

The Jakarta Post

Mind and body solutions to stress

Priyanka Rajan , The Jakarta Post , Jakarta | Wed, 02/18/2009 2:55 PM | Lifestyle



Nature's way: During a retreat in Ubud, people mediate in a natural setting. Reducing stress through such practices is believed to help disease prevention. *(Courtesy of True Holistic Healing)*

While some industries are struggling to stay afloat as the global financial crisis tightens its grip, one industry is flourishing.

The holistic care industry is in the business of stress management and as stress levels in the current economic climate rise, so do the number of customers seeking new and innovative ways to manage their anxiety.

"There has been an increase in the number of clients that are stressed because of the impact of the economic downturn," says Maya Safira Muchtar, director of L'Ayurveda Centre for Inner Beauty and Holistic Care in Jakarta.

"A lot of people have been losing their money and businesses. They come full of fear, but realize that they have to take care of their tension."

Over the past 10 years, complementary and alternative medicines such as tao, ayurveda, reiki and crystal therapy have been gaining popularity in Indonesia.

Holistic care, which encompasses individual therapies such as acupuncture, counseling and massage as well as group workshops on yoga and stress management, is often being used in conjunction with modern medicine.

"They finally realize, even doctors, that the root of all physical ailments is actually from the mind. We have a lot of referrals from doctors because allopathy doesn't cure everything, it just cures symptoms," Maya says.

"Health is not only about the body, it is also about the mind and soul. In holistic care we find the root cause of the problem."

Holistic healing practitioner at True Nature Holistic Healing, Reza Gunawan, agrees.

"There is a framework limitation when working with modern medicine because there is inadequate knowledge of how the mind relates to the body. Thoughts, feelings and belief systems are not taken into consideration. At the same time psychology knows about the mind but not how it affects the body."

He adds that holistic healing focuses more on prevention of disease.

"Modern medicine concentrates on pathology. It is based on people with sick bodies or minds, but there is little knowledge about what a health body and mind is all about."

Reza, who has been practicing holistic care for more than 20 years, believes all stress falls into one of three categories: health and appearance; love and personal relationships; and money, career and success.

As for the latter, Reza says, "Problems are never really about money, they are just about what the money represents - regrets about having lost money or fear of losing money. So it's a worry problem, not a money problem." This understanding is the first step to healing, he says.

"Once there is clearer awareness about what the problem really is, the stress can be dissolved easily. If I have no worry, I have no problem."

According to Dinastuti, a lecturer in clinical psychology at the Atma Jaya Catholic University, Jakarta, stress about financial matters is caused by a lack of a sense of security.



Crystal Clear: Crystal therapy, as applied in this facial, is one of the alternative treatments available (*Courtesy L'ayurveda*)

"Money and finance in general are considered something that gives people some foundation. They can really feel safe when they have money and can pay their bills on time and when something in that area is having problems, you lose that sense of security."

The resulting stress, Dinastuti says, can be characterized by physical symptoms including an increased heart rate, headaches, troubled sleep and a disturbed eating pattern as well as nonphysical symptoms such as irritability and an inability to concentrate.

She warns that while holistic care may be effective, during financial difficulties it may not be the most inexpensive means of stress management.

"People have to check and see what their financial priorities are before they experiment with new stress relief techniques. If they have enough money then maybe they can spend it on that kind of luxury."

There are, she suggests, alternatives to holistic care.

"The best thing to do is to spend time on your own - going to a movie on your own, going to dinner by yourself. If you sit down alone you will probably have more clarity and find a better solution."

But holistic care enthusiast of four years Sitha Soerjo argues that holistic care should be even more of a priority during times of financial trouble.

"Especially if things go bad you need to take care of yourself, right? This is your investment, this life."

She explains that holistic healing sessions should be used to learn the techniques that can then be practiced independently.

"That's what they give you - the tools so that later on you'll be able to handle it yourself somehow."

The 38-year-old television commercial producer has noticed a marked difference in her life since she took up holistic healing.

"Even some of my friends became interested in trying it because they see that it does help me and they find me more cheerful and more outgoing," she laughs.

"I think I face life differently. I have this new energy and spirit. The stress is still there but I know how to manage it and I know there is always somewhere to go to and ask for another opinion."

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The soothing `science of life'

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"It's just not a spa. A spa may take care of muscle aches - but that's temporary," says Maya Safira Muchtar, director of L'Ayurveda, one of the premier Ayurvedic holistic care centers in Jakarta.

"After a massage, you get the same aches and then you have to go back again."

Ayurveda is a system of prevention using traditional medicine that originated in Indian scriptures, the Vedas, more than 5,000 years ago.

