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## Our Story

# How Āyurveda Improved My Chronic Lyme Disease

By Jenny Menzel, H.C. • ProHealth.com • December 23, 2019

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After eight years of mysterious pain and fatigue, a CDC-positive Lyme disease test (Western Blot), and three years of long-term, combination antibiotic therapy for Lyme, my faith in

modern medicine's ability to help me feel better decayed.

I had sampled alternative therapies like acupuncture, massage, and chiropractic care in conjunction with allopathic treatment with the hopes of curing my odd range of symptoms, but the high cost of investing in Lyme-literate medical doctors took its toll on my finances and my body. Not only had my pain and fatigue symptoms not improved, I had lost 20 pounds, along with my ability to work full-time without the assistance of pain relievers.

By age 29, I quit my job and ventured to North Carolina to sink the last of my savings into a therapy called *pañchakarma*, the five actions of cleansing the body in the ancient Indian medical system called Āyurveda. It was then that I turned a corner with my first win against Lyme, not only experiencing a much-needed weight gain, but learning how to alter my diet and lifestyle to support continual health improvement.

# What Is Āyurveda?

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*Ayur* (life) and *veda* (science or knowledge) are Sanskrit words that form into Āyurveda (ah-yer-vey-duh), roughly translating into “knowledge of life.” The great Āyurvedic classical texts date back as early as 400-200 BCE, which include the *Caraka Samhitā*, *Suśruta Samhitā*, *Samgraha* and *Aṣṭāṅga Hṛdayam*, but the origins of the medical system formation stretch back as early as 3300 BCE in what is now Pakistan, making it one of the world’s oldest whole-body healing systems.

*Vaidyas* (Āyurvedic physicians) treat the whole patient, not only symptoms of specific ailments. They evaluate a person’s *doṣas* (doe-shuhs), which is the elemental makeup of space, air, fire, water, and earth that determines the state of one’s body and mind. At birth, everyone is born with a *prakṛti* (body constitution) that is a unique combination of the three *doṣas*: *Vāta* (air and space), *Pitta* (fire and water), and *Kapha* (earth and water).

As we progress through life and imbalances are introduced to our bodies through seasonal changes, diet, lifestyle habits, illness, trauma, and environmental factors, we develop a *vikṛti* which reflects the current state of our constitution based on those accumulated imbalances. It is the job of the *Vaidya* to assist the patient in correcting these imbalances to regain health.

## Āyurveda And Lyme Disease

While scientific research on chronic Lyme disease is still in its infancy as studies emerge with new findings, Āyurveda is as well, in spite of its deep roots in history. Studies are being conducted more frequently, especially in India, to legitimize the science using measurable Western standards. Indian hospitals order labs and employ other Westernized approaches to monitor and document the efficacy of treatments in an effort to prove Āyurveda as effective medical care.

In America, there is one practitioner who has specifically focused on using Āyurveda to manage Lyme disease. Dr. Scott Gerson of Gerson Ayurveda (<https://www.gersonayurveda.com/>) proposes that while Lyme is indeed caused by a specific microbe, *Borrelia burgdorferi*, this alone is not the root cause of what we know as Lyme disease. Gerson suggests that epigenetic marks (energetic abnormalities) actually predispose different individuals to react differently to the same germ. These energetic abnormalities are the accumulated imbalances incurred since birth that make up our *prakṛti*. The imbalances can happen in areas such as diet, toxic exposure (<https://www.prohealth.com/lyme-disease/library/overview-lyme-disease-mold-illness-91639>), medication, trauma, and more, suggests Gerson in a 2019 blog (<https://www.gersonayurveda.com/giam-blog/2019/5/20/ayurvedic-medicine-and-the-epigenetics-of-lyme-disease-by-dr-scott-gerson-part-one>).

What this means for patients going into a consultation hoping to support Lyme disease treatment with Āyurveda is that it may appear the practitioner isn’t prescribing herbs or therapies that would seem to eradicate the Lyme bacteria at all. This can be the biggest hurdle Westerners will grapple with that prevents them from giving Āyurveda serious consideration. For example:

In modern medicine, if we have a foot problem, we go to a foot doctor. If we have a heart problem, we go to a heart doctor. If we go to the doctor for symptoms after a tick bite, and if we are lucky to receive an accurate, positive Lyme test, we are prescribed one antibiotic for a “cure.” If we see a Lyme-literate doctor, we may get more than one antibiotic for an extended period of time. In either case, germ theory suggests that if we eradicate the germ, we eradicate the disease. To an extent, that is true. However, we see so many

different presentations not only in how people respond to a tick-borne infection, but how patients respond to traditional treatment. In order to treat a multi-systemic condition, one must take an individualized multi-systemic approach.

Enter Āyurveda.

## My Personal Experience With Āyurveda

When I first started seeing Jessica Vellela (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/jessicavellela>), B.A.M.S., the first American-born woman to graduate as an Āyurvedic physician and practice independently in India, there were many ideas I had about treating Lyme that needed revision. In the end, I benefited greatly from shifting my perspective.

Here is a summarized list of the most impactful improvements I experienced while under the care of trained Āyurvedic practitioners.

### 1. Pañchakarma “reset” my gut.

Anyone that has treated for Lyme disease knows how important gut health is. In the three years of treating Lyme with combination antibiotics, I never seemed to be affected to the point of “herxing.” Short for Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction (<https://www.prohealth.com/lyme-disease/library/what-i-use-to-manage-herxheimer-reactions-47971>), a “herx” is well known in the Lyme disease community as being a sign of healing due to released endotoxins from pathogenic death.

