



Pathya and Apathya in Obesity

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ABSTRACT:

Obesity (Sthaulya) is a growing global epidemic and has emerged as one of the most pressing public health challenges in India. It is strongly associated with lifestyle-related disorders including diabetes mellitus, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and certain cancers, thereby contributing to increased morbidity and mortality. In Ayurveda, Sthaulya is described as a disorder caused by improper dietary practices, sedentary lifestyle, and Kapha predominance, leading to abnormal accumulation of Medas (Adipose tissue) and subsequent metabolic imbalance. The management of obesity in Ayurveda emphasizes the regulation of Pathya Ahara & Vihara (wholesome diet and lifestyle) and avoidance of Apathya (unwholesome practices). Acharyas have recommended food articles and regimens possessing Laghu (light), Ruksha (dry), Lekhana (scraping), and Agnivardhana (digestive fire-enhancing) properties, which help in reducing excessive fat while improving digestion and metabolism. Conversely, indulgence in heavy, oily, sweet, and sedentary habits is considered Apathya, further aggravating the condition. An Ayurvedic diet chart formulated based on these principles provides a structured approach to dietary planning, ensuring balance between nourishment and weight loss. Integrating Ayurvedic dietary wisdom with contemporary nutrition highlights a sustainable and holistic approach to obesity management. Thus, adoption of Pathya–Apathya serves not only as a therapeutic measure but also as a preventive and promotive strategy for long-term health and vitality.

INTRODUCTION:

Obesity has become a major public health challenge in India, affecting people across all age groups and increasing the risk of non-communicable diseases such as hypertension, heart disease, diabetes etc. Obesity is regarded as a global pandemic or syndemic as it entails potentially disastrous consequences for human health.¹ Unhealthy diets, sedentary lifestyle and different environmental factors are the leading reasons for the rise in obesity. Obesity effects both mortality and morbidity. Coronary heart disease is the major cause of death but cancer rates are also increased in the overweight, especially colorectal cancer in males and cancer of the gall bladder. Biliary tract, breast, uterine endometrium and cervix in females.²

DEFINITIONS:

Obesity may be defined as an abnormal growth of the adipose tissue due to an enlargement of fat cell size (hypertrophic obesity) or an increase in fat cell number (hyperplastic obesity) or a combination of both.³

Obesity is defined as a state of increased body weight, due to adipose tissue accumulation, that is of sufficient magnitude to produce adverse health effects.⁴

Obesity refers to an increase in total body fat. When body weight is 20% above ideal body weight, for age, sex and height the condition is termed as obesity. It is often expressed in terms of body mass index (BMI).⁵

Obesity is a state of excess adipose tissue mass.⁶

**PREVALANCE:**

Most prevalent form of malnutrition is obesity. It is now so common that it is replacing the more traditional public health concerns including undernutrition.⁷ Obesity and overweight are the fifth leading risk of global deaths. Since 1980, obesity was more than doubled. In 2016, more than 1.9 billion adults, 18 years and older were overweight. In 2019, more than 38.2 million children under 5 years of age were overweight or obese.⁸ According to National family health survey (NFHS)-5 (2019-2021), In India 24.0% of women are overweight or obese and 22.9% of men are overweight or obese. It is 3.4% and 4% of increase respectively compared to NFHS-4 (2015-2016).⁹

Sthaulya:

Absence of physical activity, sleeping during day, and intake of foods which increase *Kapha*, make the end product of digestion to become sweet which in turn

causes increase of *Medas* (fat). This obstructs the nutrients channels of the remaining tissues depriving them of nutrition. So only fat accumulates in large quantities in the body making the person incapable of all activities.¹⁰

So, as the abdomen and bones are the chief depots of fat, the abdomen gets enlarged in such persons.¹¹ Then signs like difficulty in breathing even on slight exertion, excess thirst, delusions, increased sleep, sudden catching of breath, exhaustion, excessive hunger, bad body odour, poor in physical and sexual activity.¹²

Acharya Charaka explained these signs as eight inherent defects, *Astha doshas* (eight defects). They are reduced lifespan, limited body movement, reduced sexual activity, sudden debility, emits bad smell, profuse sweating, excessive hunger, excessive thirst.¹³ If the *Medas* is not taken care of early, it will cause the *Prakopa* (vitiation) of all three *Doshas* and even lead to the loss of life.¹⁴

Pathya (wholesome diet and lifestyle) for Sthaulya:

