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Therapeutic effect of Yoga in the management of overweight and obesity.

Patil Rajendra Vinayak*¹, Nakil Rahul Bapusaheb²

1. PhD Scholar, M.D.(Swasthavritta), Asso. Professor and Head, Department of Swasthavritta and Yoga, Bhaisaheb Sawant Ayurved College, Sawantwadi, Maharashtra, India.
2. M.D.(Swasthavritta), Professor and Head, Department of Swasthavritta and Yoga, L.R.P.Ayurvedic Medical College and Hospital, Post Graduate Institute and Research Centre, Islampur, Maharashtra, India

*Corresponding Author: dr.rvpatil@rediffmail.com



ABSTRACT

Sciences of *Ayurveda* and *Yoga* have emerged since ancient time and both were developed and practiced in similar circumstances with similar objective in the same land. Today, *Yoga* has become more popular because of its potential to rejuvenate body-mind complex. According to ecological approach, disease is nothing but a mal-adjustment of human being to his environment. The disruption in environment brings about lifestyle disorders. The sedentary lifestyle of today's era leads to the non-communicable epidemic of overweight and *Sthaulya* (obesity). Overweight is the most hazardous factor found in modern society and is a complex disorder of the modern world. Obesity is emerged as the most prevalent sedentary lifestyle disorder in urban society. Excessive body weight is associated with various diseases particularly cardiovascular diseases, Type-2 Diabetes

Mellitus, obstructive sleep apnea, certain types of cancer, osteoarthritis etc. *Yoga* offers natural and effective lifestyle modification therapy without harmful side effects in overweight and obese persons through its some principals. Some effort should be done to control and manage obesity with proper diet, therapy of *sukshama vyayam techniques* (Loosening Exercises), *nadishodhana pranayama*, *Yogic shuddhikriya* (cleansing process) i.e. *Kapalbhati*, and positive thinking. It is an effective lifestyle intervention skill. Hence to prevent this smoldering problem of present era the *Yoga* offers the lifestyle modifying, time effective, free of cost, objective therapy in overweight and obesity.

Keywords: *Sthaulya*, Obesity, *Yogic shuddhikriya*, *Kapalbhati*, *sukshama vyayam techniques*, and *nadishodhana Pranayama*.

INTRODUCTION:

In modern era, human beings are more prone to develop various lifestyle disorders, due to defect in food habits and lifestyle. Obesity is one such life style disease. According to World Health Organization obesity is one of the most neglected public health problems in developed and developing countries. There has been an increase in the predominance of obesity in India particularly in urban population. The worldwide prevalence of obesity nearly tripled between 1975 to 2016.^[1] Now it is estimated that most of the world's population live in countries where overweight and obesity kills more people than underweight. By the year 2030 it is predicted that 1 in 5 women and 1 in 7 men will be living with obesity, equating to over 1 billion people globally.^[2] Regarding this, 2021 was a pivotal year for global obesity policy, following evidence showing that it is one of the leading risk factors for covid-19 death and disability. Covid-19 has brought to public attention that, the higher risk of ill health from infectious diseases associated with increased body weight. Reviews across the medical literature confirm that people living with overweight, and especially obesity, are at a higher risk of developing infections of various types, and to develop serious complications following infection. Obesity was found to be highly correlated with covid-19 associated mortality; with death rates ten times higher in countries where over 50% of the population are living with overweight ^[3]. As per world health organization records on 1st Jan 2022, the correlation between national death rate for covid-19 per 100,000 populations and national prevalence of overweight is highly significant. In the 70 countries where overweight affects fewer than 50% of the population, the cumulative death rate from covid-19 averages 31 per 100000, while in the 94 countries where over half the

population is overweight the death rate from covid-19 averages nearly four-fold higher, at 115 per 100000 deaths ^[4].

“Obesity” is an increasing lifestyle related disorder now a day. It has been estimated to affect 20-40 % of the adult and 10-20 % of children and adolescents in developed countries. Since year 1979 up to 2018, world health organization has conducted as much as 37 surveys to assess the severity of obesity in developing countries too. as of now, it has been established that 15.2 % of total female and 16.8% of total male population all across the world, have body mass index more than 25 kg/m², also the percentage of female and males was estimated to be 1.4 and 1.1 of the total population, that means, every 6th person is obese all around the world.^[5,6] Obesity is a medical condition in which excess body fat gets accumulated in the body. Obesity is most commonly caused by a combination of unnecessary intake of food, lack of physical movement, abnormalities in secretion of thyroid, pituitary glands. etc which regulate the metabolism of fat and lipids and various psychological factors like depression, stress. In the present era life is being more and more sedentary. Improper food habits and unhealthy lifestyle is causing metabolic disorders like obesity.

