

REVIEW ARTICLE

Obesity (*Sthaulya*) Prevention with Yoga – A Literary Review

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received on: 16-02-2025

Accepted on: 17-03-2025

Published on: 31-03-2025

Key words:

Ayurvedic,
Dhatu,
Lifestyle disorder,
Meda,
Obesity,
Sthaulya

ABSTRACT

Due to the rapid modernization in the present era, sedentary lifestyle, and abundance of nutrition, non-communicable diseases have increased tremendously and are now becoming the chief cause of obesity all over the world. Obesity is a lifestyle disorder affecting both developing and developed countries. Obesity (*Sthaulya*) is vastly increasing due to the changes in the *Aahara*, *Vihara*, and *Manasikaavastha* of mankind. Obesity is a disorder characterized by increased body weight and excessive fat deposition in the body. The root causes, such as overconsumption of calories and reduced physical activity, lead to serious health complications such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and arthritis. This reduces the average life span and decreases the quality of life. In *Ayurveda*, *Sthaulya* (obesity) is a condition where aggravation of *Doshas* will cause improper transformation of *saar bhaga* of *aahara*, resulting in more formation of *Meda Dhatu* and inappropriate nourishment of other *Dhatus* of the body. This article is to explore the impact of the *Ayurvedic* approach on obesity. To find out the causative factors behind obesity and available *Ayurvedic Chikitsa* with the help of *Yoga*. Embracing a balanced lifestyle, staying physically active, and managing emotional stress are key factors in effectively addressing and preventing obesity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Obesity has become a global health concern, increasing the risk of various diseases such as diabetes, heart and joint disorders. While diet and exercise play a crucial role in weight management, *Yoga* provides a holistic approach that not only helps in maintaining weight but also improves mental well-being and overall health. How *Yoga* Helps in Obesity Prevention:- *Yoga* is not just stretching and making the body flexible but also enhancing metabolism, strengthening muscles, improving digestion, and reducing stress, which are all essential for maintaining health. Unlike heavy workouts, *Yoga* is gentle on the body and can be practiced by people of all fitness levels.^[1] Worldwide obesity prevalence has nearly doubled between 1990 and 2022. About 16% of the adult and elderly population were obese in 2022, which is nearly 890 million. Obesity is physiologically caused by an imbalance between food consumption and energy expenditure, leading to excessive accumulation of fat in the form of adipose tissue. There is an increase in the number and enlargement of adipose cells. Obesity

is one of the metabolic disorders having high mortality and morbidity rates.^[2] It plays the role of a powerful amplifier for metabolic syndrome. In *Ayurveda*, obesity has been described as *Sthoulya* – *Medoroga* in *Santarpanajnya Vikara*. In a balanced State, *Kapha* (one of the three *Dosha*) gives nourishment to the tissues. However, when *kapha* aggravates it accumulates in *Srotas* (channels), causing their blockage. Pathogenesis of *Sthoulya* states that increased *Meda Dhatu* (one of the seven tissues) blocks the *Medovaha Srotas* (fat-carrying channels) and obstructs *Vata Marga* (channels to carry nourishment). *Vata* activates *Jatharagni* (digestive fire), which increases the appetite and digestion of the patient. In obesity, the BMR (Basal Metabolic rate) is very low, as the *Dhatvagni* is stagnant at the level of *Meda* (fat tissue). The *Meda Dhatvagni Mandya* (improper fat metabolism) results in abnormal *Upachaya* (nourishment) of *Meda Dhatu*.^[3]

Some common causes include:-

- (A) Unhealthy Diet: High-calorie, processed and sugary food contribute to weight gain
- (B) Lack of Physical Activity: Sedentary lifestyles, no walking, no exercise, no *yoga pranayama* leading to slow metabolism
- (C) Hormonal Imbalance: Conditions such as hypothyroidism or polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) can lead to obesity

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- (D) Stress and Emotional: High-stress levels increase cortisol, which triggers cravings for unhealthy food
- (E) Genetics: Family history and genetic factors can predispose to obesity
- (F) Lack of Sleep: Poor sleep patterns disrupt metabolism and lead to weight gain.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Yoga addresses many of these causes by promoting an active lifestyle, reducing stress, balancing hormones, and improving digestion.