Sl no	According to	Vihara	Ahara
1	<i>Bhaishajyaratnavali</i> ¹⁵	<i>Chinta</i> (worrying), <i>Srama</i> (labour), <i>Jagarana</i> (being awake), <i>Vyavaaya</i> (sexual intercourse), <i>Udwartana</i> (powder massage), <i>Langhana</i> (fasting), <i>Atapa sevana</i> (exposure to sunlight), <i>Hasti & Aswa yaana</i> (riding on elephant and horse), <i>Bhramana</i> (roaming), <i>Agaru lepa</i> (anointing body with paste of <i>Aquilaria agallocha</i>)	<i>Purana vainava</i> (old bamboo rice), <i>Kodrava</i> (kodo millet), <i>Shyamaka</i> (barnyard millet), <i>Navara</i> (Navara variety of rice), <i>Yava</i> (<i>Hordeum vulgare</i>), <i>Kulattha</i> (Horse gram), <i>Chanaka</i> (Bengal gram), <i>Masura</i> (lentil), <i>Mudga</i> (green gram), <i>Tuvara</i> (<i>Hydnocarpus laurifolia</i>), <i>Madhu</i> (honey), <i>Laja</i> (Puffed paddy), <i>Kashaya</i> which are <i>Katu</i> (pungent) and <i>Tikta</i> (bitter) <i>rasa</i> , <i>Takra</i> (buttermilk), ember roasted brinjal, <i>Triphala</i> (<i>Chebulic myrobalan</i> , <i>Terminalia bellirica</i> , <i>Phyllanthus embilica</i>), <i>Guggulu</i> (<i>Commiphora mukul</i>), <i>Loha Bhasma</i> (powdered iron), <i>Trikatu</i> (<i>Piper nigrum</i> , <i>Piper longum</i> , <i>Zingiber officinalis</i>), <i>Sarshapa taila</i> (mustard oil), <i>Ela</i> (cardamom), <i>Tila taila</i> (sesame oil), hot water, <i>Shilajatu</i> (<i>Asphaltum punjabianum</i>), drinking water before having food.
2.	<i>Charaka samhita</i> ¹⁶	<i>Vyavaya</i> , <i>Vyayama</i> (exercise), <i>Chinta</i>	<i>Prasantika</i> (foxtail millet), <i>Shyamaka</i> (jowar / great millet), <i>Yava</i> , <i>Jurnahva</i> (jowar), <i>Kodrava</i> , <i>Mudga</i> , <i>Kulattha</i> , <i>Adaki</i> (pigeon pea), <i>Amlaki</i> (<i>Phyllanthus embilica</i>), <i>Patola</i> (<i>Trichosanthes dioica</i>), Honey water and alcoholic preparations may be taken as postprandial drinks that help in



			reducing excessive fat and muscle tissues, while also alleviating kapha dosha.
3.	<i>Ashtanga sangraha</i> ¹⁷	<i>Chinta, Vyavaaya, Vyayama, Shodhana</i> (therapeutic purification of body), <i>Aswapna</i> (reduced sleep), <i>Ruksha snana</i> (bathing without using oil), <i>Udwartana</i>	<i>Kulattha, Yava, Jurna, Shyamaka, Mudga, Arishta</i> (fermented medicine), <i>Honey water</i> (honey water), <i>Mastu</i> (supernatant liquid of curd), <i>Takra</i> <i>Pana</i> made up of <i>Vyosha</i> (Piper nigrum, Piper longum, Zingiber officinalis), <i>Katvi</i> (Picrorhiza kurroa), <i>Vara</i> (Calotropis gigantea), <i>Shigrū</i> (Moringa oleifera), <i>Vidanga</i> (Embelia ribes), <i>Ativisha</i> (Aconitum heterophyllum), <i>Sthira</i> (Desmodium gangeticum), <i>Hingu</i> (Ferula asafoetida), <i>Sauvarchala</i> (black salt), <i>Ajaji</i> (cumin), <i>Yavani</i> (ajwain), <i>Chitraka</i> (Plumbago zeylanica), <i>Nisha</i> (Cucurma longa), <i>Brihati</i> (Solanum indicum), <i>Hapusha</i> (Juniperus communis), <i>Patha</i> (Cissampelos pareira), <i>Kembuka mula</i> (root of Costus speciosus) - all equal parts making together one part added with equal quantities of each of honey, ghee and sesame oil; 16 parts of cornflour is made into a beverage. This recipe cures obesity.
4.	<i>Susruta samhita</i> ¹⁸		<i>Shilajatu, Guggulu, Gomutra</i> (Cow's urine), <i>Triphala, Madhu, Yava, Mudga, Koradushaka</i> (Kodo millet), <i>Shyamaka</i>

Apathya (unwholesome diet and lifestyle) for Sthaulya

Sl no	According to	Vihara	Ahara
1	<i>Bhaishajyaratnavali</i> ¹⁹	<i>Snana</i> (taking bath especially which includes oil), <i>Sukha sheela</i> (always staying in comfort), sleeping during daytime, wearing perfumes and garlands, drinking water directly after taking food	<i>Rasayana</i> (Rejuvenating medicines), <i>Shali</i> (polished rice), <i>Godhuma</i> (wheat), <i>Ksheera</i> and <i>Ikshu vikruti</i> (milk and sugarcane products), taking huge quantity of meals, <i>Snehana</i> (oleation therapy), <i>Matsya</i> (fish), <i>Mamsa</i> (meat), <i>Madhura</i> (sweet taste)

