

FEBRUARY 24, 2008

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NATURE'S POTION

By Kavitha Srinivas

It is back to the basics. A return to nature. More important, a return to common sense living that forges healthy connections between the mind and the body.

At Soukya, the carefully landscaped 30-acre holistic healing centre in Bangalore, ayurveda, homoeopathy, naturopathy and unani systems are integrated to treat everything from

cardiac complications to stress, obesity and type 2 diabetes.

With its trimmed garden hedges, neat vegetable patches, rippling pool, luxurious cottages and a wall of fame festooned with pictures of A-list celeb guests, Soukya seems a tad contrived at first. But the effect it has on its patrons cannot be ignored.

"It's not just the treatment that makes you feel well. It's the act of

PHOTOS: BHANU PRAKASH CHANDRA

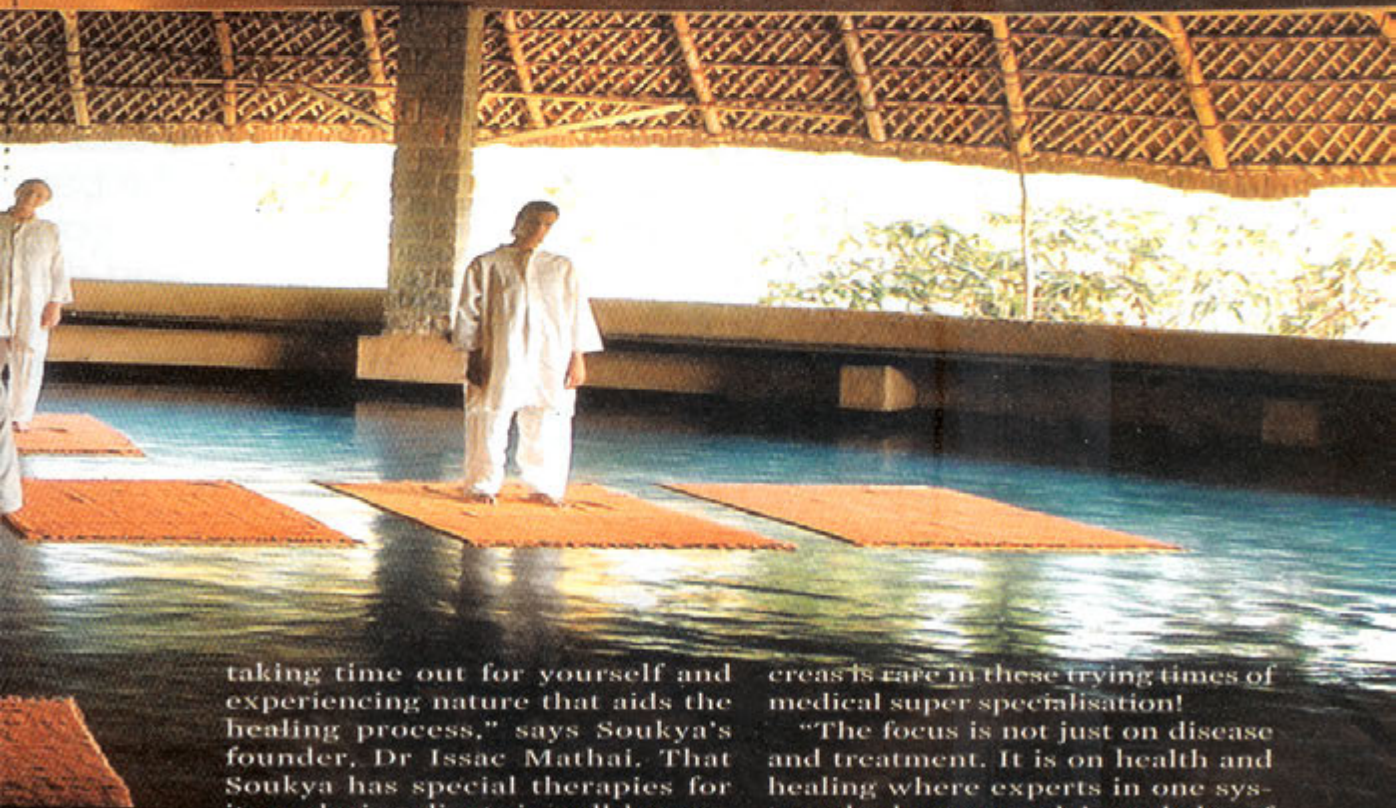
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Holistic medicine || The integrated treatment for diabetes at Soukya includes yoga, meditation, diet, exercise and counselling



