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REVIEW ARTICLE

Scope of Pathya and Yoga for Lifestyle Disorders: A Structured Review

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ABSTRACT

Background: Lifestyle disorders such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, raised blood fats and heart disease are now the leading cause of death and disability in the world, and India carries a very large share of this load. These diseases grow slowly out of daily habits like heavy and untimely meals, long sitting hours, late nights and constant mental stress. Modern drugs control the readings, but they are usually needed for life and do not correct the habit that started the disease. Ayurveda gives first place to Pathya (wholesome diet and conduct) and Yoga (discipline of body, breath and mind), both for keeping the healthy person healthy and for curing the sick. A clear review of how these two tools act on lifestyle disorders is therefore needed.

Materials and Methods: Charaka Samhita, Ashtanga Hridaya, Kashyapa Samhita, Vaidya Jeevanam, Patanjala Yoga Sutra, Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Bhagavad Gita were studied with their commentaries. Recent articles were searched on PubMed and Google Scholar, and the collected matter was arranged and critically analysed.

Results & Discussion: Pathya and Yoga act at the root stages of Samprapti, so they work as both prevention and cure. Present research supports this, though larger long-term trials are still needed.

Conclusion: Pathya and Yoga together form a simple, safe and low-cost first line of care for lifestyle disorders. They should be built into routine clinical practice and public health programmes along with medical treatment.

Keywords: *Pathya, Yoga, Lifestyle disorders, Santarpanottha Vyadhi, Agni, Dinacharya*

INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle disorders are long-standing diseases that arise mainly from the way a person eats, moves, sleeps and handles stress. The common ones are type 2 diabetes mellitus, hypertension, obesity, dyslipidaemia, coronary heart disease and fatty liver. They belong to the larger group of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), as they do not pass from one person to another. According to the World Health Organization, NCDs killed at least 43 million people in 2021, which is about 75% of all deaths not related to the pandemic. Eighteen million of these people died before the age of 70 years, and 82% of such early deaths took place in low- and middle-income countries. Tobacco use, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and harmful use of alcohol are named as the main behavioural risk factors, and every one of them is a habit that a person can change.[1]

India is facing this problem on a very large scale. The ICMR-INDIAB study, the biggest national survey on metabolic diseases, examined 1,13,043 adults from urban and rural areas of all the states between 2008 and 2020. It found that 11.4% of Indian adults had diabetes, 35.5% had hypertension, 28.6% had generalised obesity and 39.5% had abdominal obesity. The authors concluded that the burden of metabolic NCDs in India is much higher than earlier estimates and called for urgent state-wise prevention plans.[2] Fast urban growth, desk jobs, packaged and fried food, late-night screen use and work pressure are pushing these numbers higher every year, even among young adults.

This means the aim of Ayurveda is to protect the health of the healthy and to relieve the disease of the sick.[3] For both these aims, the two most practical tools are Pathya (right food and right conduct) and Yoga (the union of body, breath and mind through disciplined practice). Since lifestyle disorders are born out of wrong living, correcting the way of living is the most logical treatment. Even so, the classical ideas on Pathya and Yoga are scattered across many texts, and students and clinicians often lack one place where these ideas are joined with present-day evidence. The present review tries to fill this gap.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim: To study the scope of Pathya and Yoga in the prevention and management of lifestyle disorders.

1. To collect and explain classical references on Pathya, Ahara Vidhi, Dinacharya and Yoga.
2. To understand the Samprapti (pathogenesis) of lifestyle disorders in Ayurvedic terms.
3. To relate the classical concepts with present scientific evidence.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a conceptual and literary review. Classical texts, namely Charaka Samhita with Ayurveda Dipika commentary, Ashtanga Hridaya with Sarvangasundara and Ayurveda Rasayana commentaries, Kashyapa Samhita, Vaidya Jeevanam of Lolimbaraja, Patanjala Yoga Sutra, Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Shrimad Bhagavad Gita, were read for references on Pathya, Ahara, Vihara, Santarpanottha Vyadhi and Yoga. Modern literature was searched on PubMed, Google Scholar and the World Health Organization website using the keywords "lifestyle disorders", "non-communicable diseases", "Pathya", "yoga", "diabetes", "hypertension" and "lifestyle intervention". Preference was given to national surveys, randomised controlled trials and meta-analyses. The collected material was sorted under suitable headings, the Samprapti was framed as a flow chart, and the findings were compared and discussed.