Due to this missing herx, I thought I simply had a strong constitution and was able to handle the antibiotics better than others who were herxing from them. However, after arriving to AyurVillage in the North Carolina foothills for my first *pañchakarma* with Vellela, I was shown that my digestive tract wasn’t doing a good job at digesting food at all. I had a lot of *ama* (impurities/toxins) hampering the ability to receive nutrients from the food I was eating. It led to feelings of heaviness after eating practically anything. *Ama* is the antithesis of *agni* (fire) needed to properly digest (cook) our food. I wondered, if I wasn’t digesting well enough to benefit from the healthy food I was eating, how capable was my body of breaking down and dispersing the antibiotics to where they needed to go?

To begin the process of detoxifying (<https://www.prohealth.com/lyme-disease/library/seven-detox-ideas-that-wont-break-the-bank-6569>) my system, a thorough individual assessment was completed. Vellela prescribed *virechana*, one of the five *pañchakarmas* involving a controlled, medicated purgation specifically targeting the elimination of excessive *pitta* (heat) from the body, especially in the small intestines. I ingested ghee (medicated butter) for a set number of days, which would act as a soap, scrubbing the intestinal walls and pulling all of the harmful accumulated heat in my body to be expelled through purgation.

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After completing an authentic, four-week *virechana*, I went from a low of 113 lbs. to 120 lbs almost immediately (I was severely underweight). I went from dairy-free, gluten-free, sugar-free to eating anything, as long as I followed the proper schedule for eating and a proper way of preparing my food.

Therapies I did following *virechana*, such as bee venom therapy (BVT), started producing a herx, which meant I was finally treating dormant pathogens with antimicrobials (<https://store.prohealth.com/discount/BNR91420>) (<https://www.prohealth.com/lyme-disease/library/herbal-antimicrobials-for-lyme-disease-38635>). With the help of Vellela as she coached me over a number of months from a distance, I was able to reach 130 lbs — my normal healthy weight.

## 2. A custom cocktail of Āyurvedic herbs helped balance me quickly.

Next, I went to India, but my second *virechana* didn't go as smoothly as the first. I was a different person, with additional imbalances and at a different life stage than the previous time, as well as in a different environment. I also received a more traditional *pañchakarma* experience in India by having multiple technicians working on me, and receiving additional *pañchakarmas*, such as *bastis* (medicated enemas), that I never received with the first.

My 31-hour flight around the world took me from relaxing in 90°F weather at the foothills of the Himalayas to a Midwest blizzard in April. This extreme environmental difference during a fragile transition post-*pañchakarma* seemed to have unleashed deeply dormant Lyme back into my system. Exercising caused hormonal disturbances (<https://www.prohealth.com/lyme-disease/library/lyme-disease-hormones-4-ways-balance-naturally-91615>) due to liver congestion, resulting in acne, mood swings, irritability and altered menstruation, all of which were quickly remedied with the correct herbal formula.

All over again, I learned the benefit of tailored Āyurvedic herbs through working with a trained Āyurvedic practitioner. Instead of working directly with Vellela, I worked with certified Svastha Āchārya (Āyurvedic Health Trainer), Brian Shaad, who trained under Vellela and now runs the MyĀyu (<https://www.myayu.com/>) platform. I found this platform to be an affordable and practical option to get professional Āyurvedic prescriptions that met my immediate needs.

## 3. I re-learned how to eat and live in a way that's healthy for me.

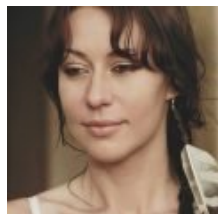
Intense whole-body cleanses like *virechana* are only as beneficial as is the upkeep maintained in the months that follow. The most challenging thing for me was figuring out how to live a balanced lifestyle that would support my continued healing. In a fast-paced society that promotes working long hours and eating saturated foods on the go, I found myself unable to maintain the strict schedule set forth by Āyurveda without a bit of guidance.

One of the most challenging rules to live by was that I had to have all my food freshly cooked at home. I had to get creative with managing my schedule to eat fresh and hot to lessen the toxic burden to my body. What we eat one week may not be what we need the next week. Having an Āyurvedic counselor coaching me through the months for a while helped me learn what foods were good for me, when they were good for me, as well as when they could do more harm than good. I learned how to listen to my intuition and body, and compare that with a professional for feedback so that I could build into being mostly independent.

With the Āyurvedic and Western lifestyle in a natural conflict with one another, Shaad and Vellela taught me how to apply the traditional principles to my Western world in a way that worked for me, and at a price I could afford (<https://www.prohealth.com/lyme-disease/library/5-tips-to-treat-lyme-disease-when-youre-on-a-budget-48127>) longer term.

When it comes to Lyme disease, no two patients will get sick the same, be treated the same, or react to treatments the same, because no two patients started out the same. The vast application of Āyurveda is truly only an experience you can personally have on your own. It is certainly a therapy I will continue to employ to the best of my ability for the rest of my life, whether I continue to have Lyme symptoms or not.

As with any form of modern or alternative medicine, research your options, ask questions, and follow your intuition with what feels right for you at the current stage you are in on your journey with wellness.



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