

MANAGEMENT OF *ATI-STHAULYATA* (OBESITY) - AN AYURVEDIC OVERVIEW

Baheti Sandip R¹, Prasad Anjali Baijnath², Agrawal Sachin³, Dongre Dipti A⁴, Singh Varinder Pal⁵

^{1,2}Research Officer, CARIRD Patiala, Punjab, India

³Assistant Professor, RS&BK, Tanta University, Sriganaganagar, Rajasthan, India

⁴Assistant Professor, SariraRachana, Dr. B.N.M. Rural Ayurveda College, Bijapur, Karnataka, India

⁵Senior Research Fellow, CARIRD Patiala, Punjab, India

Email: anjali.prasad75@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

As per the Ancient Ayurvedic proverb by *Lolimbaraja* “When diet is wrong medicine is of no use, when diet is correct medicine is of no need”. Here role of diet and exercise is discussed in management of one of the most widely prevailing disease i.e. Obesity. Obesity is an abnormal accumulation of fat usually 20% or more over an individual’s ideal body weight. People are generally considered obese when their body mass index (BMI) is 30kg/m², with the range 25-30kg/m² defined as overweight. Ayurveda define *sthoola* (obese) as a person having pendulous appearance of *sphika*, *udara* and *stana* due to excess and abnormal deposition of *meda* (fat) with reduced zeal towards life. Weight loss can be achieved in a short span of time by following proper diet regimen; but maintaining reduced weight is difficult and requires proper planned management by physical exercise and a balanced *ahaara* (diet); which is to be made indispensable part of an individual's lifestyle. Physical Exercises, if done properly regulates BMI and increases oxygenation. It also strengthens and improves *mamsa* and *medadhatwagni*. In order to improve *agni* (digestive power) one should use, *vamana* (emesis) in *kapha*, *virechana* (purgation) in *pitta* and *basti* (enema) in *vata* after prior unction. *Vyayaama* (physical exercise) is always useful as it improves *bala* (patient’s stamina).

Keywords: *Ahaara, Vyayaama, Vamana, Virechana, Basti.*

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda is an age old system of medicine and is still significant to lifestyle and disease management of this era. Ayurveda classifies diseases reasonably as *nija* due to faulty *ahaara-vihaar* (faulty food habit and lifestyle) and *agantuja* due to *upsarga* (infection) and *aghaata* (trauma).¹Ayurveda also

emphasizes on prevention of disease and then advocates its management.²A healthy life stands upon three pillars of *ayu* (life) – *Ahaara, Vihaar* and *aushadhi*. The first two of these pillars *ahaara* and *vihaar* (diet and lifestyle) are preventive in nature.

When these principles are followed, the foundation of healthy life becomes even strong.

Ati-sthaulyata/medoroga (obesity) is one of such *nija-vyadhi* (lifestyle disorder). *Ati-sthaulyata/medoroga* (obesity) is one among the 20 diseases caused due to vitiation of *kapha*.³ *Medoroga* is not merely abnormal deposition of fat in body but its aetiology comprises of faulty digestive power, food habit, not following diurnal and seasonal regime. *Acharya Charaka* criticises obese as one among eight despicable personalities. Over-obese may have difficulties like shortening of life-span, hampered movement, difficulty in sexual intercourse, debility, foul smell, over swelling, too much hunger and excessive thirst.

Definition

The person is called *sthaulya* (obese) who has pendulous buttocks, abdomen and breasts and suffers from deficient metabolism and energy, due to excessive increase of fat and muscles.

Aetiology

Whatever promotes the bulk of the body is known as *bruhana* (promotive therapy)⁴ or *santarpana* (over saturating)⁵. *Bruhana* (Corpulence) and *langhana* (leanness) of body depends on *ahaara-rasa*. When one constantly takes diet which increases *kapha*, indulges in eating when the previous meal is not digested, avoid physical exercise and sleeps in day, the *ahaara-rasa* being undigested and circulating in the body, due to excessive unctuousness, produces fat which cause obesity⁶ on excessive application of promotive therapy one suffers from obesity,⁷

TABLE 1: SHOWING DIFFERENT CAUSES OF ATI-STHAULYATA

S.No.	Causes	Activities
1.	Faulty food habits	Intake of excessive quantity of food, intake of heavy, cold, unctuous food, and excessive sweet food.
2.	Faulty lifestyles	Lack of physical exercise, abstinence from sexual intercourse, sleeping during day time, suppression of natural urges.
3.	Improper therapeutic management	<i>Ati-bruhana</i> .
4.	Psychological	Worries, grief, suppression of natural urges, lack of mental work.
5.	Miscellaneous	<i>Beejaswabhabha</i> i.e. hereditary, chromosomal/ genetic factors.