A Sanskrit word meaning the "science of life", Ayurveda prescribes not only physical health requirements such as diet, exercise and massage but also healthy living, thinking and behavior.

It emphasizes moderation in food and medicine intake as well as in sleep and sexual intercourse.

"It is about how we should try to live and balance our life with nature," explains Maya. "Starting from our lifestyle, approach to food, what we think and the physical side also."

Ayurveda is impressively broad and advanced considering its ancient origins.

It includes information on treatment of diabetes and hypertension as well as procedures for performing plastic surgery, amputations and caesarean sections.

Broadly, Ayurveda is classified as a system of complementary and alternative medicine under the umbrella of holistic care, together with homeopathy, naturopathy, hypnosis and traditional Chinese medicine.

One or more systems are often used in combination as part of an individual's therapy.

"We have a large anagram of healing traditions. You cannot just use one method for everything. People are unique and the most appropriate treatment will be determined according to their needs," says Maya.

Ayurveda is based on the notion of five natural elements: earth, water, fire, air and space.

Within the body, these five elements assume the form of three doshas (body types) - vata (wind), pitta (bile) and kapha (phlegm).

When one of the doshas is in excess or is deficient, because of physical or emotional trauma, this causes an imbalance with the elements of nature and consequently invites disease.

When the body is in equilibrium with nature, however, the individual remains healthy.

It is common practice for Ayurvedic centers to give first-timers an initial consultation before performing any treatment.

The session acts as a health assessment, during which the assessor, through direct questioning, observation and physical examination, determines the client's dosha constitution and suitability for treatment.

Ayurvedic treatment in Jakarta is largely centered on massage.

"Everything you do you have to adapt to the place, climate and culture. We can't take everything as it is from India," Maya explains.

The most popular therapy is the Shirodhara therapy, which begins with a full-body oil massage followed by the ceremonial procedure of dripping oil onto the middle of the forehead from a copper vessel for an extended period.

The Abhyangam full-body massage with herbal oils, on the other hand, requires two therapists to perform a synchronized massage to increase the balancing effect.

Steam baths commonly follow oil massages to induce sweating and flush out toxins.

Other treatments include head and foot massages, herbal facials and eye treatments.

--JP/Priyanka Rajan

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Diet recommendations

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So what is right for your blood type?

In his book, *Eat Right 4 Your Type*, naturopath Peter D'Adamo prescribes diet, exercise and lifestyle plans for each of the four blood groups.

Based on the theory that all food contains lectins that are compatible or incompatible with each blood type, the diet recommends that certain foods should be included and others avoided in order to minimize negative reactions to lectins.

The theory goes further to say that since our blood types evolved at different times, our dietary requirements are determined by our ancestry and we should eat what our ancestors with the same blood types ate many years ago.

D'Adamo argues that managing our diets in this way can help lose weight, boost energy and lower the risk of contracting some diseases.

Blood Type O - The Hunter

It is recommended that those with the O blood type eat foods high in protein such as red meat, fish and poultry.

They should also include fruits and vegetables in their diet.

However, they should avoid grains, breads, legumes and beans as well as dairy products, caffeine and alcohol.

D'Adamo's health regime for O types includes vigorous exercise such as aerobics, running and contact sports.

Blood Type A - The Cultivator

For A blood types the *Eat Right 4 Your Type* diet suggests a predominantly vegetarian diet including soy, grains, fruits and vegetables.

However, D'Adamo warns that Type As have particularly sensitive digestive systems and should try to maintain a fresh and organic diet.

They should avoid dairy products and red meat.

In addition, Type As should engage in gentle and calming exercises such as golf, yoga and tai chi.

Blood Type B - The Nomad

Those with the B blood type have relatively tolerant digestive systems and can enjoy almost all foods including dairy, meat, eggs and vegetables.

Grains, lentils, nuts, tomatoes and processed foods should, however, be avoided.

D'Adamo recommends moderate exercise that requires mental balance for Type Bs, such as hiking, swimming, tennis and cycling.

Blood Type AB - The Enigma

Type AB's dietary and exercise requirements are a hybrid of type A and type B requirements.

The Eat Right 4 Your Type diet especially recommends seafood.

It also suggests that tofu, dairy foods such as yoghurt, and green vegetables are beneficial.

D'Adamo also suggests that type Abs should eat smaller, more frequent meals.

Those of blood type AB have a long list of foods that should be avoided including chicken, beef and pork as well as smoked or cured meat. Also on the to-avoid list are beans, corn, wheat and seeds, as well as caffeine and alcohol.

Like Type As, D'Adamo recommends calming exercises for type ABs.

JP/Priyanka Rajan