The non-communicable epidemic of abdominal obesity is found to be the pioneer of diabetes mellitus (type 2), hypertension, cardiac heart diseases, depression, impotency, infertility, osteoarthritis, respiratory problems, sleep apnea, as well as psychological problems. These diseases are very hard to be treated and the treatments like coronary angioplasty, artificial knee transplantation, hormonal therapy, lifelong anti-diabetic drugs etc. happen to be highly expensive which is not affordable to common man; also the mortality and morbidity are more in overweight person compared to others. Now a day the economic impact of

overweight and obesity is substantial irrespective of income level and geographic context.^[7] This difficulty has drawn my attention towards prevention and control of overweight and preventing complications of obesity. Though, modern system of medicine has their own therapeutic modalities in tackling obesity, but they are associated with many adverse effects. Considering this the global population is enthusiastically looking towards effective natural remedies.

Measures taken in many countries during 2020 and 2021 showed that “lockdown measures had a negative impact on the diets and lifestyles of children and adolescents, with a consequent increase in body weight and central fat accumulation.”^[8] Different studies have shown that the prevalence of overweight and obesity increased by 2% to 13% in different countries across the course of the pandemic.^[9,10] Furthermore, the numbers of hours of physical activity declined significantly, while the proportion of children reporting screen time of more than five hours daily increased from 15% to 47% along with an increase in food insecurity.^[11]

In *Ayurveda*, *Charaka* has described *sthaulya* (overweight and obesity) among the eight most unwanted diseases^[12] and *samtarpanajanita roga*. (Overnutritional).^[13] *Sthaulya* is considered as *samtarpanajanitaroga* due to excessive accumulation of *meda* (depot fat) in body. *Ayurveda* accurately explains etiology of excess fat deposition like *avyayama* (lack of physical activity), *divaswapna* (day sleep), *atimedha bhakshana* (excess intake of fat) lead to *Medovaha strotas* (the fat carrying channels) diseases which resembles with obesity.^[14,15] *Medadhatu* plays a major role in pathogenesis of obesity. *Sthoulya* is a term used in *Ayurveda* which can be correlated with obesity. As per *Ayurveda* it is a condition where, adipose tissue and muscle tissues are excessively accumulated. The buttocks,

abdomen and breast are movable and whose metabolism is impaired is called *Atisthoulya* (obese).^[16] Obesity is an abnormal accumulation of Body fat, usually 20% or more over an individual's ideal body weight or more of the standard weight for the person age, gender and height. Obesity is associated with increased risk of illness, disability, and death.

To undertake the management of overweight and obesity, *yogic* ways of lifestyle modification offers the free of cost, viable, easy to do, time effective and lifestyle modification objectless therapy of *kapalbhati* through *shat-shuddhikriyas* (purifying procedure), *nadishodhana pranayama* and *sukshama vyayam techniques* or warm up exercises (loosening exercises).^[17,18] Hence to prevent this smoldering problem of present era the “sciences of life” i.e. *yoga* offers the lifestyle modifying, objective therapy through its basic principles.

Depending on weight, overweight and obesity is classified as follow:

Mild to moderate: 10-20% above desirable weight.

Moderate to severe: 20-30% above desirable weight.

Severe: 30% above the desirable weight.

Yogic concept of obesity:

The word “*yoga*” is derived from ‘*yuj*’ which means unite or join or to bring together. The union of supreme consciousness with individual consciousness is known as *yoga*. According to *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, *yoga* is defined as to the cessation or stilling of the *vrttis* (fluctuations) of the *chitta* (mind). It is the practice of calming the mental modifications to achieve a state of pure consciousness and self-realization.^[19]

Pathogenesis of disease in yoga:

As per *yoga shastra*, three causes for occurrence of disease:

