

# Nourishing the *Emotional Heart*

BY JACKIE DOBRINSKA

Anyone who has ever fallen in love knows that the heart is a complex organ. It expands with sweetness, twists with anger, greens with jealousy, and saddens with grief. More than a physical organ, it is the seat of an inner world that metabolizes the complexity of these emotions.

Ayurveda, the sister science of yoga and an ancient system of healing, tells us the “fire in the heart” must be strong for compassion, empathy, and love to dominate.

When this fire is weak due to stress, fear, and unhealthy lifestyle habits, we experience prolonged periods of shyness and loneliness, find it impossible to forgive ourselves or another, or look for acceptance and peace from the outside world instead of within ourselves.

With Valentine’s Day this month, and the Center for Disease Control celebrating American Heart Month, now is a good time to address the more subtle aspects of this sacred organ. To strengthen the heart’s fire, Ayurveda suggests:

**FEEL YOUR FEELINGS.** Repressed natural urges clog subtle channels. Yet, as Marshall Rosenberg (1934–), author of *Nonviolent Communication*, points out, feeling our feelings may be hard to do. To gain emotional fluency, he suggests practicing inner empathy, which includes tuning into the physical sensations, naming the associated feelings, and identifying the underlying unmet need. This practice leads to more compassion and less violence.

To clear old emotional blockages, find safe ways to process them. Common techniques include screaming anger in the woods or into a pillow, crying grief onto the earth or a friendly shoulder, or engaging in a process known as Emotional Freedom Technique, which combines psychology and acupressure to “tap out” stuck emotions.

**GIVE LOVE.** Yoga tells us that energy, or prana, follows thoughts, and what we pay attention to will grow. To

expand the sweetness in the heart, pay attention to the very thing you seek. Make gratitude lists, practice random acts of kindness, and appreciate the small things—all of which stimulate important neurochemicals found in both the brain and the heart. Devotion, chanting, and poetry are ancient practices recommended to grow feeling of expansive love.

**CONNECT.** American author Leo Buscaglia (1924–1998),

also known as Dr. Love, reminds us, “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word.” Connecting to another engenders sweetness. While this may happen between friends and lovers, it can also happen by connecting to nature, animals, your own sweet self, or something beyond the self that defies definition.

**PRACTICE SELF-CARE.** Keep the emotional channels clear by practicing harmonious lifestyle habits. Ayurveda recommends getting enough sleep, eating clean foods, walking

outdoors daily, and practicing regular self-massage with oil.

**GET SUPPORT.** Herbs are helpful allies that nourish emotional channels. Try Indian herbs known as Rasayanas, also known as Adaptogens, as well as rose hips, hawthorn berries, and rosemary leaves, which support emotional health.

Eating brussels sprouts, flaxseed, and cinnamon may support cardiovascular health, but developing appreciation, attention, and emotional fluency support a sweeter emotional life. This Valentine’s Day, go beyond the physical, and nurture the subtle grace of your perceiving heart.

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