Pathogenesis:

Due to passage being obstructed with fat, *vata* circulates in *kostha* and thus stimulates digestive power thereby digesting ingested food quickly; and appetite increases producing more and more *ahaara-rasa* which results in increase in fat, various complications may arise and person may die early.⁸ *Ati-sthaulya* is also caused by vitiated *medodhatu*.^{9, 10, 11}

Sign and Symptoms:

The obese person is shortly attacked by panting, thirst, hunger, sleep, sweating foul odour in body, distress, lassitude and muffled voice; the person becomes unable to perform functions due to flaccidity of fat and sexual act is reduced due to obstruction of channels by *kapha* and *meda*; due to

the same reason the successive *dhatu*s are not nourished leading to low vitality.

Complications:

Ati-bruhana causes complication like *atisthaulya*.¹² Which indeed leads to carbuncle, fever, abscess, fistula-in-ano, and *vatika* disorders. Because of the obstruction in channels, all his diseases becomes severe, hence one should avoid its originating causes,¹³

Management

Prevention: Prevention of obesity can be achieved by *Ayurveda* by ensuing directed *dincharya*, *ritucharya*, *ashta-ahaarvidhivisheshyatana*, *aahaaropyogi varga*, *nidra*, *sadvritta*; whereas its management comprises of correction and *agni* (digestive power) and *malashodhana* (removal of waste products) from the body.

Lifestyle: Physical exercises, avoidance of sleep, mental activity (too much worry), excessive sexual intercourse etc. helps in controlling weight of the body.

Food habit: Function of *koshtha* can be summarised in three different attributes viz-*deepana* (digestive power-regulates the appetite), *pachana* (assimilation-ensures proper nourishment of the *dhatu*) and *anulomana* (removal of excreta from body). People tend to become obese when they have problems in one or more of these areas.

An Obese person with *mandagni* (low digestive power) should avoid guru *ahaara-dravya* (heavy food) and should take *laghuahaara-dravya* (light) more frequently. But over-obese person with *teekshnagni* (high digestive power), should take guru (heavy food) as well as *aptarpaka* (non-saturating) food. E.g. Honey with lukewarm water etc. Some of the wholesome food for reducing weight are barley, green gram, kodo-wild and cultivated, *syamaka* etc. which are roughening and channel-clearing; Foods which mitigate vata, kapha and *meda* such as hoarse gram, jowar, black millets etc. drinks such as *arishtas*, honey water, whey and butter milk also help in reducing weight.¹⁴ *Karshniyayavaagu* is advised for making a person thin. *Gavedhuk dhaanya* (*Coixlacryma-jobi*) are roasted, boiled and then honey is added upon cooling.

On being hungry one should not saturate himself completely with food. Only $\frac{1}{3}$ of the capacity of stomach should be filled with solids, $\frac{1}{3}$ with liquids and rest $\frac{1}{3}$ should be kept empty.

Shamana: Drugs which are sharp, hot and dry. *Langhana* and *rukshana* can be administered by virtue of *deepana*, *pachana*, *kshudhanigraha*, *trishnanigraha*, *vyayaama*, *aatapasevan* and *marutsevan*. It should be treated with the regular use of, cow's urine, *triphala*, *lauhabhasma*, *guduchi*, *haritaki* and *musta* to be taken with honey. *Rasanjana*, *bruhat panchmula*, *guggulu* and *shilajita* should be taken along with *agnimantha swarasa*. Equal parts of *vidanga*, *shunthi*, *yavakshara*, *amalki*

and barley if taken with honey and *vyoshadi yoga* can cure the complications of obesity.^{15, 16}

Compound Drugs

Medoharayoga, *Navak Guggulu*, *Gokshuradi Guggulu*, *Punarnavamandura*, *VarunadiGhanvati*, *Triphala*, *Piper nigrum compounds Vyoshadhya Saktu*, *Lekhaniya Mahakashya*, *Lekhan Vati*, *Mahamanjithadi kwatha*, *Sinhanada Guggulu*, *Trigunadi Guggulu*, *Medohara Guggulu*, *Vyoshadi Guggulu*, *Chitrakadi Vati*, *Amrutadi Guggulu*, *Triphala Guggulu*, *Vidangadi Churna*, *Medohara Vati*, *Vachakatukyyadi yoga*, *Vidangadi Loha*, *Lauha Rasayan*, *Badavagni Rasa*, *Arogyavardhini*, *Trayushnadi Loha*, *Navayas Loha*, *Swetaparpati*, *Pashanbhedadi kwatha* etc.

BahyaShodhana

Udavartana, *Avagah*, *Parisheka* and *Lepana*. *Udvartana* (dry powder massage have properties of *kaphahara*, *Medasahpravilayanm*, stabilizes body part and improves complexion removes the fetid odor and controls excessive sweating).¹⁷

AbhyantarShodhana

Vamana, *virechana*, *raktamokshana* and *shirovirechana*. *Asthapan Basti* particularly *lekhanabasti* or *karshanabasti*.