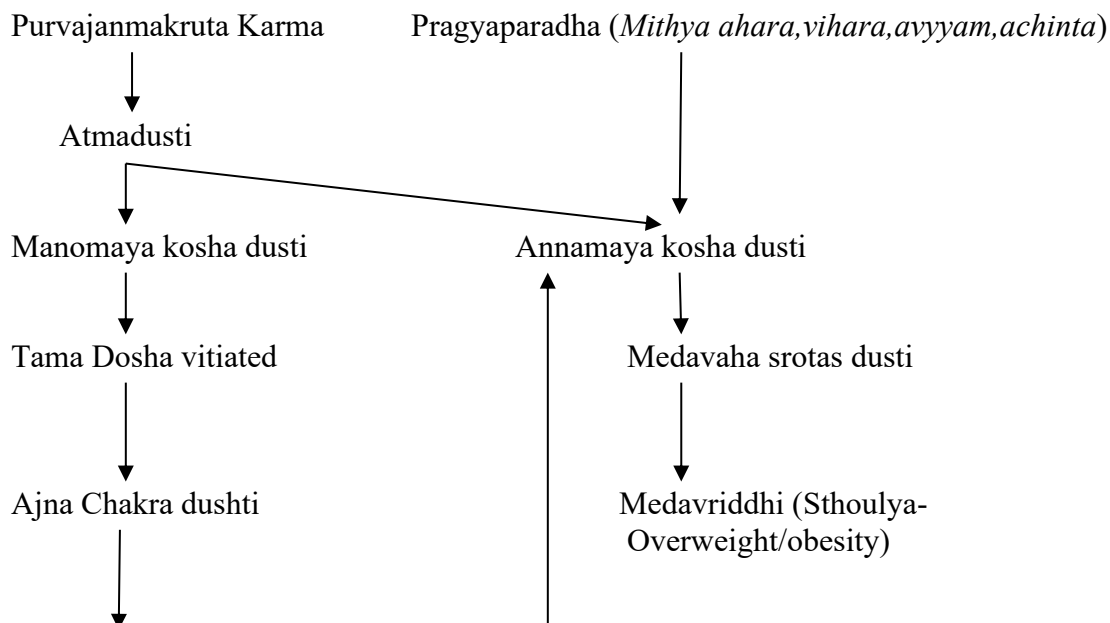
1. *Purva janma vritti* (deeds of previous birth)
2. *Manasika karma* (psychological measures)
3. *Sharirika karma* (physical measures)

The pathogenesis of disease in yoga is viewed through a holistic, psychosomatic lens, emphasizing that illnesses arise from imbalances in the mind-body connection, often starting in the mental or energy layers before manifesting physically. This perspective, largely derived from *Patanjali Yoga Sutra*, *Yoga Vashishtha*, and *Hathyog Pradipika* identifies mental disturbances, false perceptions, and ignorance as the root causes of *Dukha* (suffering) and *Vyadhi* (disease).^[20,21]

The five *Kleshas* (Afflictions) are the root causes of all mental and physical suffering, including *Avidya* (ignorance), *Asmi ta* (ego), *Raga* (desire), *Dwesha* (aversion), and *Abhinivesha* (fear of death).^[22] Disease begins as *Adhi* (mental/emotional tension) at the *Manomaya Kosha* (mental sheath), if not managed, this mental tension causes *Vyadhi* (physical illness). Disease can be understood as a blockage or imbalance in one or more of the five *Koshas* (sheaths),

ranging from the physical body to the subtle mental and spiritual bodies.^[23] Patanjali identifies nine obstacles that hinder well-being, including *Vyadhi* (physical illness) and *Alasya* (lethargy).^[24] Hatha Yoga views disease as an imbalance between the *Ida* (mental/cooling) and *Pingala* (body/heating) nadis, resulting in an improper flow of *Prana* (life force).^[25] Mental toxins (negative emotions) and physical toxins (due to bad diet/lifestyle) block the free flow of energy, causing further mental and physical diseases. Chronic stress causes an overactive Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal axis, leading to constant high levels of cortisol, which causes inflammation and suppressed immune function such person becomes more vulnerable to different infection that causes diseases. Yogic science strictly believes in process of rebirth and *Purva janma krita karma*.^[26] In *Ayurveda* as well as in *Yoga* mentioned that *Mithya ahara* (improper dietary habits) *Vegadharana* (suppression of natural urges), and sedentary lifestyle all lead to accumulation of excessive fat tissue and progression of disease like obesity.^[27,28]

Flow chart



Yogic Approach to Healing

Yoga aims to decrease the "allostatic load" (the wear and tear on the body from chronic stress) by restoring autonomic balance through parasympathetic activation (vagal stimulation). Regular practice helps manage diseases by regulating the psychosomatic mechanisms, reducing cortisol, and increasing GABA levels, which improves autonomic function and decreases inflammation. Yogic practices of *sukshama vyayam techniques* (Loosening Exercises), *nadishodhana pranayama*, *Yogic shuddhikriya* (cleansing process) i.e. *Kapalbhati*, are used to remove blockages in the nadis, reduce the "fight or flight" response, and improve physical functioning, thus reducing the risk of lifestyle-related ailments.

