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Role of *Virechan Therapy* (Purgation with Herbs) in Management of Obesity

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ABSTRACT

Obesity is described as a metabolic disorder. An individual is generally considered obese when he or she is 10 per cent or more above the ideal weight for the sex, age and height. The fact that few people who eat more are thin, while those who eat less are obese, is due to difference in basal metabolic rate and difference in amount of energy needed to carry out a given work. Obesity has adverse effects on both mortality and morbidity. Treating obesity is considered as a challenging job in any system of medicine. In *ayurveda* it is explained as *sthoulya*, which lead to problem at the level of *meda* (fat). This excess fat cause increase of digestive fire as a result the person eats more and excessive fat gets accumulated in the body. For obese person *ayurveda* explains different *shodhana* procedures (detoxification process). *Virechan* (therapeutic purgation) is one of the important *shodhana* procedure. Herbs used for *virechana karma* expels out the toxins in the body by purgation. *Virechan* reduces the level of lipids in the body in two ways-

1. By Reducing the synthesis of excess lipids
2. By Increasing the excretion of excessively produced lipids

Hence, method for the elimination of the excess lipid is achieved by these two ways by performing *virchana karma* and this procedure can be used in various metabolic disorders especially in context to obesity.

KEYWORDS

Obesity, *meda* (Fat), *Virechan*, *Purgation*, *Sthoulya*, *Ayurveda*, *Shodhana*



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INTRODUCTION

Obesity is a state in which there is an abnormally great amount of neutral fat in the storage depots of body¹. It has been described as a metabolic disorder². An individual is generally considered obese when he or she is 10 per cent or more above the ideal weight for the sex, age and height³. The fact that fat is being deposited without a corresponding decrease in other tissues indicates that more calories are being ingested than converted into heat and lost as organic compounds in the urine, faeces & breath is considered as “the caloric balance”⁴. Obesity is most commonly caused by a combination of excessive food intake, lack of physical activity and genetic susceptibility. It is also caused by genes, endocrine disorders, medications or mental illness⁵. The fact that few people who eat more are thin, while those who eat less are obese, is due to difference in basal metabolic rate and difference in amount of energy needed to carry out a given work. Obesity has got severe effect on the health of an individual such as general lassitude, dyspnoea on exertion, pain in knee and lumbar spine, oedema of ankles, infection of skin, sometimes varicose veins⁶.

Ayurveda explains obesity under the term *atisthoulya* which comes under 8 categories of people who are socially unfit (*ashtau*

nindita) and it is a *santarpanottha vyadhi* and explains it as increase of fat tissue (*medo dhatu*)⁷. *Ayurveda* opines that lack of exercise, sleeping in day time, intake of food articles which aggravates *kapha dosha*, lead to the formation of *annarasaw* which results in accumulation of *sneha* (oiliness) and fat in the body. The symptoms explained by *acharya charak* in obese person are excessive accumulation of muscles and fat in the body leading to sagging butts, abdomen and breast⁸. It leads to low energy level. In obesity the *medo dhatu shrotas* are blocked by fat tissue and the successive *dhatu*s do not get nourishment and fails to develop properly which results in complications. Treatment of *sthoulya* (obesity) as per principle of *ayurveda* can be planned considering triad of *dosha* (i.e. *vata, pitta, kapha*), *bala* (physical strength) and *dhatu* (structural entities). Here, *shodhana* therapy can play an important role in management of such type of diseases. It has been considered in the context of obesity that “*karshya meva varam sthoulyam*” means that being lean is better than being obese.

ROLE OF VIRECHAN KARMA IN OBESITY

Virechankarma (medicated purgation)

It is a process of detoxification (*shodhana karma*) of body with the help of herbs. It



removes the morbid *doshas* (toxins) which are accumulated in the body channels and *dhatu*s. These toxins are responsible for the formation of improper *dhatu* leading to different types of diseases. *Dhatu* are the structural entities (7 in numbers) present in the body which are responsible for proper growth of body. *Virechan* is one among the five *karmas* explained under *panchakarma*. It includes pre-operative and post-operative procedure which are most important to be taken care of while planning *virechan karma*. In this procedure therapeutic purgation is performed in the patient with the help of certain herbs.

Herbs and compounds used for *virechan* therapy

There are many herbs which are described in *ayurvedic* classics that are used for the process of *virechana*. These are to be used on the basis of digestive capacity (*kostha*) of the patients. Important among them are:

Trivrit (*Operculina turpenthum*)

Kutki (*Picrorhiza kurroa*)

Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*)

Eranda (*Ricinus communis*)

Snuhi (*Euphorbia neriifolia*)

Amlatas (*Cassia fistula*)

Trivrit avleha

Avipattikar churna

Abhyadi modak

Ichabhedi ras

Ghandharva hastadi kashaya

***Virechan kala* (time of medication for *virechan*)**

Ayurvedic texts have mentioned proper timings (*kala*) for giving the *virechan aushadhi*. *Acharya Charak* says: “*kapha kale gate*” means after passing of the *kapha dosha kala* i.e around 9-11 am is considered best for the *virechan karma*.

