



STHOULYA (OBESITY), ETIOLOGY AND ITS MANAGEMENT IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Sthoulya (obesity) is a common growing health problem. It is a disease which is the result of an unorganized way of living, taking food, stress, lack of physical work and much common among the people of middle- higher socioeconomic status. Present paper aims to give the general idea of factors or causes responsible for the obesity. This paper also discusses about the important associated symptoms, complications, preventive measures and management of obesity. Since Ayurveda takes a multidimensional and holistic approach in the management and cure of any disease and so obesity.

KEYWORDS : *Sthoulya*, Obesity, Body mass index, Lifestyle, Overweight

Introduction

Present day, everyone is in mental and physical stress due to their modern living lifestyle, undisciplined to pursue the daily regimen, dietetic rules and regulations, which result in many diseases as hypertension, diabetic mellitus, obesity, osteoarthritis, cardiac diseases, depression, respiratory disease, etc. Among this lifestyle induced diseases like obesity (*sthoulya*) is one of them which is defined as the increased body weight beyond the desired standard. Another parameter for the assessment of obesity is Body Mass Index (BMI). BMI is a person's weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in meter and can be expressed as

$$\text{BMI} = \text{Body Mass (weight) in kg} / \text{Height in meter}^2$$

The BMI of a person may also be determined by using the chart which displays different BMI categories.

Obesity is very well said in Ayurveda by the name of *sthoulya* and *atisthoulya*. Acharya Charaka, who may be called as the Indian Hippocrates, described obesity as a disease of the fat tissues (*medoroga*) leading to hugeness (*sthoulyam*). It has been classified under "*Asta Nindita Purusha*" (eight despicable personalities) and defined as excessive and abnormal increase of *meda dhatu* along with *mamsa dhatu* resulting in the pendulous appearance of buttocks, belly and breasts. The obese people have the tendency to retain water in their body. Hence the excess weight is both due to retention of water and storage of fatty tissue.

Etiology

A number of factors are responsible for obesity as

1) **Sedentary lifestyle:** Physical inactivity is a major element in the development of obesity. Physical inactivity may be due to enforced, job related, webaholic or internet addiction or due to ageing. Prolonged sitting in a comfortable seat which is very common in businessman, government job holder and most of the white collar Jobs. That's why the rate of obesity is increasing day by day.

2) **Stress or Psychological cause:** Emotional disturbances caused by stress from psychological and social environment. Stress may be induced by a number of routine disturbances as outburst activities like fighting, arguing, family events, marriages, deaths, traveling long distances, facing heavy traffic etc., these factors are directly or indirectly responsible for weight gain.

3) **Dietary intake:** *The increased prevalence of obesity in recent decades may be* more due to the excess intake of food than the physiological needs, rapid eating habit and increased consumption of high-fat foods or sweetened drinks. In Ayurveda *ati sampurna* (excess food intake in a single meal) and *adhyashana* (frequent food intake before digestion of a previous meal) are recognized as the basic factors for the development of *sthoulya roga*.

4) **Age, Sex and Race:** However, obesity may occur at any stage of life, but the persons of middle age group are more prone to be obese. Adolescent and middle aged female are more sufferer than

that of men due to the hormonal changes in their body during puberty, menstrual stage, pregnancy menopausal phase and hormonal deficiency of thyroid, pituitary and ovarian glands. Although obesity is a global problem, but certain races are more prone to it like South German, Africans, Dutch, South Italians and Ceylon.

5) **Socioeconomic status:** Reduced energy expenditure and excess intake of food results in extra accumulations of fat in the body. Usually it is seen that the person of higher socioeconomic status prefers more luxurious and sedentary lifestyle. Therefore, obesity is much more frequent among them.

6) **Drug induced:** Long term use of some of the modern medicines induces obesity, i.e. Anti-epileptic, Corticoids, Oral contraceptive pills, Antidepressants, Hypoglycemic Antihypertensive drugs etc.