Yogic *Shatkarma*, or six cleansing techniques, are essential purification practices in Hatha Yoga designed to detoxify the body (removing *ama*), balance the three doshas (*Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha*), *medasleshmahara* (remove excess fat and mucus from the body) and enhance physical and mental vitality. Specially *Kapalbhati* described as *kaphadosha vishoshi* (absorb or dry out excess mucus, phlegm). By cleansing the internal organs and removing gross impurities, they prepare the body and mind for deeper yoga practices like *Pranayama* and *meditation*.^[29,30]

Importance of Mitahara (balanced diet) in Yoga and Ayurveda:

In classical texts, the importance of balanced diet is clearly mentioned. This is the quantity sufficient to one's needs. Due to importance, *Mitahara* is described prior to starting yogic procedures in *Gheranda samhita*, *Hathyog Pradipika* and *Shiva*

Samhita.^[1] For proper digestion of food, it should be consumed in appropriate quantity as described in *Trividh kukshiya adhyaya* in *Ayurveda* and *Mitahara* in *Hath yoga Pradipika*.^[31,32,33] In Ayurveda, sages also describe wholesome and unwholesome diet in overweight person. In obesity one should avoid *guru ahara* (heavy food), *snigdha ahara* (unctuous food), *madhura ahara* (sweet food), *sheeta ahara* (cold food), *navanna* (fresh grains), *navamaddya* (fresh alcoholic preparation), *payavikara* (milk and milk preparation), *guda vikara* (jiggery preparation), *masha* (black gram), *godhuma* (wheat) etc.^[34]

Mode of action of yoga on overweight and obesity:

A) Prayer: It plays a vital role for relaxation of mind. Predominance of Alpha rhythm is present during prayer and its gives general effects all over the body. It's useful in physical, mental and spiritual aspects. It gives anxiolytic and stress relieves effects to the body.^[35]

B) Sukshama vyayam techniques (loosing exercise):

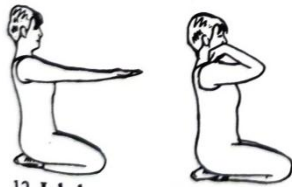
Sukshma vyayama was performed on a regular basis before starting of any asana. It includes stretching of various muscles of our body, rotation of big and small joints and bending of different body parts. It reduces muscle tension and joint stiffness, increases blood circulation all over the body and gives warming up effect. *Sukshama vyayam techniques* generate heat rather than thermal axis of the body. Its increases basal metabolic rate and gives massage to the major groups of muscles. It reduces fat in all parts of the body.^[36] As it combines the body, breathing, mind and devotion it is a holistic therapy for prevention and treatment of obesity.

Method Of Performing Sukshama Vyayam Techniques (Warm Up Exercise; Loosening Exercise)-In Sitting Position- [37,38]

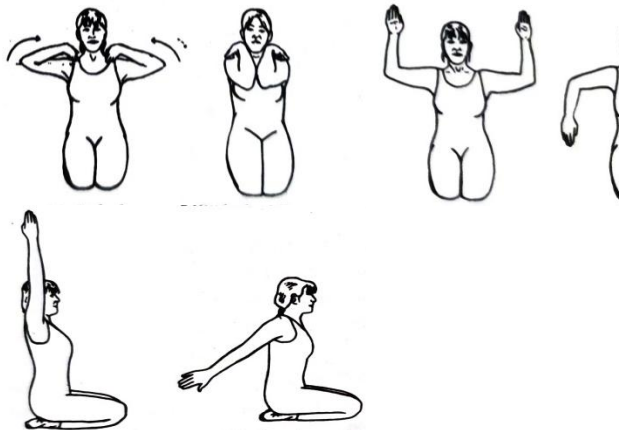
- Wrist Joint Movement (Flexion-Extension, Radial-Ulnar Deviation, Rotation)



