

# A Review Article on Exploring the Role of Swasthavritta in Tackling Obesity

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## ABSTRACT

Modernization and sedentary lifestyles have led to a rapid rise in metabolic disorders, with obesity, or *Sthaulya* in Ayurveda, becoming a significant global health concern. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that obesity affects approximately half a billion people worldwide, making it a public health priority, especially in developing countries like India, where lifestyle disorders are prevalent. Obesity, a multifactorial nutritional metabolic disease, results from an imbalance between energy intake and expenditure, leading to excessive adipose tissue growth and severe health complications such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain cancers. Current treatments, including pharmacological interventions, often come with side effects, highlighting the need for preventive strategies.

Ayurveda, a holistic health science, addresses both the prevention and treatment of obesity through *Swasthavritta*, which aims to maintain health and treat diseases by restoring homeostasis among the *Tridosha*, *Saptadhatu*, *Agni*, and *Mala* etc. This review explores the etiopathology of *Sthaulya*, its symptoms, and preventive measures such as *Nidan Parivarjan* (avoiding causative factors), *Dinacharya* (daily regimen), diet, and non-pharmacological methods like exercise and yogic practices. Emphasizing the principles of *Swasthavritta*, the review suggests that adopting an Ayurvedic lifestyle can significantly reduce the risk of obesity and its associated health issues, providing a comprehensive management protocol through diet, lifestyle modifications, and therapeutic interventions. This paper aims to offer insights into the aetiology, pathogenesis, and effective management strategies for obesity through *Ayurveda* and *Yoga*, addressing the global demand for sustainable obesity prevention and treatment methods.

**Keywords:** *Sthaulya*, Obesity, Prevention, Lifestyle, *Swasthavritta*, *Nidan Parivarjan*, *Pathya-Apathya*, *Vyayam*, *Yogia*, *Body Mass Index (BMI)*, *Lifestyle Disorders*, *Ayurveda*, *Medoroga*.

## INTRODUCTION

Obesity, or *Sthaulya* as it is referred to in Ayurvedic literature, is a condition marked by excessive accumulation of *Medodhatu* (fat tissue) leading to a state of *Ayatopachaya* (improper growth) in the body. *Charaka Samhita* provides a comprehensive definition of *Sthaulya*<sup>1</sup>, indicating that excessive *Medo* and *Mamsa Dhatu* results in flabbiness and abnormal movement in the abdomen, buttocks, and breasts, ultimately causing a loss of enthusiasm and energy in the individual, termed *Atisthula*.

Lifestyle diseases, including obesity, are becoming increasingly prevalent as societies industrialize and life span increased<sup>2</sup>. These conditions encompass obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, and cancers induced by improper nutrition, tobacco, alcohol use etc.<sup>3</sup> According to the World

Health Organization (WHO)<sup>4</sup>, nearly 12% of the global population is currently classified as obese. This surge in lifestyle diseases poses a significant public health challenge, as obesity is often the precursor to more severe non-communicable diseases, forming what is known as the "New World Syndrome"<sup>5</sup>.

The Ayurvedic approach to understanding obesity goes beyond mere physical manifestations, exploring metabolic disturbances (*Dhatvaagnimandya*) and the imbalance of digestive fires (*Agni*). In the condition of *Sthaulya*, the digestive fire (*Jatharaagni*) is hyperactive, leading to rapid digestion and excessive appetite, while the tissue metabolic fire (*Dhatvaagni*) and elemental fire (*Bhutaagni*) are impaired, causing improper transformation of nutrients and accumulation of *Medo-Dhatu*.<sup>6</sup>

This review aims to understand the role of *Swasthavritta* (preventive healthcare in Ayurveda) in addressing obesity. The objectives are to elucidate the preventive strategies outlined in *Swasthavritta* to enhance health, improve lifestyle, and avert the complications associated with *Sthaulya*.