CONCEPTUAL STUDY – AYURVEDIC REVIEW

Lifestyle Disorders in the Ayurvedic View (Santarpanottha Vyadhi)

There is no single word in the classics for "lifestyle disorder", but Acharya Charaka describes a very close idea in the Santarpaniya Adhyaya. He explains that a person who keeps over-nourishing the body with oily, sweet, heavy and slimy food, new grains, new wine, the meat of marshy and water animals, milk products, jaggery and flour preparations, and who at the same time avoids physical work and enjoys day sleep, soft beds and easy seats, develops a group of diseases called Santarpanottha Vyadhi (diseases of over-nutrition). The list includes Prameha, Pidaka, Kotha, Kandu, Pandu, Jwara, Kushtha, Amadosha, Mutrakrichchhra, Arochaka, Tandra, Klaibya, Atisthaulya, Alasya, Gurugatrata, Indriya Srotasam Lepa, Buddhi Moha, Pramilaka and Shopha.[4] This picture of rich food plus no exercise is exactly the picture of today's obesity, diabetes and metabolic syndrome. For this group, the line of treatment given is Apatarpana, that is, lightening therapies such as fasting, exercise and purification, which is the opposite of the cause.

Role of Agni and Ama

It means that all diseases arise when Agni is weak, and abdominal diseases arise most of all.[5] When food is taken in excess, at the wrong time, or before the last meal is digested, Jatharagni becomes weak (Agnimandya). The partly digested, sticky material that forms is called Ama. This Ama mixes with Doshas, blocks the fine channels (Srotas) and disturbs the Dhatvagni of each tissue. In lifestyle disorders, the weakness of Medo-Dhatvagni leads to the piling up of poorly formed fat (Abaddha Meda), which can be compared with the excess body fat, insulin resistance and raised lipids seen in modern medicine. Thus, any plan for these disorders must first correct Agni, and this is exactly where Pathya and Yoga work.

Concept of Pathya

That which does not harm the body channels and is pleasing to the mind is Pathya; that which harms them and is not pleasing is Apathya. Charaka adds an important point in the next verses: no food is fixed as wholesome or unwholesome for everyone, because its effect changes with quantity (Matra), time (Kala), method of preparation (Kriya), place (Bhumi), body (Deha) and Dosha.[6] This shows that Pathya is not a fixed diet chart. It is a personal plan made for each patient after looking at his Prakriti, Agni, Bala, season and disease stage. This idea is very close to the modern concept of personalised nutrition.

Importance of Pathya in Treatment

If the patient follows Pathya, what is the need of medicine? And if he does not follow Pathya, what is the use of medicine?[7] The verse does not reject medicine; it simply means that without Pathya even the best drug fails, and with Pathya the need for drugs becomes small. This is very true for lifestyle disorders. A diabetic patient who takes tablets but keeps eating sweets late at night, or a hypertensive patient who takes medicine but keeps a salty diet and poor sleep, rarely gets lasting control. In such diseases, Pathya is not a side support; it is the main treatment.

Ahara as the Great Medicine

Kashyapa Samhita gives food the highest place among all remedies and calls Ahara "Mahabhaishajya", the great medicine.[8] The logic is simple. Medicine is taken for a short period, but food is taken every day, many times a day, for the whole life. So the effect of daily food on the body, good or bad, is much stronger than that of any drug. In lifestyle disorders, the same daily food that slowly produced the disease can, when corrected, slowly reverse it. Light, warm, freshly cooked and properly timed food keeps Agni bright and prevents Ama, whereas heavy, cold, stale, fried and packaged food does the opposite. Viewing food as medicine also helps the patient take diet advice seriously rather than treating it as optional.

Rules of Eating: Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana and Ahara Vidhi Vidhana

Acharya Charaka goes beyond "what to eat" and also explains "how, how much, when and by whom". He gives eight factors that decide whether a food will help or harm (Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana), and then lists rules of eating (Ahara Vidhi Vidhana): eat warm, unctuous food in proper quantity, only after the previous meal is digested, avoid incompatible items, eat in a pleasant place with all needed things at hand, neither too fast nor too slow, without talking or laughing, with full attention, and after judging one's own capacity.[9] These rules match modern advice on mindful eating, portion control, avoiding snacking and fixed meal timing. A short summary is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana and its relevance in lifestyle disorders