7) **Etiology of *sthoulya (obesity)* in Ayurveda:** In our ancient texts of Ayurveda, an elaborate description has been given relating to the causes of *sthoulya (obesity)*. Those are *achintanam* (not thinking much), *divaswapna* (sleeping at daytime), *harshanityam* (always enjoying happiness), *sleshmaj aahar-vihar sevana* (diet and lifestyle which causes an increase in fatty tissues), *atisampurana* (excessive intake of food which is difficult to digest), *aayavaya* (no sexual relation), *avyayama* (lack of exercise) and *beejaswabhabha* (hereditary).

Table 1 Shows the classification of overweight and obesity in adults (Taken from W.H.O. Technical report)

S. N.	Stages of Obesity	BMI* (kg/m ²)	Risk of other clinical diseases
A.	Underweight	<18.0-18.5	Low (but the Risk of other clinical problems is increased)
B.	Normal range	18.5-24.9	Average
C.	Overweight	25.0-29.9	Mild increased
D.	Obese	≥30.0	
E.	Phase I Obese	30.0-34.9	Moderate
F.	Phase II Obese	35.0-39.9	Severe
G.	Phase III Obese	≥40.0	Very severe

*BMI= Body Mass Index

Prevention of obesity

In Ayurveda, it has been described very systematically concerning the symptoms and complications of obesity. Premature aging, decreased prolonged existence, tiredness on performing common exertion, unnecessary sweating, feeling of excessive hunger and thirst, weakness, reduction of sexual power, inappropriate mental functioning etc. are the common symptoms of obesity. When these situations are not treated with due course of time, a number of complications like kidney infection, diabetes, hypertension etc. are developed with the passage of time. Following preventions should be undertaken.

- An obese person should be well aware regarding the cause of obesity and the person should be careful about to reduce the fat instead of losing the weight.
- Although an obese person has an extreme desire for hurried loss of weight, but this tendency should be discouraged. If weight

loss is rapid, not only the fat metabolism and electrolyte disturbances occur and the muscles and liver are also affected.

- One should keep himself away from the sedentary and lethargic lifestyle, such as watching television, continuous sitting or studying in a single posture, eating at late nights etc.
- Excess intake of high caloric and fat diet should be avoided. A diet containing moderate amounts of salads, fresh fruits and vegetables, cereals and other fibrous food should be consumed. The bulk of vegetables and fruits containing few calories but high cellulose and fibers help in filling the stomach and relieving from hunger.

Management of Obesity

Ayurveda emphasizes the holistic care and treatment in any disease. Spiritual, psychological, and physical, these all the three aspects are given importance in the management of disease. Minimal intake of food and exceed expenditure of energy would be the basic rule to get rid of the obesity. Now a day Ayurvedic management is recognized as the better option for those whom are suffering from the remedy of *sthoulya* (obesity).

Therefore following line of treatment should be followed.

- Regular exercises like brisk walking, running and swimming in the morning hours for the duration of 30- 45 minutes and this duration should be extended day by day as possible.
- Some of the *asana* and *pranayam* such as *paschimottanastana* (the back stretching pose) *bhujangasana* (the cobra pose), *pawanmuktasana* (the wind releasing pose) are helpful in the reduction of body fat.
- Intake of low caloric diet such as millets and highly fibrous vegetables such as cabbage may be said as ideal food for the obese; it takes longer time for its digestion.
- Regular intake of natural honey is indicated in Ayurveda for the treatment of *sthoulya*. The action is due to *lekhaniya* property of honey.
- Use of single Ayurvedic drugs as *Guggulu*, *Guduchi*, *Ginger*, *Chitrak*, *Trikatu*, *Shilajita*, *Agnimantha*, *Devdaru*, *Musta*, *Triphala* (*Haritaki*, *Vibhitaki* and *Amalaki*) etc are responsible for the reduction of body weight and fat.

Conclusion:

Prevention is better than cure. The person suffering from obesity or prone to the obesity should be encouraged to develop a healthy eating habit and to avoid the foods with high calories; high sugar contents. An emphasis on long- term weight control and maintaining good health rather than on short- term weight loss is required.

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