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Management of obesity through *Langhana* and naturopathic fasting: A review

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Abstract

Obesity, known as *Sthaulya* in Ayurveda, is a major global health concern associated with metabolic, cardiovascular, and psychological comorbidities. Modern medicine often addresses obesity symptomatically, while Ayurveda and Naturopathy focus on the root cause through holistic detoxification, digestive correction, and lifestyle harmonization. This review explores the classical Ayurvedic concept of *Langhana*—a therapeutic lightening method—and its resonance with naturopathic fasting, both aimed at balancing *Kapha Doṣa*, enhancing *Agni* (digestive fire), and mobilizing *Meda Dhātu* (fat tissue). Clinical studies, classical references, and modern physiological explanations support the synergistic efficacy of these ancient techniques. The paper highlights the therapeutic mechanism, clinical protocols, and integration potential of *Langhana* and naturopathic fasting in sustainable obesity management.

Keywords: *Sthaulya*, *Langhana*, Naturopathic fasting, *Kapha Doṣa*, *Agni*, Ayurveda, Detox

Introduction

Obesity, known in Ayurveda as *Sthaulya*, is a globally prevalent metabolic disorder characterized by excessive accumulation of *Meda Dhātu* (adipose tissue) that results in functional and structural impairments of the body. The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified obesity as one of the leading preventable causes of death worldwide, contributing significantly to non-communicable diseases such as type 2 diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, osteoarthritis, and certain forms of cancer. Despite advances in modern medicine, the sustainable management of obesity remains elusive, as most conventional approaches focus on caloric restriction, pharmacological interventions, or bariatric surgery, which often provide short-term results and carry potential side effects or relapses. In this context, traditional health systems such as Ayurveda and Naturopathy offer a holistic, constitutionally tailored, and sustainable model of weight regulation and health restoration.

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, perceives obesity as a *Santarpanajanya Vyādhi*—a disease caused by over-nutrition and lifestyle indulgence. It is considered one of the *Ashta Nindita Puruṣa Lakṣaṇas* (eight condemned bodily constitutions), wherein excessive accumulation of *Meda* and *Māṃsa* leads to physical heaviness, lack of enthusiasm, breathlessness, and susceptibility to other metabolic diseases. *Charaka Samhitā* (Sūtrasthāna 21) provides a detailed account of *Sthaulya*, highlighting its root causes as improper diet (*Guru, Snigdha, Madhura Ahāra*), sedentary lifestyle (*Avyāyāma*), day sleep (*Divāsvapna*), and impaired *Agni* (digestive fire). The accumulation of *Āma* (undigested toxic waste), aggravated *Kapha Doṣa*, and blocked *Srotas* (microchannels) further deepen the pathology. The fundamental Ayurvedic approach to treating obesity is *Langhana*—a therapeutic lightening technique that reduces heaviness (*Gurutva*), corrects *Agni*, and eliminates *Meda* and *Āma* through various internal and external interventions.

Langhana encompasses a spectrum of interventions ranging from *Shodhana* (purificatory therapies such as *Virechana* and *Rukṣa Udvartana*), *Shamana* (palliative use of *Tikta Rasa* and *Deepana* drugs), to non-pharmacological methods like *Upavāsa* (fasting) and intake of *Laghu Ahāra* (light food). These therapies aim to restore metabolic intelligence, mobilize accumulated fat, reduce *Kapha*, and increase *Laghutva* (lightness), thereby addressing not just the physical manifestations of obesity but also its deeper functional imbalances. Notably,

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antioxidants [11], antidiabetic [12], Anticholesterol and *Upavāsa*, or fasting, is extolled in the *Ashtanga Hridaya* and *Charaka Samhitā* as a natural and powerful means to enhance *Agni*, reduce *Āma*, and promote clarity of both body and mind.

Parallel to this, Naturopathy, a contemporary holistic healing system, emphasizes fasting as a physiological rest process wherein the digestive organs are given a break, allowing the body to expel accumulated toxins, normalize hormone levels, and initiate self-repair mechanisms. Naturopathic fasting practices, such as intermittent fasting, water fasting, juice fasting, and mono-diet regimens, have shown promising results in improving insulin sensitivity, triggering autophagy, and promoting fat mobilization. These benefits resonate closely with Ayurvedic objectives of *Doṣa Shamana*, *Meda Kṣaya*, and *Srotoshuddhi*. While Naturopathy explains these outcomes through scientific mechanisms such as ketosis, reduced oxidative stress, and hormonal balance, Ayurveda interprets the same through the purification of *Srotas*, strengthening of *Agni*, and pacification of *Kapha-Meda Doṣa*.

