

WEEK THREE: Addiction & Our Energy Bodies

Ayurveda and Addiction

In biology, we view the body as an extraordinarily built biome, functioning as a series of intricate, complex and delicate systems within systems; housing a very important microbiota: the ecological community of commensal, symbiotic and pathogenic microorganisms that literally share our body space. Traditional Western medicine understands these systems in parts, but often confuses the parts for the whole, resulting in the treatment of symptoms or specific ailments, usually only looking at the physical body, separate from the mental body, or vice versa. The ayurvedic system of medicine addresses the sophisticated complexities of the body in a holistic way, offering a profound understanding of each person's unique body, mind and consciousness, making it an ideal system to heal addictive patterns. Ayurveda is called a "living" science, because it incorporates modern developments with ancient wisdom. Ayurveda supports the elimination of the cause of the dis-ease or ailment, the treatment of the condition, the re-building of the body and the continuing support of the rejuvenation program.

Our bodies are uniquely equipped to handle imbalances, applying properties of homeostatis to regulate chemical reactions that keep everything functioning and in working order, especially under stressful conditions. As we learned earlier, when the body is under extreme amounts of stress over prolonged periods of time, these systems of maintaining balance become over-taxed, and this over-taxation of the system can lead to addictive behaviours. Yogi Amrit Desai, founder of Kripalu Yoga, observes *"...that stressors—thoughts and reactions to our lifestyle, relationships, work environment and family life—are introduced through the ego mind. Emotionally charged thoughts and feelings of blame, shame or guilt then get metabolized into our biological body system. Stored in the form of toxins and neuro-glandular imbalances, these feelings create energy blocks that prevent the free flow of energy, or prana, the body's self-healing wisdom. Energy blocks may take the form of muscular tensions and weakness in liver, kidney and digestive functions. Gradual decline results in a progressive deterioration of biological processes and consequently can manifest in external symptoms of fatigue, fear, anxiety and insecurity.*

"But, when our thoughts are free from stressful emotional feelings, they naturally pass like clouds without leaving footprints in our biology."

Ayurvedic medicine considers addiction to fall under the study of **Madatya**, translating to "intoxication". **Madatya** is the state of being that arises from long-term and heavy useage of "intoxicating" substances. To expand upon this, I would also include the the term "behaviours", to provide context to the modern research in relation to the ancient teachings of Ayurveda. In this sense, we can understand that mind-altering substances that we put into our bodies in one way or another, and behaviours, such as excessive time on the internet/social media and/or in front of a device or screen, as well as "toxic" relationship patterns, excessive consumerism and compulsions with food and exercise, can be considered **"Madya"** the term used in Ayurveda for "intoxicating substances". **Madatya** is considered to be the opposite of *Ojas (vital life-force)*.

Madya Gunas

According to Ayurveda, madya has its own qualities/attributes or **gunas**, within the the 3 gunas present in everything and every being in the universe: Sattva, Rajas and Tamas. (information below adapted from an article in [Ayurlog: National Journal of Research for Ayurved Science](#))

1. Light (*Laghu*)
2. Hot (*Ushṇa*)
3. Sharp (*Tikshṇa*)
4. Subtle (*Sukshma*)
5. Clear (*Vishada*)
6. Sour (*Amla*)
7. Spreading (*Vyavayi*)
8. Ashu (*Quick Acting*)
9. Vikasi (*Depressant*)
10. Dry and/or Rough (*Ruksha - Khara*)

The Doshas & Addiction

Addiction is complex - and so is classifying specific behaviours and drug-uses with the doshas. The following information about dosha-dominance and addictive behaviours is by no means exhaustive, but it provides a general overview of what how addiction can manifest within each dosha. Keep in mind that it is possible, and very plausible, that most people who are experiencing addictive behaviours will exhibit a combination of two or more of the doshic imbalances - in combination with what you've learned about the biology of addiction and the functioning of the brain and nervous-system, you will begin to see a lot of crossover in the doshic imbalances.

VATA

Vata-dominant types and those with vata-imbalances will often experience higher levels of anxiety and insomnia. Vata-types can be known to pursue drugs/behaviours that reduce anxiety and calm their nervous-system, at least in the short term, including nicotine (smoking) and benzodiazepines and on the flip-side, when exhaustion sets in, the use of stimulants can begin: caffeine and so on.

PITTA

Pitta-dominant types and those with pitta-imbalance have the capacity for pushing themselves beyond healthy limits, manifesting in perfectionist behaviours and over-working, which are in themselves addictive behaviours and can also lead to the over-use of nicotine (smoking), and stimulants such as caffeine and cocaine.

KAPHA

Kapha-dominant types and those with kapha imbalances have the capacity for over-eating, leading to bingeing and purging (bulimia nervosa), as well as the over-use of depressants including alcohol, opiates, benzos and barbiturates, as well as television and internet addiction.

Addiction & Our Energy Bodies: The Chakras

The chakras are specialized energy centres in the subtle bodies, connecting our physical bodies to our emotional and spiritual selves. Each are associated with a major nerve and glandular system in the physical body. The chakras act as transformers or “receiving stations” to step down vibratory frequencies and translate them into hormonal, nerve and cellular activity in the physical body. The chakras are hubs of electrical and chemical activity that receive, process and distribute information from and to the rest of the body-mind, acting as bridges between universal consciousness, the external world, our physical body, mind and emotions.