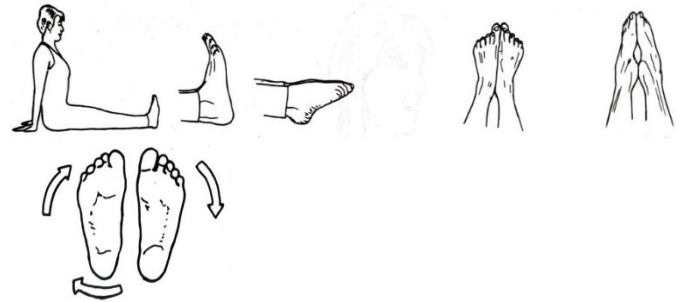
- Elbow Joint Loosening Exercise- (Extension-Flexion) –



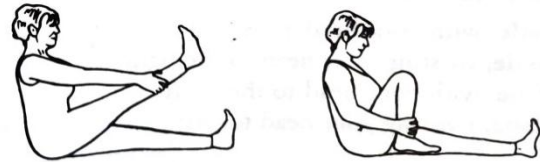
- Shoulder Joint Movement (Flexion-Extension, Abduction-Adduction, External And Internal Rotation)



- Ankle Joint Movements (Plantar Flexion-Dorsiflexion, Eversion-Inversion, Rotation Clock And Anticlockwise.



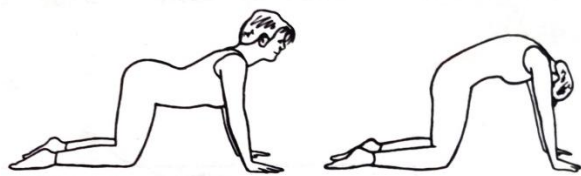
- Knee Joint Movements, (Flexion-Extension,)



- Hip Joint Movement (Extension-Flexion, External And Internal Rotation, Abduction-Adduction.



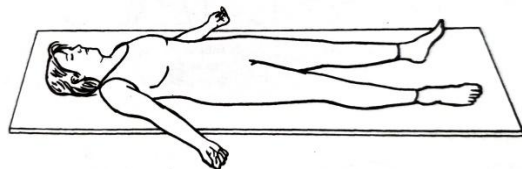
- Spine (Extension-Flexion-Backward And Forward Bend) ,Spine –Lateral Flexion, Rotation



- Neck Movement - Extension-Flexion, Lateral Flexion, Lateral Rotation.



- Relaxation And Corpse Pose (Shavasana)..



- Each warm up exercise performs daily on empty stomach.

Method of performing Sukshamavyayam Techniques (Warm up exercise; Loosening exercise)-In standing position-.^[39,40]

- Neck Rotation Clock And Anti-Clockwise
- Eyeball Rotation Clock And Anti-Clockwise
- Shoulder Joint Forward And Backward Rotation
- Wrist Joint Clock And Anticlockwise Rotation
- Chest Twisting Towards Right And Left Side
- Hip Joint Rotation Clock And Anticlockwise

- Knee Joint Rotation Clock And Anticlockwise

- Ankle Joint Rotation Clock And Anticlockwise

Each warm up exercise performs daily on empty stomach.

C) *Nadishodhana (Anuloma-viloma) pranayama-* (Alternate Nostril Breathing)-

Technique: Sit comfortably in a cross-legged position (*Sukhasana*) with your spine straight. Use your right hand in *Nasika Mudra* (fold index and middle fingers). Close the right nostril with the thumb, inhale through the left, close the left nostril, with your ring finger and exhale through the right. Then, inhale through the right and exhale through the left to complete one round.^[41] Practice *Nadishodhana pranayama* early in the morning for 15–20 minutes with empty stomach.

Alternate breathing through the left and right nostrils is the procedure of *Nadishodhana pranayama*. The left nostril is known as *Ida nadi* or *Chandra nadi*, it has a cooling effect on the body. It represents energy conservations aspects of *Pranic* functions. The right nostril is having catabolic heating and destructive effect on the body. It is known as *Pingala nadi* or *Surya nadi*. *Anuloma viloma* pranayama is purify the *Nadi* (channels), removes obstruction so *prana* gets proper flow within the *nadi*. It also removes *kapha dosa*. This procedure is useful for weight reduction. *Nadishodhana Pranayama* is a balancing and purifying breath technique that, primarily known for calming the mind, can assist in managing weight by reducing stress, improving metabolic function, and decreasing the urge for emotional or compulsive eating habits. *Nadi Shodhana* activates the parasympathetic nervous system, lowering stress and potential stress-induced overeating. It works by balancing the sympathetic and

parasympathetic nervous systems, helping to eliminate excess *Kapha* (mucus/fat) and create a sense of lightness in the body, bringing the body and mind into balance. It enhances oxygenation and stimulates metabolic processes that help in weight management. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* stated that "leanness of the body" is a physical sign of purified *nadis*.^[42]