According to Bhojanakutuhalam

Rotika prepared from barley imparts taste, is sweet, light and strengthening, increases the production of excrements and semen, aggravates *Vata*, treats kapha disorders, chronic cold, dyspnoea, cough and diseases of adipose tissue, urine and bodily wastes.²⁰

The papadums prepared from rice flour are light, impart taste and alleviate *Kapha*.²¹

Vadas of the size of the palm, prepared from the marrow of pumpkin, seeds of cinnamon, cummin seeds and salt after drying the mixture in sun and cooking the *Vada* in embers is light to digest. the *vadas* prepared from wet ginger, cumin seeds, asafoetida and coriander leaves alleviates *Kapha* and imparts taste.²²

Vadas prepared from flowers of neem, sesame and salt alleviate *Kapha* and *Pitta* and treat worm infestations and wounds.²³

**Ayurvedic Diet chart:**

Day	6:30 AM	8:30 AM	11 AM	1 PM	5 PM	7:30 PM
Monday	Lukewarm water 300ml	Foxtail millet (<i>Kangu prasantika</i>) Idly (3) with Groundnut chutney and Sambar	<i>Lashuna sidda</i> <i>Takra</i> 200 ml	<i>Yava Rotika</i> (1), Barnyard millet (<i>Shyamaka</i>) (150gm), Veg sambar, Jeera rasam, green gram palya	<i>Dadima</i> juice – 100 ml	<i>Yava rotika</i> (2), Okra palya, masur daal
Tuesday	Honey water 300ml	Mix millet pongal (150gm) with pudina chutney + Cut papaya (50gm)	<i>Matulunga</i> juice 100ml	Ragi ball (1), Foxtail millet (150gm), Drumstick sambar, Tomato rasam, Ridgegourd palya	<i>Kushmanda vataka</i> -1	Kodo millet roti (2) + Brinjal palya
Wednesday	Lemon honey water 300ml	<i>Kulatta</i> soup (200ML), raw veg salad (100gm)	<i>Mudga</i> soup 100ml	<i>Yava Rottika</i> (1), Millet rice (150gm), <i>Shigru</i> sambar, Garlic rasam, Chanaka palya	Veg salad – 50 gm	<i>Yava rotika</i> (2), Green gram palya
Thursday	Lukewarm water – 300ml	Ragi dosa (3) with horsegram chutney	<i>Dadima</i> juice – 100 ml	Ragi ball (1), <i>Purana shali</i> rice (150gm), <i>Patola</i> sambar, lentil rasam, Bittergaurd palya	Palak soup 100ml	<i>Yava rotika</i> (2), Green gram palya
Friday	Honey water 300ml	Millet bisibele bhat (150 gm) Watermelon (50 gm)	Mix veg soup – 100ml	<i>Yava Rottika</i> (1), Millet rice (150gm), Horsegram sambar, jeera rasam, Horsegram & leaves palya	<i>Yava saktu</i> , warm water – 100ml	Barley porridge 200ml, Bengal gram gravy
Saturday	Lemon honey water – 300ml	Kodo millet (<i>Kodrava</i>) Idly (3) with Groundnut	<i>Jeeraka siddha</i>	Ragi ball (1), foxtail millet (150gm), Raddish sambar, Tomato	kokum juice – 100 ml	Ragi porridge 200ml, Okra



		chutney and Sambar	takra – 100ml	rasam, Mudga palya		palya, masur daal
Sunday	Lukewarm water – 300ml	Mudga soup (200 ml), Fruit salad (50 gm)	Methi sidda takra – 200ml	Yava Rottika (1), Millet rice(150gm), Green leafy vegetable sambar, Tamarind Tili saaru, Snakegaurd palya	Methi sprouts with pomegranate, cucumber, lemon juice and pepper	Garlic Jave wheat chapathi(2), Ridge gourd & groundnut palya

DISCUSSION:

The food that we take plays a great role in the manifestation of obesity. Obesity will occur with the combination of improper food habits along with the sedentary life style. So, *Acharyas* have given food articles which have properties antagonist to that of obesity.