Vyayaama (Exercise)

Definition: The body movement which is meant for producing firmness and strength is known as physical exercise: one should practise it in moderation.¹⁸ or the work involving exertion of the body is known as 'vyayaama' (physical exercise). After doing it one should press the body gently all over.¹⁹

Benefits: By physical exercise one gets lightness, capacity to work, firmness, tolerance of difficulties, diminution of impurity and stimulation of *agni* (digestion and metabolism).²⁰ Physical exercise causes physical development, lustre, compactness of body parts, stimulation of digestive power, absence of idleness, firmness, lightness, cleanliness, tolerance to fatigue, exhaustion, thirst, heat, cold etc. and provides optimum immunity. There is no anti-obesity measure equal to physical exercise; one who

performs physical exercise regularly can't be overcome by enemies, he can't be attacked by senility and his musculature becomes firm.²¹

Amount of Exercise: One should not indulge in over exercise. In all seasons daily exercise should be performed by persons desiring their wellbeing by 'balardha' (half the strength), more than this otherwise harms. When *pranavayu* situated in heart comes out to mouth while performing exercise is the sign of half of strength. Physical exercise should be performed after considering age, physique, place, time, and diet otherwise one is afflicted by severe disorder.²²

Sign of Proper Exercise: Appearance of perspiration, increased respiration, lightness of the organs, feeling of obstruction in cardiac region etc. is the signs of proper physical exercise).

Sign of Excessive Exercise: Excessive physical exercise gives rise to fatigue, exhaustion, emaciation, thirst, internal haemorrhage, darkness before eyes, cough, fever and vomiting.²³ Wasting, thirst, anorexia, vomiting, giddiness, exhaustion, cough, consumption, fever and dyspnoea are caused by excessive exercise.²⁴

Indication: Those who are strong and take unctuous food. That too has the most salutary effect in winter and spring.²⁵

Contraindication: The persons who are much emaciated due to excessive sexual indulgence, weight-carrying, travelling on foot and evacuative measures and are victims of anger, grief, fear and exertion, the children, the old and those having aggravated vata, those who speak too much and loudly; are hungry and thirsty should abstain from physical exercise.²⁶ Physical exercise should be avoided by one suffering from intrinsic haemorrhage, emaciation, consumption, dyspnoea, cough and wound, after taking food. Wasted due to sex and afflicted with thirst and giddiness.²⁷

Yoga and Pranayama

Yogaasana like *paschimottanasana*, *bhujangasana*, *utthita-parsvakonasana*, *matsyendrasana*, *trikonasana*, *garudasana*, *virabhadrasana*,

dhanurasana, *suryanamaskar*, *sarvangasana*, *halasana*, *chakrasana*, *veerasana*, *ardhamatsyendrasana* etc. *pranayama* like *nadishuddhi pranayam* and *kapalbhati shuddhi kriya* & meditation have been proved to be effective in reducing weight.

Conventional view

Obesity might be defined as an abnormal growth of the adipose tissue due to an enlargement of fat cell size (hypertrophy obesity) or development in fat cell number (hypertrophy obesity) or a combination of both. Obesity is largely expressed in terms of body mass index (BMI). A BMI of 30 or more in males and 28.6 or more in females manifests obesity. The term 'Overweight' means a weight in excess of the average for a given sex, height and age. Overweight is normally due to obesity. However, abnormal muscle development or fluid retention could also develop overweight.

However, it has been estimated to influence 20 to 40 per cent of the adults and 10 to 20 per cent of children and adolescents in developed countries. Contrary to the general conception that this is a disease of rich countries, obesity is found in all countries.

Obesity can appear at any age and normally develops with age. Infants with excessive weight gain have a developed incidence of obesity in later life. Hyper-plastic obesity in adults is extremely difficult to treat with conventional methods. About one-third of obese adults have been so since childhood. It has been well established that most adipose cells are formed early in life. Therefore, one must see that precaution is taken during the childhood itself. Studies have revealed that men tend to develop obesity between 29 and 35 years while the women gain weight between 45 and 49 years of age.²⁸

Lack of physical activities, mental exercise and sedentary life style is most important etiological facts of the obesity. Conventional medicines enlist aetiological factors responsible for obesity as:

- Sedentary lifestyle with little physical exercise.

- Taking more junk foods and foods containing more fat, sugar and gluten etc.
- Emotional distress: People tend to eat more when they are upset, anxious, under stress or feeling boredom.
- Hereditary.
- Sluggish working profile.
- Nutrition and Pregnancy: One theory states that when children are undernourished during their foetal life, when they become adults, they usually develop abdominal fat, even with the normal diet. This put them at a greater risk of developing obesity.

CONCLUSION

The obesity brings lot of complication and incapability in terms of activities in patients. The treatment of obesity is difficult with medicines only without adjusting the diet regimen and physical activity. One needs to reconsider entire lifestyle in terms of diet, physical activity and meditation if he wants to avoid obesity and the related problems.^{29, 30}

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