

Use of Ayurvedic Medicines among Minnesota South Asians

An overview for Medical Professionals



AshaUSA (Asha means hope) is a non-profit organization focused on promoting health and harmony in the South Asian community.

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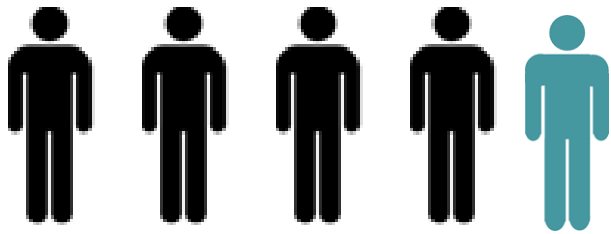
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Use of AYURVEDIC MEDICINES among SOUTH ASIANS

FACT: Use of Ayurvedic medicines is quite prevalent among Minnesota South Asian's



2 in every 5 South Asian Adults have used Ayurvedic Medicines



1 in every 5 South Asians have used Ayurvedic Medicines for their kids < 18 years of age

Definitions

Source: Project AHMSAM (Amarapurkar, Puram, Wanduragala, Hossain, 2016)

Ayurveda -- is one of the **world's oldest** holistic healing systems from India. It is based on the belief that **health and wellness** depend on a delicate **balance between the mind, body, and spirit.**

People who practice Ayurveda often use **herbal compounds (Ayurvedic medicines)** to **treat ailments and promote health.**

South Asians (SA)

WHERE ARE THEY FROM?

SA's in the USA

3.2 Million

Source: 2010 US Census



SA's in MN

- 44,000 in MN
- 2nd largest Asian group in MN (Hmong at 66,000)
- 75% 1st Generation
- 89% from India
- 11% from Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, & Sri Lanka

Ethnic roots:

Indian subcontinent

Major Religions:

Hinduism (majority),
Islam,
Buddhism,
Christians,
Sikhism, and
Jainism

Ayurveda is widely practiced on the **Indian subcontinent**, more than **90 percent** of Indians use some form of Ayurvedic medicine, according to the University of Minnesota's Center for Spirituality & Healing.

Ayurvedic Medicines

Ayurvedic concepts of Prakruti

- Ayurvedic philosophy maintains that people are born with a specific constitution, called ***prakruti*** a unique combination of physical and psychological characteristics that affect the way each person functions.
- Ayurvedic physicians prescribe ***individualized*** treatments based on their ***prakruti***, including compounds of herbs or proprietary ingredients, and diet, exercise, and lifestyle recommendations.

Source: <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/ayurveda/introduction.htm>

Is Ayurvedic medicine safe?

- Ayurvedic medicine uses a variety of products and practices.
- Some of these **products may contain herbs, minerals, or heavy metals** such as lead, mercury and arsenic.
- Even **a** tiny amount of these heavy metals can harm the body, particularly if used **improperly or without the direction of a trained practitioner.**
- Some herbs are unintentionally grown in contaminated soil or processed with equipment that may introduce metal into the product.

Research

Heavy Metals in Ayurvedic Medicines

- In 1990, a study on Ayurvedic medicines in India found that 41% of the products tested contained arsenic, and that 64% contained lead and mercury.
- A 2004 study found toxic levels of heavy metals in 20% of Ayurvedic preparations sold in the Boston area.
- A 2008 study of more than 230 products found that approximately 20% of ayurvedic medicines purchased over the Internet from U.S. and Indian suppliers contained lead, mercury or arsenic.
- In 2014 – 2015, Minnesota Department of health identified several Minnesota children whose families are of Indian origin, had high levels of lead or mercury in their blood that were traced back to Ayurvedic medicines.

Ayurvedic Medicines usage among South Asians in Minnesota

- 57% of the participants (N = 70) indicated that they have used Ayurvedic medicines for at least 5 years or less than 5 years.
- Ayurvedic medicines used by adults (N=87) were mainly for common ailments such as cough (58%), cold (57%), aches and pains (50%), indigestion (43%) acidity (41%), and constipation (41%).

Research

Ayurvedic Medicines usage among South Asians in Minnesota (cont)

- More than 50% of the participants (N=168) who use Ayurvedic medicines use sources other than an Ayurvedic doctor to decide on what Ayurvedic medicines to use. Participants also depend on their family & friends to get advice.
- 40% of the participants (N=48) who use Ayurvedic medicines, purchased products from the Ayurvedic doctor, 27% of the participants purchased from local South Asian grocery stores, and 21% from the online stores.
- Over 70% of the survey participants (N=94) who indicated that they use Ayurvedic medicines do not share this information with their primary care doctor. Some of the reasons were -- don't see a need, don't know how to explain, doctors won't understand – so why bother?

Source: Project AHMSAM (Amarapurkar, Puram, Wanduragala, Hossain, 2016)

"Based on these research findings, medical professionals should make it a practice (proactively) to ask their South Asian clients if they use any ayurvedic medicines. If yes, ask where they purchased it from, how long they have been using it, and take the time to review these medicines including labels. Be aware of signs of lead poisoning.

South Asian Culture

South Asian Habits and Preferences

- Many South Asians use Ayurvedic medicines while growing up. Most of them believe that since it is natural it must be safe or elders in the family use it so it must be safe.
- Very limited understanding of the medicinal contents and the potential reactions to other western medicines.
- Most of the time, South Asian go by advertisements, family/friends advice to buy medicines, instead of going to qualified Ayurvedic doctors.

Recommendations

- Medical professionals should:
 - a) gain a general understanding of Ayurvedic medicines.
 - b) routinely ask about the use of Ayurveda medicines with their South Asian clients. Many of them consider only western medications as “medicine” and may not divulge the use of Ayurvedic medicine when asked if they use any other medications.
 - c) encourage their patients (who use Ayurveda medicines) to show them the medicine containers with labels.
 - d) look for signs of lead-exposure in children using Ayurvedic medicines

References

- **Project AHMSAM (Amarapurkar, Puram, Wanduragala, Hossain, 2016)**