Yava have *Kashaya Rasa Pradhana* (predominance of astringent taste), *Ruksha* (dry) *Laghu* (light) *Guna* (quality) and it is *Kaphapittahara* (mitigates kapha and pitta). It has *Lekhana* (scraping) and destroys *Medas* property. Also, it is *Agnivardhaka* (increases digestive fire) which will aid in proper digestion.²⁴ *Jiraka* is having *Katu* (pungent) *Rasa*, *Laghu* and *Ruksha Guna*, *Ushna Virya* (hot potency), *Katu Vipaka*, *Kapha Shamaka* (pacify). Also, *Jiraka* in its action it is told that it has *Lekhana* and *Shodhahara* (mitigates swelling) property.²⁵ *Matulunga* is having *Laghu guna* and *Kaphavatashamaka*. Even the *Matulunga* seeds have property like *Sothahara* and *Lekhaniya*.²⁶ *Kulatta* is having *Kashaya rasa*, *Laghu*, *Tikshna* (penetrative) and *Ushna guna*, *Ushna virya* and *Katu Vipaka*. It is also having *Medohara Karma*.²⁷ *Shigru* is having *Katu Rasa*, *Laghu Guna*, *Ushna Virya* and *Katu Vipaka*. Properties like *Lekhana*, *Kaphagna* are also there with *Shigru*.²⁸ *Mudga* is having *Kashaya rasa*, *Laghu Guna* and destroys *Kapha* also.²⁹ *Chanaka* is *Vatala* (increases *Vata*), *Ruksha* and *Laghu*. Also, it is having *Kaphanasana* property. It is also having *Madhura* (sweet) *Rasa* along with *Kashaya Rasa*. So, it will help the *Vata Dosha* not to get too much aggravated also.³⁰

Masura is *Laghu*, *Kapha Nashaka* and *Vatala* in nature.³¹ *Adaki* is also having same properties that is mentioned for the previous.³²

Kshudra Dhanya is also mentioned by *Acharyas* like *Kangu*, *Shyamaka*, *Kodrava*. *Kangu* or *Priyangu* is having properties like *Vatakara* and mitigates *Kapha*.³³ *Shyamaka* causes *Shoshana* (draining) property and also increases *Vata* and also mitigates *Kapha*.³⁴ *Kodrava* also increases *Vata* and mitigates *Kapha*.³⁵

While mentioning about the oils *Acharyas* have mentioned about *Sarshapa Taila* and *Tila Taila*. *Sarshapa Taila* is having *Katu Rasa*, *Laghu* (Light), *Ushna* (warm), *Tikshna* qualities. It is also having *Ushna Virya* and *Katu Vipaka*. It also helps in digestion and have *Lekhana* property.³⁶ *Tila Taila* is also having *Lekhana* property. Even though mitigates *Vata* and *Kapha*, *Tila Taila* is having *Madhura Rasa* and *Madhura Vipaka*, also it has *Brihmaniya* property.³⁷ So, while considering both the *Taila*, *Sarshapa Taila* have upper hand than that of *Tila Taila*.

Most of the food items that are used in modern world which most of the people are fancying like millets were already told in our *Ayurvedic* textbooks. We can also combine our *Ayurvedic* ideas with that of modern also to make combined diet charts. *Ayurvedic* herbs and spices like ginger, turmeric, black pepper, cumin, and coriander can stimulate digestion and metabolism, helping to boost *Agni*. Combine this with modern metabolic boosters like green tea, caffeine (in moderation), and intermittent fasting. The combination helps in improving digestion and enhancing fat-burning mechanisms.



Use *Ayurvedic* guidelines to tailor the diet based on the dominant *Dosha*. People with *Kapha* imbalance (which often leads to obesity) benefit from lighter, drier foods, while those with *Vata* imbalance may need more grounding foods. Combine this with modern body type analysis to create a diet plan that considers both *Dosha* and individual metabolism. *Kapha* types should focus on low-glycemic, high-fiber foods and avoid cold and heavy meals. Encourage mindful eating by adopting *Ayurvedic* practices like eating in a calm environment, chewing each bite properly, and avoiding distractions while eating (*Aharavidhi Vidhaana*). Combine this with mindful eating and Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to break unhealthy eating habits, reduce emotional eating, and promote conscious food choices. Combine *Ayurvedic* meal timing (eating your main meal during the day, light dinners) with the intermittent fasting approach. Practice a 16:8 fasting protocol (eating during an 8-hour window) that aligns with *Ayurvedic* recommendations. Focus on eating lighter, easily digestible foods in the evening to support the body's natural circadian rhythm.

CONCLUSION:

Sthaulya or obesity is not only a disorder of physical appearance but also a condition with deep rooted metabolic and lifestyle origins. *Ayurveda* emphasizes that the balance between *Pathya* and *Apathya* is central to its management. The guidance of *Acharyas* clearly highlights the importance of moderation, mindful eating and correction of daily habits along with suitable *Ahara* and *Vihara*. Incorporating an *Ayurvedic* diet chart that aligns with these principles offers a sustainable and holistic approach to weight management. Thus, understanding and practicing *Pathya-Apathya* is not merely a therapeutic intervention but a preventive and promotive strategy towards long term health, vitality and freedom from complications of obesity.

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