Recent clinical trials, both in Ayurveda and naturopathic institutions, have demonstrated the efficacy of structured fasting and *Langhana* protocols in reducing body mass index (BMI), waist circumference, and serum lipid levels while improving overall vitality, digestion, and mental clarity. These therapies not only improve metabolic parameters but also empower patients to take charge of their health through conscious living, dietary mindfulness, and lifestyle discipline—principles deeply rooted in both healing systems.

Furthermore, the integrative use of Ayurvedic *Langhana* with naturopathic fasting can offer a personalized, cost-effective, and spiritually aligned approach to the growing burden of obesity. This convergence honors the individuality of the patient (*Prakṛti*), the causative pathology (*Hetu*), and the nature of the disease (*Roga Mārga*), thereby enabling practitioners to design interventions that address the body, mind, and consciousness in unison.

This review paper aims to explore and analyze the classical Ayurvedic approach of *Langhana* in the management of *Sthaulya*, and its conceptual and clinical harmony with naturopathic fasting methods. By examining textual references, therapeutic mechanisms, modern evidence, and clinical observations, the study seeks to establish a comprehensive understanding of how these ancient and modern practices can converge in the effective and sustainable management of obesity.

Ayurvedic Concept of Obesity and Langhana

In Ayurveda, *Sthaulya* (obesity) is not merely a disorder of weight gain but a *Meda Roga*—a disease of deranged *fat metabolism*. It is described as a condition caused by *Santarpana* (over-nourishment), leading to the *Ati-pravr̥tti* (excessive increase) of *Meda Dhātu* and subsequent *Doṣa Dush̥ti*, particularly of *Kapha* and *Vāta*.

According to *Charaka Samhitā*, *Sthaulya* is described in Sutrasthana 21:4 as follows:

"Dīrgham āyuṣyam ārogyam taruṇam vayasā sthitam | Medasā vyāpṛtam chittam na gacchati na sthīrā bhavet ||"

(The mind of an obese person is dull, body heavy, and devoid of enthusiasm. Obesity disturbs health and vitality.)

Ayurveda identifies eight undesirable physical conditions known as *Ashta Ninditā Puruṣa*, of which *Sthaulya* is one. The root causes are traced to:

- *Ahāra Hetu* (dietary causes): excessive intake of *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Guru* (heavy), *Madhura* (sweet), and *Shīta* (cold) food.
- *Vihāra Hetu* (lifestyle causes): lack of physical activity (*Avyāyāma*), excessive sleep, especially during the day (*Divāsvapna*).
- *Mānasika Hetu* (psychological causes): stress and emotional imbalance triggering unhealthy eating behavior.

The metabolic fire (*Jatharāgni*) becomes suppressed due to accumulated *Kapha* and *Āma*, resulting in improper tissue formation (*Dhātu Agni Mandya*), particularly of *Meda Dhātu*. The *Srotas* (microchannels) transporting nutrition are blocked by excess *Meda*, leading to disturbed physiology and lethargy.

The *Charaka Samhitā* mentions:

"Atisneha, atiguru, madhura sevī sthaulyaṃ labhate"

(Overconsumption of oily, heavy, and sweet foods leads to obesity.)

Management of *Sthaulya* thus primarily revolves around correcting *Agni*, eliminating *Āma*, and reducing *Kapha* and *Meda*. This is done through *Langhana*—one of the ten fundamental treatment approaches in Ayurveda.

Forms of Langhana Useful in Obesity

The term *Langhana* comes from the Sanskrit root '*Lagh*' which means 'to lighten'. *Langhana* is indicated in *Kapha* and *Meda*-dominant conditions where heaviness (*Gurutva*), dullness (*Mandatva*), and congestion are present. It promotes lightness (*Laghutva*), clarity, improved *Agni*, and metabolic activity.

According to *Charaka Samhitā*, Sutrasthana 22:9:

"Langhanaṃ rukṣaṃ tūkṣṇam uṣṇam laghu kathinaṃ śuṣkaṃ..."

(Langhana involves dryness, sharpness, heat, lightness, roughness, and is useful in disorders caused by excess nourishment.)

The primary forms of Langhana useful in managing obesity include:

1. Upavāsa (Fasting)

Voluntary abstinence from food is a key *Langhana* method. It is indicated in individuals with excess *Kapha*, *Meda*, and *Āma*. It enhances *Jatharāgni*, encourages *Meda Kṣaya* (fat reduction), and induces *Laghutva* (lightness). Intermittent fasting and Ayurvedic *Niruha Upavāsa* methods are considered safe and effective when guided properly.

2. Pachana (Digestive-stimulating herbs)

When *Āma* is present and strength is moderate, herbs such as *Trikatu* (dry ginger, black pepper, and long pepper), *Chitraka*, and *Mustā* are used to stimulate digestion and reduce *Meda* indirectly.