2.1. *Atisthula Purusha Lakshna Evum Nidana Lakshna* (symptoms)

1. Reduction in lifespan
2. Limitation of body movements (hampered due to loose, tender, and heavy fats)
3. Difficulty in sexual intercourse and impotence (due to less quantity of semen produced and obstruction of the semen channels by *Meda Dhatu*)
4. Debility – weakness (due to *Dhatu* imbalance)
5. Bad odor from the body without sweating
6. Excessive sweating (since *Meda Dhatu* and *Kapha* are vitiated)
7. Excessive hunger
8. Excessive thirst (due to raised digestive fire and *Vata* in the body).

2.2. *Nidana* (causative factors)^[4]

1. Eating in large quantities
2. Consuming heavy, sweet, sour, and sour foods
3. Not exercising
4. Not having sexual intercourse
5. Sleeping on the day
6. Always being happy
7. Never being afflicted by mental disorders such as worry and grief
8. Genetics of the parents leads to gradual obesity.

3. YOGA HELPS IN OBESITY PREVENTION^[5,6]

3.1. Boosts Metabolism

Yoga improves digestion and stimulates endocrine glands such as the thyroid, which plays a role in regulating metabolism. This helps the body burn calories more efficiently.

3.2. Reduces Stress and Emotional Eating

Yoga incorporates deep breathing and meditation, which lower cortisol levels and reduce emotional eating habits caused by stress or anxiety.

3.3. Improves Digestion

Certain *yoga* poses massage abdominal organs, regulate bowel movement, and prevent bloating – factors that contribute to weight management.

3.4. Strengthen Muscles and Tones the Body

While *Yoga* is not as intense as weight training, it strengthens muscles, improves flexibility, and tones the body, making it an effective form of exercise.

3.5. Enhances Mindful Eating

Regular *yoga* practice encourages mindfulness, helping individuals become more aware of hunger, portion control, and healthier food choices.

3.6. Best *Yoga Asanas* for Obesity Prevention

3.6.1. *Surya Namaskar* (sun salutation)

The best full-body *Yoga* exercise, *Surya Namaskar*, is a sequence of 12 poses performed in a flowing manner. It engages the entire body, increases heart rate, and helps burn calories effectively. If not just for weight loss, the *Surya Namaskara* is a widely practiced *yoga asana* that is the right way to start a day. Just practicing *Surya Namaskara* can help improve your health in a speedy and secure manner. The *Surya Namaskara* or sun salutation not only warms up the muscles and facilitates better blood circulation but also stretches and tones most of the major muscles, trims, and tones the waist and arms, stimulates the digestive system, and balances the metabolism.^[7] Different *asanas* that involve completing a cycle of *Surya Namaskara* also individually hold good and, when practiced on their own, also yield great results. *Surya Namaskar* is a packaged effort to achieve good health and the best way to lose weight. Performing several rounds of *Surya Namaskar* can help you burn calories, which is essential for weight loss. The exact calorie burn varies depending on factors such as your body weight, the intensity of your practice, and the number of rounds you do.

3.6.2. *Naukasana* (boat pose)

Strengthens the core The boat pose engages the abdominal muscles and tones the stomach area, making it the perfect *Asana* for *Yoga* for the obesity management plan.