## OBESITY

Obesity, recognized as a global epidemic, is not merely a medical concern but a multifaceted issue encompassing social, psychological, and economic dimensions. Its prevalence has surged over the decades, attributing to a plethora of health complications ranging from diabetes mellitus to cardiovascular diseases<sup>7</sup>. In addressing this complex health challenge, traditional medical systems like Ayurveda offer profound insights and holistic approaches.

## UNDERSTANDING SWASTHAVRITTA

*Swasthavritta* is a branch of *Ayurveda* that deals with promoting and maintaining health and wellness. It encompasses various aspects of lifestyle, including dietary practices, daily routines, sleep patterns, exercise regimens, and mental well-being. According to Ayurvedic principles, imbalances in these lifestyle factors can contribute to the development of diseases, including obesity<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, adopting a holistic approach to *Swasthavritta* can play a crucial role in preventing and managing obesity.

## AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, elucidates the aetiology, pathogenesis, and clinical manifestations of obesity, attributing its onset to factors such as sedentary lifestyle, dietary habits, and genetic predispositions. Ayurvedic literature perceives obesity as a manifestation of imbalances within the body's fundamental elements, particularly the vitiation of *Kapha dosha* and *Meda dhatu*. The classical texts, notably *Charak Samhita*, delineate *Sthaulya* (obesity) because of disrupted metabolism and nourishment processes. Drawing upon these foundational principles, contemporary studies reveal Ayurvedic interventions for obesity management<sup>9</sup>. The concept of *Sthaulya* encompasses not only physical aspects but also its psychological and social ramifications, aligning with modern understandings of obesity as a complex interplay of biological, environmental, and behavioural factors.

## DIETARY PRACTICES IN SWASTHAVRITTA

Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of proper eating and dietary choices in maintaining optimal health. In the context of obesity, dietary modifications are essential for managing weight and preventing further weight gain. *Swasthavritta* advocates for a balanced diet that includes a variety of whole foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats. Additionally, *Ayurveda* emphasizes the concept of "*Agni*" or digestive fire, highlighting the importance of maintaining a healthy digestive

system for proper metabolism and weight management. *Ahara* which assuages *Kapha dosha* and *medodhatu* and *vatanulomaka* is required within the administration of *Sthaulya*. Consumption of eat less considering its *Swabhava*, *Samyoga*, *Samskara*, *Matra*, *Desha* and *Kala* give the real benefits of *Ahara* like wellbeing, quality, vitality, and longevity<sup>10</sup>. *Swasthavritta* advocates dietary guidelines tailored to individual body types (*Prakriti*) and metabolic imbalances (*Doshas*).

### DAILY ROUTINES AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

In *Swasthavritta*, daily routines and physical activity play a vital role in promoting overall well-being and preventing obesity. In Ayurveda, *Dinacharya* has been prescribed as daily regimen from morning to evening for the maintenance of good health. In which getting up in *Brahma muhurta*<sup>11</sup>, *Vyayama*<sup>12</sup>, *Udvardana*<sup>13</sup> and *Ahara*<sup>14</sup> are suitable for prevention as well as management of Obesity. We can combine this healthy lifestyle with safe and effective treatment of Ayurveda to prevent and manage Obesity<sup>15</sup>. *Ayurveda* emphasis irregular routines can disrupt metabolic processes and contribute to weight gain. Furthermore, incorporating regular physical activity into one's routine is essential for maintaining a healthy weight.

### MENTAL WELL-BEING AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

Stress and mental well-being are closely linked to obesity, as chronic stress can lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as overeating or indulging in comfort foods. *Swasthavritta* emphasizes the importance of mental well-being and stress management techniques such as meditation, deep breathing exercises<sup>16</sup> etc. These techniques help in reducing stress levels, promoting relaxation, and preventing emotional eating, thus supporting weight management efforts.

