a meal, if you have heartburn or indigestion, just put some fennels seeds in hot water and drink it, and that'll calm and cool and soothe things down.

I travel with peppermint tea for that reason, so there's so many. So fun. I think, you know, I'm so fired up. And I thing one issue that comes up in the wellness space these days is that people can end up with a list of 47 things they're supposed to do before breakfast, right?

And for someone listening who maybe is feeling overwhelmed, can you narrow this down to like the three highest impact things that you would have someone do to reduce their general inflammatory burden?

When it comes to our morning routine, if I don't have a ton of time, I just use my tongue scraper. That's it. I keep it simple. Because it's such a good habit, it'll do so much for you, and then you don' have to focus on everything else.

So yeah, sometimes we can keep simple, It doesn't need to be that complicated. And move in nature even for five minutes. Nature has you and you're going to have the benefits of it So we can simplify this down.

I think of it as certain days, I can do everything. And on certain day, s I could only do my real bare minimum. I think what happens though is sometimes we only to the bare-minimum forever and we need to come back to expanding it back towards all the things we.

But yes, a circadian walk in the morning and evening is so powerful. A tongue scraper does so much in terms of detoxification. And I have a simple habit called tea time is me time that I keep a couple times a day as just this opportunity to pause and tune in and tuned into my intuition and use it as a mindful moment to just drop into parasympathetic.

Sometimes I tend to be just in fight or flight stress, running at 200 miles an hour. So this one simple habits is vagus nerve toning and helps us just settle down.

and be at peace and allow the body to heal, right? If we're in rest and digest, we'll rest, digest and heal.

Simple habits for lowering inflammation

And so much of the Ayurvedic wisdom is saying, look, I'm here to give you those tools. You just have to make space for them. It's that easy. I love it.

Yeah, and I want to end this on another personal note by asking about what brings you the most joy right now and what are you hoping to still be doing when you're 90 years old?

I love that question. You know, what brings me the most joy right now is tea time alone in my backyard, just soaking up some peace and some nature. I find the last year or two being out on a book tour the way I have life just

got so intense and it gets really excited.

Exciting to have so much momentum. But the only way to slow that momentum down and collect my peace in, my case is my tea, time is me time. It really forces me to.

Slow down. So you're going to pause and that pause is just long enough for me to say, please put down your iPhone. Please just tune into self, take a deep breath, and let's just check in with self.

Let's use this moment for us, for Me, not for the world. That's my first. And then my second is when I turn 90, my wish is to keep doing this, to get to write books about Ayurveda, finding ways to teach it in a way that people will apply it to themselves.

I'm sure I am going growing and changing with the Ayurvedic wisdom. And so my dream is just to get to keep doing this, to getting to teaching it to the world, because this is my favorite thing that I get do.

What fun. I love it. It brings that purpose and meaning, right, which also I think helps us tap into that joy. Shivani, thank you so much for being here, I just love this reminder of some of these powerful tools.

I feel so fired up about tongue scraping and thinking about my circadian rhythm in a slightly different way. Just healthy aging tools, they aren't necessarily complicated, right?

It's about kind of returning to the common sense and they're embedded in the rhythms of everyday life.

Joy, purpose, and closing reflections

of how we eat and sleep and move and manage stress and connect with other people and care for our gut and creating this beautiful space for restoration the way that you just described.

I also really appreciate this bridge you've created between thousands of years of Ayurvedic wisdom and our evolving understanding in the West of inflammation and metabolism and brain health.

And you're like this translator between them. and I just, I love, you know, through you getting to tap into some of that and be inspired by it. For everyone listening, I really hope today's conversation has left you feeling not with another overwhelming list of things to do, but with a few simple places to start or some reminders of thing to go back to.

These small choices that are repeated consistently that become our routine. They really shift the trajectory of how we age. And so I hope that you've been inspired the way I have today.

Dr. Shivani Gupta, thank you for joining me today on the Think Well, Age Well. Thank you. Thanks for having me. Thank you so much for listening to the Think Well, Age Well podcast.

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