3.6.3. *Bhujangasana* (cobra pose)

It stimulates digestion, strengthens the core and reduces belly fat, making it a good *asana* for *yoga* for the obesity management plan. This *Asana* is described in *Gheranda Samhita*. *Bhujanga* means Kobra. The final position of this *Asana* resembles the hooded snake. Hence, it is called *Bhujangasana*. It produces extension of the spinal cord, expands the chest, and strengthens chest muscles. The vital capacity of the lung is increased by the practice of this *Asana* regularly. It improves digestion and respiration, reduces the size of the protruding belly, and shapes up the abdomen.^[8]

3.6.4. *Trikonasana* (triangle pose)

The etymology comes from the *Sanskrit* word *Trikona*, meaning three corners, a triangle. The *Trikonasana* helps to improve digestion as well as reduces the fat deposited in the belly and waist and also improves balance and concentration. This speeds up metabolism, stimulates blood circulation, and helps fight obesity. The lateral motion of this *Asana* helps you burn more fat from the waist and abdominal region while also strengthening the muscles in the thighs and hamstrings. This *Asana* has also come through tradition.^[9] It has been described widely in modern *Yoga* texts. We assume a triangular form through this practice; hence, it is called *Trikonasana*. Its practice makes the spine flexible and hence is useful in back pain. It reduces the stiffness of the hip joint and makes it flexible. It strengthens the muscles of the arms and improves stone and tolerance.

3.6.5. *Utkatasana* (chair pose)

Strengthens legs and core *Utkatasana* or the chair pose is an *asana* aimed at supporting the balance of the body, but when additionally twisted, it becomes *Parivritta*. The *Parivritta Utkatasana* is similar to a squat, an exercise common in modern and Western practices. This *Asana* effectively works on toning the abdominal muscles and strengthening the quads and glutes by increasing the intensity of the pressure this posture provides. The *Asana* also improves the lymph system and the digestive system.^[10]

3.6.6. Virabhadrasana (warrior pose)

The warrior pose is broken down into several parts and pieces that combine overall efforts to tone your thighs, shoulders, and arms while simultaneously improving your focus. A few minutes of *Virabhadrasana* can fetch you great results and tighter quads. The warrior pose is designed to improve your balance along with toning your back end, legs, and arms. In addition, *Virabhadrasana yoga asana* cuts your tummy and gives you a flat belly if you pick up poses that also attack your abdominal muscles while you hold the position.^[11]

3.6.7. Dhanurasana (bow pose)

Dhanush or *Dhanur* is the description of how one's body is structured in this *Asana*. By placing oneself on the ground flat on their abdomen, the hands and legs are to be connected from the back.^[12] This helps massage the abdominal organs, improves digestion, strengthens the thighs, chest, and back, and gives one the perfect way to achieve a flat belly. It stretches your whole body and strengthens and tones your muscles with improved blood circulation.^[13]

4. ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR OBESITY PREVENTION

Practicing *Yoga* in a daily routine of at least for 30–45 min can significantly help in losing weight. Follow a balanced diet, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Avoid processed food, sugar, and excessive fats; drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.^[14] Manage stress by meditation and deep breathing (*Pranayama*).^[15] Get enough sleep, about 7–8 h of quality, to regulate metabolism and prevent weight gain. Stay active throughout the day in addition to *Yoga*, and incorporate walking, stretching, and physical activity into your daily routine.^[16]

5. CONCLUSION

Obesity prevention is a lifelong commitment that requires a combination of healthy eating, regular exercise, and mental well-being. *Yoga*, particularly *Surya Namaskar* and other *asanas*, provides an effective, natural, and sustainable way to prevent obesity while enhancing flexibility, strength, and mindfulness. By incorporating *yoga* into your daily lifestyle, you can achieve physical fitness, mental clarity, and overall well-being, ensuring long-term health and vitality. Start your *yoga* journey today and embrace a healthier, happier life.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

7. AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All the authors contributed equally to the design and execution of the article.

8. FUNDING

Nil.

9. ETHICAL APPROVALS

This study does not require ethical clearance as it is a review study.

10. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

11. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript and all data are available for only review purposes from principal investigators.

12. PUBLISHERS NOTE

This journal remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published institutional affiliation.

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How to cite this article:

Mishra A, Bhambu SK, Rao A. Obesity (*Sthaulya*) Prevention with Yoga – A Literary Review. *IRJAY*. [online] 2025;8(3):47-49.

Available from: <https://irjay.com>

DOI link- <https://doi.org/10.48165/IRJAY.2025.80307>