D) Yogic shuddhikriya- Shatkarma (cleansing process) –

In yogic science, Shatkarma (*Shatkriya*) refers to the six classical purification techniques which were designed to detoxify the body and balance the three *doshas* (*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*). These practices are traditionally considered foundational and are ideally performed before progressing to *Asana* (postures) and *Pranayama* (breathing). *Kapalbhati* is one of these *Shatkarma* (purification technique) often called the "Skull Shining Breath".^[43,44] It is defined by rhythmic, forceful exhalations that act as a "bellows" to cleanse the respiratory and digestive systems. *Kapalbhati* means rapid breathing technique in which exhalations are active and forceful while inhalations are effortless and passive. It purifies the frontal area of the brain, improves metabolism, and reduces abdominal fat.

Method of performing *Kapalbhati*:-

1) Sit in comfortable *asana* (pose), preferably as *Padmasana* (lotus pose) or *Sukhasana* (comfort pose) with your spine erect and shoulders relaxed. Rest your hands on your knees in *gyan mudra* (thumb and index finger touching) or with palms facing upward. Take a deep, calming breath in through both nostrils to center yourself.

2) At the time of *rechaka* (expiration) give sudden jerk, do active forceful expiration, followed by passive effortless *puraka*

(inspiration), counted as one *aavartane* (stroke).^[45]

3) Initially 3-4 repetitions of 10-20 strokes are to be performed in each setting, without holding breath, and then 20 to 30 strokes are gradually increased.

4) Then perform these *Kapalbhati* strokes daily at morning for 15 minutes on empty stomach.

Shatkarmas are specifically indicated in ancient yogic texts for individuals with excessive *Medo dhatu* (fat) to improve overall metabolism before starting advanced yoga. During *Kapalbhati* the respiration becomes shallow. The tidal volume decreases and breathing rate is increased. Oxygen consumption is greater than before due to breathing pattern. Forceful contraction and relaxation of abdominal muscle will be useful to reduce fat of abdominal region. According to *Gheranda samhita* and *Hathayoga Paradipika Kapalbhati* reduces *Kaphadosha*.

Techniques like *Kapalbhati* specifically target abdominal fat through vigorous muscular activity. The "bellows" action of the abdomen works on visceral fat, helping to reduce waist and hip circumference. The forceful abdominal contractions stimulate receptors that signal the brain to increase hormonal and metabolic activity. Regular practice has been shown to significantly increase basal metabolic rate and decrease body fat percentage. By cleansing the "pipes" of the body (alimentary canal and nasal passages), *Kapalbhati* improve toxin removal, nutrient absorption and hormonal regulation, supporting sustainable weight management. The rapid pumping provides a deep internal massage to organs like the liver, pancreas, and gastrointestinal tract, by stimulating the pancreas through physical massage, *Kapalbhati* helps to regulate blood sugar and

insulin sensitivity, reducing the body's tendency to store fat.

Conclusion:

Sedentary lifestyle, stress and faulty dietary habits are the most important causative factors in pathogenesis of overweight and obesity. It poses a great threat to the general health of an individual. Several review of literature shows the impact of yoga on obesity. This review highlights the vital role of yoga specially *kapalbhati shuddhikriya*, *Sukshama Vyayam techniques* and *nadishodhana pranayama* in prevention of obesity and promotion of health.

Yoga also plays an important role to maintain the physical health as well as mental health.

So

regular practice of yoga in daily life is useful for prevention of various diseases and gives us

a healthy lifestyle.

Yoga is all about positive modification of lifestyle. So these yogic interventions are best suited for all sections of obese patients, be they prosperous or poor. These modifications were perfect choice for poor as well as middle income group as one has to spend not a single penny for practicing it. These interventions were objectless, non-pharmacological, very easy to adopt after a bit counseling irrespective of season and surrounding. *Yoga* is a technique to bring a balanced approach in our life. It helps to control over unnecessary patterns of sedentary lifestyle and diet. Various yogic procedures may stimulate the specific organs, endocrine glands to regulate the metabolic functions. This review article highlights their specific effects in the management of obesity.

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