taking time out for yourself and experiencing nature that aids the healing process," says Soukya's founder, Dr Issac Mathai. That Soukya has special therapies for its exclusive clients is well-known. What brings us here is its diabetes management programme. To discover a treatment protocol that doesn't view you as a pair of short-sighted eyes, a cholesterol-ridden heart or a poorly-performing pan-

creas is rare in these trying times of medical super specialisation!

"The focus is not just on disease and treatment. It is on health and healing where experts in one system also have enough knowledge of other systems of medicine," says Dr Mathai. "Our diabetes management programme is not an alternative to western medical care. But we are against mindless pill popping. We do not tell people to stop taking

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vascular diseases. The American Heart Association (AHA) recently lowered the accepted cholesterol upper limit, which means millions more will need to be put on statins. The AHA also recommends the use of cholesterol-lowering statin drugs for treating children and adolescents with high-risk lipid abnormalities. Dr Mathai is among the few doctors who question the need to freely prescribe the pharma industry's 'blockbuster' drug. "I think statin therapy, in many cases, is now a money-making racket. When incorrectly prescribed, statins can cause more damage than cholesterol. Unfortunately, the American medical world thrives on fear," he says, adding that many doctors have turned into representatives of big pharmaceutical companies.

Reiterating the need to shift the focus of healing from pill popping, he argues that the three-minute routine that most doctors subject their patients to can help treat common cold, not a condition like diabetes that requires systematic and sustained management.

"My doctor told me to follow a 'balanced' diet. But he never actually spelt out what 'balanced' means," complains Rohini Balavel, a 73-year-old housewife who was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes 20 years ago. She has been taking insulin injections twice a day. A non-vegetarian, she cites the case of her father who loved his chicken curry and rice, and lived till the ripe age of 99 without having to pop any pills!

Ramakrishna S.R., music composer, media person and avid researcher into the food-diabetes connection, explains the classic food dilemma that most people with diabetes face. "Vegetarians and raw foodies disagree on many diet-related questions. The low-fat, high-carb diet that has now gained prominence everywhere faces strong opposition from schools that believe fat isn't the monster it is made out to be. Low-carbing has a big following among weight losers and diabetics, and many believe low-carb is the way to go even for those

without these conditions," he says.

The dietary regimen prescribed by the team of doctors at Soukya is nowhere as radical as the 30-day raw food diet recommended by a doctor in the US state of Arizona, who has documented how he 'reversed' diabetes with the help of a diet comprising raw vegetables.

"While we don't prescribe something as radical as raw food, we don't blindly follow the American Diabetes Association's (ADA) diet recommendations either. We consider the ADA norms as broad guidelines, nothing more. At Soukya, every patient's diet and exercise regimen is customised. We check the traditional diet of each patient and offer culture-specific foods," Dr Mathai says.

A strong advocate of ragi as it releases sugar slowly, Dr Mathai says he has seen remarkable success among borderline diabetics who made the prescribed dietary and lifestyle changes. Though he has successfully treated conditions such as diabetic neuropathy with the holistic approach, he says he will make no tall claims because there are no clinical trials to support these findings.

Soukya's diabetes management programme, like its stress management, weight-loss and rejuvenation programmes, is still very exclusive and expensive. It will take some time and plenty of effort for Dr Mathai and his team to replicate the Soukya template on a large and affordable scale to benefit not just the moneyed classes, but also the masses. "We plan to set up a 250-bed hospital in the health city proposed by the Karnataka government. Then, we can confidently back our findings in diabetes management with clinical trials," he hopes. **H**



Ayurveda tries to balance vaata, pitha and kapha. Yoga is linked to the healing protocol, and homoeopathy treats the body as a whole.

Dr Issac Mathai,
founder, Soukya