### AYURVEDIC MANAGEMENT

*Ayurveda* offers a plethora of herbal remedies and formulations that can aid in weight management and obesity prevention. Certain herbs such as *Guggulu*, *Triphala*<sup>17</sup>, *Vrikshamla*<sup>18</sup>, *Vidanga*, and *Shilajit* have been traditionally used for their anti-obesity properties. These herbs help in improving metabolism, reducing fat accumulation, and promoting overall health. Ayurvedic formulations such as *Navak Guggulu*, *Medahara Guggulu*, *Triphala Guggulu* and *Arogyavardhini*, *Vidangadi loha*, *Shilajit*, *Trimurthi Rasa*, *Agnikumar Rasa*, *Medohara Rasa*, *Mustadi Kwath*, *Vidangadi Churna* are commonly prescribed for obesity management, either alone or in combination with other therapies.

### ROLE OF YOGA AND PRANAYAMA

*Yoga* and *Pranayama*, integral components of Ayurvedic therapy, offer profound benefits in obesity management. *Asanas*, breathing techniques, and cleansing practices not only stimulate physical activity but also promote mental well-being and emotional balance. Practices like *Kapalabhati* and *Anulom Vilom Pranayama* are particularly emphasized for their efficacy in enhancing metabolism and reducing adipose tissue.

Additionally, *Swasthavritta* encourages stress management techniques such as meditation, yoga, and pranayama to alleviate psychological factors contributing to obesity. Yoga offers numerous benefits for both the body and mind. One of the primary advantages is its ability to increase calorie burning, which aids in reducing body weight. Additionally, yoga improves circulation and tones heart muscles,

enhancing cardiovascular health. It also helps lower plasma glucose levels and increases insulin sensitivity, making it beneficial for managing blood sugar levels.

Regular practice of yoga can lower blood pressure, contributing to better heart health. It also improves overall cardiac fitness and helps lower lipid levels, promoting a healthier lipid profile. Beyond physical benefits, yoga is highly effective in relieving stress, fostering a mental sense of well-being, and promoting relaxation. This holistic practice supports a balanced and healthy lifestyle, improving both physical and mental health<sup>19</sup>.

The yogic text *Hatha Yoga Pradeepika* and others suggest that practicing *pranayama*, particularly *Kapalabhati* and *Anulom Vilom*, can help make the body slim and fit by burning excessive fat, with *Kapalabhati* involving forceful exhalations to reduce belly fat and *Anulom Vilom* generating body heat to burn fat; additionally, various yoga asanas such as *Suryanamaskar*, *Pawanmuktasana*, *Bhujangasana*, *Shalabhasana*, *Dhanurasana*, *Pachimottanasana*, *Ardha Vakrasana*, *Halasana*, *Ardhachakrasana*, *Naukasana*, *Trikonasana*, *Veeerbhadrasana*, and *Ustrasana* contribute to weight reduction and overall fitness<sup>20</sup>.

## LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS

*Swastavritta*, offers a holistic approach to lifestyle modification for obese individuals by emphasizing balanced living and preventive healthcare. It incorporates daily and seasonal routines (*dinacharya* and *ritucharya*), a balanced diet (*ahara*), regular physical activity (*vyayama*), and mental well-being practices such as meditation and yoga. By adhering to these principles, obese individuals can achieve sustainable weight loss, improved metabolism, and overall well-being. *Swastavritta* promotes harmony between body, mind, and environment, encouraging mindful eating, consistent exercise, and stress management as integral components of a healthy lifestyle.

## PREVENTIVE MEASURES

*Swasthavritta* underscores the importance of preventive healthcare practices to mitigate the risk of obesity and associated comorbidities. This includes maintaining a disciplined daily routine (*Dinacharya*), observing seasonal regimens (*Ritucharya*), and periodic detoxification therapies (*Panchakarma*) to cleanse the body of accumulated toxins (*Ama*). By promoting harmony between body, mind, and environment, *Swasthavritta* aims to prevent the onset of obesity and promote holistic well-being.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Swasthavritta* offers a holistic approach to tackling obesity by addressing various aspects of lifestyle, dietary practices, physical activity, and mental well-being. By adopting principles of *Swasthavritta*, individuals can not only manage their weight effectively but also improve their overall health and well-being. Further research and clinical studies are warranted to validate the efficacy of Ayurvedic interventions in the management of obesity and to explore novel approaches for combating this global health epidemic.

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