The chakras are connected to each other and to various aspects of the physical body through energetic threads known as “nadis”. Nadis represent an extensive network of fluid-like energies which parallel the body’s nerves in their abundance. Nadis are formed by fine threads of energetic matter. It is said that there are 72,000 nadis in the subtle anatomy of human beings. Because of this intricate interconnection with the nervous system, the nadis affect the nature and quality of nerve transmission within the extensive network of the brain, spinal cord and peripheral nerves. Dysfunction at the level of the chakras and nadis can, therefore, be associated with pathological changes in the nervous system. There is a special alignment between the major chakras, glands, and nerve plexuses that is necessary for optimal human functioning. Emotions that have not been processed or unresolved conflict can create a blockage in flow, a knot in the energetic body that creates a corresponding physical dysfunction. Psychological material associated with a specific chakra may be brought to awareness by increasing the energy flow to that area through practicing physical yoga, pranayama and meditation exercises, allowing an energetic contraction to release. Our belief systems, the patterns of our thoughts, our past history, our unhealed conflicts or traumas, the vibration fields around us and our suppressed emotions may create imbalances in any of these energy centres that may result in physical illness or addiction. We may help to remove these obstructions by examining and changing unhealthy belief systems and thought patterns, by releasing past

traumas, resolving conflict, by experiencing and expressing withheld emotions, by changing the vibrational fields around us, through energetic healing techniques, and through spiritual disciplines. Once obstructions are removed and the energy can flow, we become more whole, physical ailments may heal, our emotions are more balanced, and our growth potential and spiritual development accelerate.

CHAKRA ONE/Root Chakra/"Muladhara" Chakra

The first chakra is known as the coccygeal, base or root chakra and is located between the anus and sex organs. The root centre reflects the degree to which we feel connected to the Earth or are grounded in our activities. It is directly connected to our feelings of security, and is linked to our survival instincts. The physical structures associated with this center are symbolic of release.

Balanced: grounded, secure with a strong foundation

Imbalanced: victimized, paranoid, hostile, compulsive and/or self-destructive, greed. Physical ailments associated with imbalanced root chakra include hemorrhoids, constipation, sciatica, sacrum pain and environmental sensitivities.

Addiction Associations: hoarding, over-eating, money, being a victim, constant re-location, clutter, violence, gambling, shopping.

CHAKRA TWO/Sacral Chakra/"Swadhishtana" Chakra

The sacral chakra is the subtle-energy seat of the sexuality and relates to our emotional life, sensuality, sexuality, relationship issues and creativity. It is associated with the reproductive organs, in addition to the urinary bladder, large and small intestines, the appendix, and the lumbar vertebrae.

Balanced: we express emotions appropriately, nurture healthy relationships and express our creativity.

Imbalanced: we may avoid intimate relationships and/or have poor boundaries, we may be either over-emotional or shut down emotionally. Physical ailments may include uterine or prostate problems, recurrent vaginal infections or discomfort, low back pain, kidney disorders, infertility and ovarian cysts.

Addiction Associations: food, sex, pornography, excess pleasure, alcohol, smoking

CHAKRA THREE/Solar Plexus Chakra/"Manipura" Chakra

The third chakra is located one inch below the navel and corresponds to our sense of personal power, will, control, stamina, strength and resiliency.

Balanced: assertive, confident, can initiate positive change

Imbalanced: low self-esteem, lack discipline, poor follow-through on personal goals, angry, aggressive, controlling, authoritarian, abusive.

Addiction Associations: power, status, work, anger, success, perfection, gambling, violence, stimulants, caffeine.

CHAKRA FOUR/Heart Chakra/"Anahata" Chakra

The fourth chakra is associated with our heart-centre and is related to our ability to receive, feel and give love, acceptance, forgiveness and compassion. This includes both self-love/compassion/acceptance/forgiveness and that towards others.

Balanced: kind, loving, compassionate, able to let go, forgive, express joy, hopeful

Imbalanced: we may lack love for ourselves and others, we may give too much of ourselves and feel the need to "fix" others to feel ok about ourselves. We may use others, feel emotionally guarded and irresponsible in our relationships. Physical ailments associated include asthma, lung cancer, respiratory complications, allergies and upper back and shoulder pain.

Addiction Associations: relationships, our children, pleasing, over-nurturing, helping, work, opiates.

CHAKRA FIVE/Throat Chakra/"Vishuddha" Chakra

The fifth chakra is located at the base of the throat and is most commonly associated with communication, self-expression, listening, teaching and the ability to command through speech. In addition to communication, the throat chakra is known as the centre of will. Difficulties in self-expression may be seen here as a problem in exerting the will to communicate one's true inner feelings. The will activity of the throat chakra can also affect an individual's ability to consciously recognize their own needs.

Balanced: positive self-expression, command over will-power, strong communication skills with others

Imbalanced: unable to voice feelings, opinions and/or needs, blocks in creativity/self-expression, fear other's judgement/opinions.

Addiction Associations: gossip, talking too much, being right, status, appearances.

CHAKRA SIX/Third Eye Chakra/"Ajna" Chakra

The third-eye chakra is located between the eye-brows and is related to intuition, visualisation skills, concentration, planning and the ability to know the unknown and see the unseen. It is associated with the pituitary gland and the frontal lobe of the brain.

Balanced: healthy introspection, strongly-developed intuition and inner guidance, maintaining strong goals, clairvoyance ("clear vision").

Imbalanced: depression, disassociation, confusion, alienation, over-intellectualization due to lack of connection to self.

Addiction Associations: fantasy, drugs, alcohol, gambling, food, sex.

CHAKRA SEVEN/Crown Chakra/"Sahasrara" Chakra

The crown chakra is above and beyond the six other centres, and is located at the top of the head. It is considered to be one of the highest vibrational centers in the subtle body and is associated with deep inner searching or the so-called "spiritual quest". This chakra links the finite to the infinite, the individual to the Universal.

Balanced: we may feel a unity and connectedness with all beings, merging with the divine and understanding of our highest consciousness and destiny.

Imbalanced: alienation, disconnection, disassociation, depression.

Addiction Association: drugs, alcohol, fantasy