Factor	Simple meaning	Practical use in lifestyle disorders
Prakriti	Natural quality of food (heavy/light)	Prefer light foods like Yava and Mudga over heavy foods
Karana	Processing and cooking	Roasting, boiling and steaming in place of deep frying
Samyoga	Combination of foods	Avoid Viruddha Ahara such as milk with salty or sour items
Rashi	Quantity of food	Eat as per Agni; leave part of the stomach empty
Desha	Place of origin and habitat	Prefer local and seasonal food
Kala	Time and season; state of digestion	Fixed meal times; no late-night heavy meals
Upayoga Samstha	Rules of eating	Eat only after previous meal is digested
Upabhokta	The person who eats	Plan diet as per Prakriti, age, Bala and disease

Vihara: Dinacharya and Vyayama

Pathya covers not only food but also daily conduct (Vihara). Acharya Vagbhata starts his daily routine (Dinacharya) by advising a healthy person to wake up in Brahma Muhurta to protect his life span. About exercise (Vyayama).

Exercise gives lightness, capacity for work, strong digestion, reduction of fat and firm, well-shaped limbs. He also warns that exercise should be done only up to half of one's strength (Ardha Shakti). In the same chapter, powder massage

(Udvartana) is said to reduce Kapha, melt fat and make the limbs firm.[10] Each of these benefits directly targets the problems of lifestyle disorders: excess fat, weak Agni and a heavy, lazy body. Regular waking time, fixed meal times, daily exercise, Udvartana, avoiding day sleep and avoiding night waking together form a complete Vihara Pathya for these patients.

Concept of Yoga

Yoga is the control of the changing waves of the mind. To reach this state, Patanjali gives eight limbs (Ashtanga Yoga): Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi, and he describes Asana as a posture that is steady and comfortable (Sthira Sukham Asanam).[11] For a patient of a lifestyle disorder, Yama and Niyama build self-control in food and habits, Asana works on the body, Pranayama works on breath and the nervous system, and Pratyahara, Dharana and Dhyana work on the stressed and restless mind. Thus, Yoga is not only exercise; it is a full lifestyle that reaches the mental cause (Manasika Nidana) of these diseases, which diet and drugs alone often miss.

Link Between Pathya and Yoga

Yoga removes sorrow only for the person who is balanced in food and recreation, balanced in effort at work, and balanced in sleep and waking. The verse before it says that Yoga is not possible for one who eats too much or too little, or who sleeps too much or too little.[12] Here the word Yukta (balanced) is the common thread. Balanced food is Pathya Ahara, balanced activity and sleep are Pathya Vihara, and the result is Yoga. In simple words, Pathya prepares the ground and Yoga grows on it; one without the other gives only half the benefit.

Asana, Pranayama and Shatkarma

Hatha Yoga Pradipika gives the practical side of Yoga. It says that Asana, being the first limb of Hatha Yoga, brings steadiness, freedom from disease and lightness of the body. About breathing practice.

Correct practice of Pranayama destroys all diseases, while wrong practice can give rise to diseases. The same text describes Kapalabhati as a practice that dries up the disorders of Kapha.[13] This verse carries two lessons for clinical use. First, Pranayama and Asana have real healing power, mainly for Kapha and Meda related disorders. Second, they must be learnt under a trained teacher and chosen according to the patient; for example, forceful practices like Kapalabhati are not advised for patients with uncontrolled hypertension or heart disease. Commonly used practices are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Common Yogic practices and their proposed action in lifestyle disorders

Practice	Proposed Ayurvedic action	Useful in
Surya Namaskara	Reduces Kapha and Meda; kindles Agni	Obesity, diabetes (as per capacity)
Tadasana, Trikonasana	Gives lightness; improves Vyana movement	Obesity, sedentary habit
Bhujangasana, Dhanurasana	Stimulates abdominal organs and Agni	Diabetes, obesity, fatty liver
Ardha Matsyendrasana, Mandukasana	Presses abdomen; supports pancreas and digestion	Diabetes
Paschimottanasana	Calms Vata; reduces belly fat	Diabetes, stress
Shavasana	Deep rest; calms Manas and Vata	Hypertension, heart disease, stress
Nadi Shodhana (Anuloma Viloma)	Balances Prana; calms mind	Hypertension, anxiety
Bhramari	Calms Manas; reduces Rajas	Hypertension, insomnia
Kapalabhati	Dries Kapha; reduces Meda	Obesity, diabetes (avoid in hypertension, heart disease)
Dhyana	Increases Sattva; lowers stress	All lifestyle disorders