Effect of *virechan* on obesity

As *atisthoulya* (obesity) is a *santarpanottha vyadhi* (hypernourishment) its line of treatment is *aptarpana* (hyponourishment) and *langhana* (fasting) which can be achieved by *shodhana* and *shaman*⁹. *Shodhana* like *virechan* (therapeutic purgation) is a standard approach for such patients *asayurveda* explains it as a principal therapy for metabolic disorders.

It is predominantly *rasaja vikara* (disease of nutrient fluid tissue) as per *shusruta&charak* states it is a *medoja vikara* (disease of fat and lipids). Here *Agni* is disturbed means the metabolism is altered. Hence the *agni at rasa* and *medo dhatu* level needs to be corrected. Taking the medicines up to cellular level is important for breaking the pathogenesis of the disease and this task is done by ghee, as cell membrane is made up of phospholipids which only provide passage to lipids and lipid soluble substances. Its bioavailability (drug carrying capacity) is much more than other *fats*. It acts as a good solvent for many



metabolic waste products. The purpose of administration of large amount of Ghee before the *virechan* procedure is to avoid it from undergoing digestion and remain unassimilated or free flowing, so that it may dissolve waste products and toxins in itself. After proper *Snehana*(oleation) all the cells of body become completely saturated with fats. Then this fat comes out of cell to extra cellular fluid along with toxins by osmosis. Thus, fat and liquefied toxins brought from tissues, lead to the increased level of fatty acids in the blood resulting in high plasma volume. To maintain the equilibrium of normal plasma level the extra amount of liquid reaches the alimentary canal through diffusion and osmosis for excretion.

After proper oleation the exposure of steam through sudation increases the temperature which melts the fatty acid chains of phospholipid bilayer present in oil and thus brings more movement. This increases the permeability of cell membrane and facilitates absorption and excretion. When the wastes and toxins reach the alimentary canal, they are eliminated forcefully by the action of purgative drugs in the form of *virechan* therapy.

Virechan reduces the level of lipids in the body in two ways-

1. By reducing the synthesis of excess lipids -

It clears microcirculatory channels, so that circulation of blood and metabolites improves. In turn, the function of liver improves. The process of *virechan* corrects process of absorption in the gut. It relieves the extra load or burden of metabolism on liver thus reducing the excess production of lipids by the liver.

2. By increasing the excretion of excessively produced lipids -

Virechan as purgation causes excessive excretion of digestive enzymes, digestive juices which collectively called *pitta* in *ayurveda*. The duodenum is the place where bile duct and pancreatic ducts open and is responsible for carrying out major digestive processes. The major pathway of excretion of excess cholesterol from the body is usually by conversion to bile acids excreted in faeces as bile salts and *virechan* increases this excretion. The presence of fatty acids in duodenum is a stimulus for secretion of cholecystokinin hormone which is responsible for contraction of gall bladder and expulsion of bile. Here its stimulation is caused by the fatty acids of the ghee taken prior to *virechan* therapy. Cholecystokinin thus released, stimulates the gall bladder to contract and release the stored bile into the intestine. This bile is then excreted along with the stool by the irritant action of the purgative drugs. This cycle commences from the first day of *snehapana* (oral intake



of fat) till the completion of the therapy, i.e. *virechan*. In researches, it is found when faecal bile acid excretion is increased and gall bladder volume is reduced, the reduction in serum cholesterol and LDL is observed which ultimately reduces the fatty deposits of body. So, *virechan* procedure by increasing bile acid excretion reduces the amount of lipids present in blood, which is a major cause of obese. Thus the whole *virechan* procedure breaks the pathology by two ways – first by correction of deranged lipid metabolism and secondly by increasing the excretion of lipids through bile salts thus reducing the plasma overload.

CONCLUSION

Virechan therapy is considered best treatment module described in *ayurveda* which shows its action by correcting the vitiated state of the whole digestion process and controls mal-production of lipids that are not beneficial to the body, and by increasing the excretion of bile (Pitta) increases excretion of the excess formed lipids along with bile. Hence, it controls the fat and is helpful in obese person. Thus *virechan karma* (purgation procedure) can prove a real breakthrough in the coming times for the safe and persistent treatment of obesity. Various researches have proved

that *virechan karma* can play a pivot role in lowering the lipid levels thereby proving a cost effective and safe treatment module in management of metabolic disorder like obesity. It acts at the level of *meda dhatu* so as to have a qualitative production of *dhatu* which is considered as a healthy sign in an individual.



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