SAMPRAPTI (PATHOGENESIS) OF LIFESTYLE DISORDERS – FLOW CHART

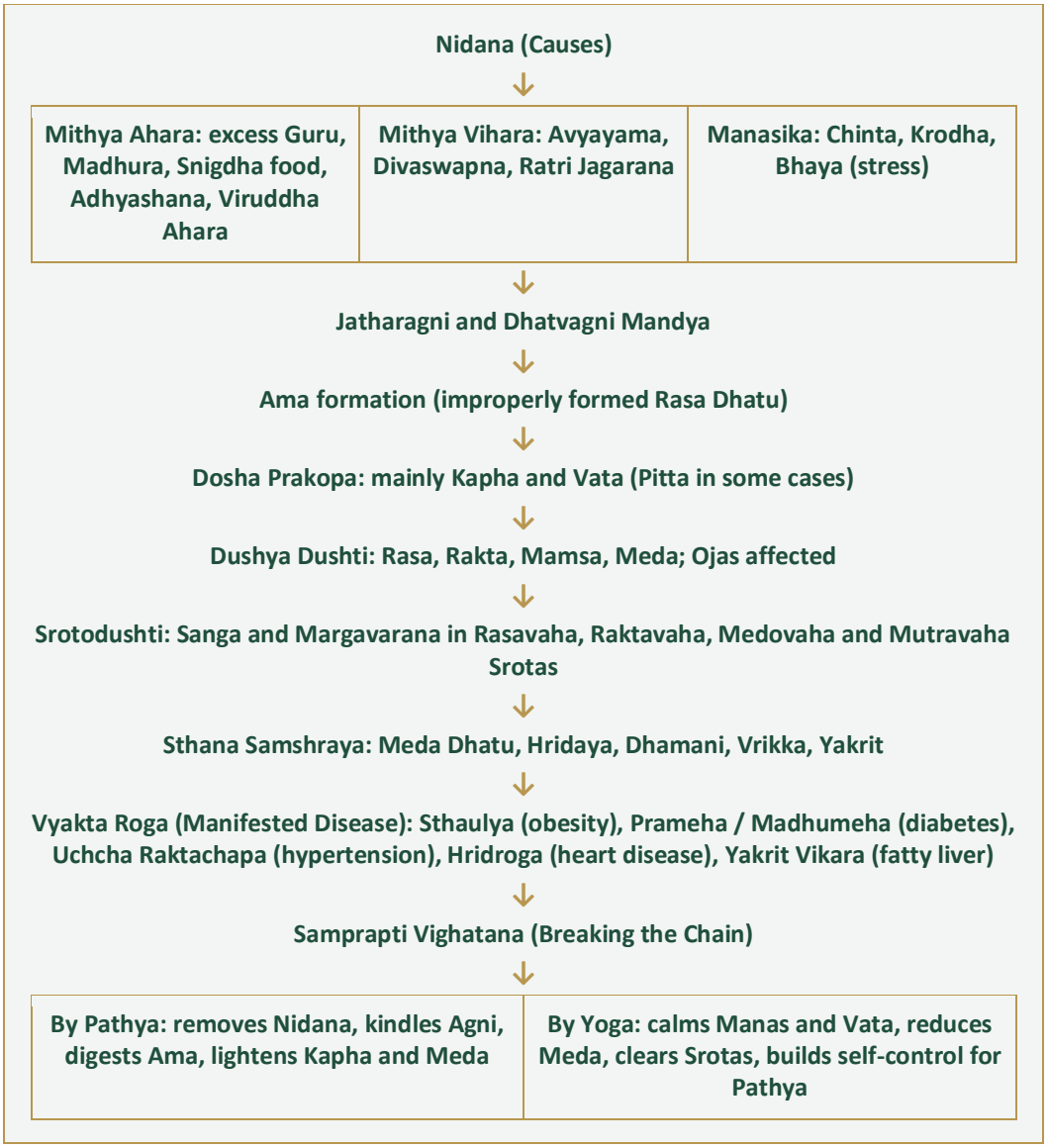


Figure 1: Flow chart of Samprapti of lifestyle disorders and its breaking by Pathya and Yoga

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

- Most lifestyle disorders fit well into the classical group of Santarpanottha Vyadhi, where rich food and lack of physical work are the main causes.
- Agnimandya and Ama form the central step of the disease process; Kapha, Meda and Vata are the main Dosha and Dushya, and Srotorodha is the common result.
- Pathya in Ayurveda is not a fixed diet list. It is decided for each person according to Matra, Kala, Prakriti, Agni, Bala and stage of disease.
- Ashta Ahara Vidhi Visheshayatana and Ahara Vidhi Vidhana together give a complete code of eating, covering what, how much, when, where and how to eat.
- For lifestyle disorders, Laghu and Ruksha foods are generally favoured, such as old cereals, Yava (barley), millets, Mudga (green gram), Kulattha (horse gram) and bitter vegetables like Karavellaka and Patola, while new grains, curd, sweets, fried and stale food are restricted.
- Vihara Pathya includes waking in Brahma Muhurta, daily Vyayama up to half of one's strength, Udvartana, and avoiding day sleep and night waking.
- Yoga acts on body (Asana), breath (Pranayama), mind (Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana) and conduct (Yama, Niyama); thus it also treats the mental stress that drives these diseases.

- The Bhagavad Gita and the Ayurvedic texts share one principle of balance (Yukta); Pathya and Yoga support each other and work best together.
- Modern trials on lifestyle change and meta-analyses on yoga support the classical claims, showing lower blood sugar, blood pressure, body fat and lipid levels (details in Discussion).
- Both tools are low in cost, safe when practised correctly, and easy to teach in groups, which makes them suitable for community and national health programmes.

DISCUSSION

Removing the cause (Nidana Parivarjana) is the first step of every Ayurvedic treatment, and in lifestyle disorders the cause lies on the daily plate and in the daily routine. Pathya acts at the very first stage of Samprapti: it stops further Nidana, rekindles Agni, prevents new Ama and slowly lightens the load of Kapha and Meda. Modern science has tested a similar idea on a large scale. In the Diabetes Prevention Program, 3,234 adults with raised blood sugar who did not yet have diabetes were divided into groups. The group given an intensive lifestyle programme of diet change and at least 150 minutes of physical activity a week, aiming at 7% weight loss, showed a 58% fall in new cases of diabetes, while the group given metformin showed a 31% fall, when compared with placebo.[14] In other words, a planned change in food and activity, which is the essence of Pathya Ahara and Pathya Vihara, worked better than a standard drug in preventing diabetes.

Yoga works at a deeper level along with Pathya. Asana and Kapalabhati reduce Kapha and Meda and stimulate the abdominal organs; Pranayama steadies Prana and Vyana Vayu, which control breathing and circulation; and Dhyana reduces Rajas and Tamas, the qualities of mind that lead to stress eating, poor sleep and loss of self-control. In modern terms, these practices are thought to reduce stress hormones, lower sympathetic drive and improve the body's response to insulin. A meta-analysis of 23 controlled studies with 2,473 adults having type 2 diabetes found that yoga improved HbA1c, fasting blood sugar and post-meal blood sugar compared with control groups, and also improved lipid profile, blood pressure, body mass index, waist-hip ratio and cortisol levels.[15] These results agree with the classical claim that correct Asana and Pranayama destroy disease and give lightness to the body.

The benefit of Yoga is not limited to diabetes. A systematic review and meta-analysis of 44 randomised trials with 3,168 participants found that, compared with usual care or no intervention, yoga lowered systolic blood pressure by about 5.85 mmHg and diastolic blood pressure by about 4.12 mmHg, and also improved waist size, cholesterol, triglycerides, HbA1c and insulin resistance. The authors, however, noted that the risk of bias was high or unclear in most of the trials.[16] This points to both the promise and the present limits of the evidence. Most studies are small, short and use different yoga packages, and very few have tested Pathya and Yoga together in a planned, Prakriti-based way, as the classics advise. Future research should therefore use standard protocols, longer follow-up and combined Pathya–Yoga programmes. Until then, the existing classical logic and modern data are strong enough to place Pathya and Yoga as the first line of care, with medicines added wherever needed.

CONCLUSION

Lifestyle disorders are, in Ayurvedic terms, diseases of wrong Ahara, wrong Vihara and a disturbed mind, built on Agnimandya, Ama, Kapha–Meda Dushti and Srotorodha. Pathya corrects the cause and the Agni, and Yoga corrects the body, breath and mind; together they break the Samprapti at its root. The classical texts give a detailed and personalised code of diet, daily routine and yogic practice, and present-day trials support its value in diabetes, hypertension, obesity and heart disease. Being simple, safe and low in cost, Pathya and Yoga have a wide scope in both prevention and management of lifestyle disorders and deserve a regular place in clinical practice, medical education and public health programmes, alongside modern treatment when required.

DECLARATIONS

Conflict of Interest: Nil

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