3. Rukṣa Udvartana (Dry powder massage)

Application of herbal powders like *Triphalā*, *Yavā*, *Mustā*, *Vacha*, and *Kola* in upward strokes over the body reduces subcutaneous fat, enhances lymphatic circulation, and improves tone. *Sushruta* recommends *Udvartana* as a daily routine for *Sthaulya*.

"Udvartanaṃ kapha haraṃ medasaḥ kṣaya kārakam"

(*Udvartana* removes *Kapha* and reduces *Meda*.)

4. Virechana (Purgation therapy)

A classical *Shodhana* process using herbs like *Trivṛt*, *Eranda Taila*, or *Avipattikara Churna* for cleansing the bowels. It removes excess *Pitta* and *Kapha*, corrects *Agni*, and clears *Āma*. It is effective in *Kapha-Meda Dushita Vyādhi* like *Sthaulya*.

5. Takra Sādana (Therapeutic use of buttermilk)

Buttermilk (*Takra*) is *Laghu* (light), *Deepana* (digestion-enhancing), and *Kapha-Meda Nashaka*. Regular intake with *Pippali* or *Hing* is a classical remedy for obesity.

6. Langhana Ahāra (Light diet)

Simple diets like *Yavāgu* (rice gruel), *Lāja Manda* (parched rice water), or *Mudga Yusha* (green gram soup) are prescribed post-*Shodhana* or during dietary discipline phases. These are easy to digest, promote *Agni*, and support *Meda Vilayana*.

7. Vyāyāma (Physical activity)

Although not *Langhana* in the strictest medicinal sense, *Vyāyāma* is a *Kapha-Shāmaka* measure encouraged to promote lightness and fat mobilization.

8. Ama Nirharana (Removal of metabolic toxins)

Using *Guduchi*, *Haritaki*, and *Triphala* in the early morning on an empty stomach helps eliminate *Āma*, mobilize fat, and increase metabolism.

When implemented correctly under Ayurvedic supervision, these forms of *Langhana* not only reduce body weight but also restore digestive strength, clarity of mind, and overall balance of the *Doṣas*. Combining these with mental *Langhana*—reducing stress, clutter, and emotional burden—creates a multi-dimensional framework for healthy living.

Naturopathic Fasting and Detoxification

Naturopathic fasting, as a cornerstone of traditional healing systems, embodies the principle of aligning human physiology with the natural cycles of cleansing and rejuvenation. Rooted in the belief that the body possesses a self-healing intelligence known as *Vis Medicatrix Naturae*, fasting is employed to facilitate this inherent mechanism by creating an environment that allows toxins to be expelled, tissues to regenerate, and metabolic imbalances to be corrected. In the context of obesity, fasting serves not merely as a weight-reduction tool, but as a comprehensive therapeutic intervention that addresses the root cause of excessive *Meda Dhātu* accumulation, *Agni Mandya* (digestive debility), and systemic *Āma* (toxic residue).

The practice of fasting within naturopathy parallels the Ayurvedic concept of *Langhana*, a therapeutic lightening strategy that involves reducing the bodily burden through internal cleansing and metabolic enhancement. In both traditions, the purpose is not deprivation, but restoration—allowing the body to pause, digest existing toxins, mobilize stored fat, and rekindle the *Jatharagni*, the central digestive fire. Fasting activates a series of biochemical and energetic processes in the body, including improved insulin

sensitivity, autophagy, reduction in inflammatory markers, and stabilization of hormonal fluctuations such as leptin and ghrelin. These effects not only lead to weight reduction but also restore the cellular communication and homeostasis needed for long-term health.

In both Ayurveda and naturopathy, the act of fasting is seen as a sacred discipline. It brings not only physiological clarity but also mental and emotional purification. In the Ayurvedic classics, fasting or *Upavāsa* is described as one of the primary methods of reducing *Kapha Doṣa* and mobilizing *Meda*. The *Ashtanga Hridaya* emphasizes that *Upavāsa* leads to lightness, improved intellect, and purification of the *Srotas*, or bodily channels. Similarly, naturopathy views fasting as a gateway to calmness of mind, refinement of appetite, and elevation of awareness—transforming one's relationship with food, body, and self.

Modern studies have validated these classical observations, revealing that structured fasting can activate autophagic pathways, remove dysfunctional cellular components, and promote mitochondrial efficiency. Clinically, obese individuals practicing intermittent fasting or supervised juice and water fasts report reductions in waist circumference, body fat percentage, and blood pressure, along with enhanced energy levels and emotional resilience. These benefits mirror the outcomes seen in Ayurvedic interventions where *Langhana* through *Upavāsa*, *Takra Pāna*, and *Laghu Ahāra* are prescribed based on the *Prakṛti* (constitution), *Doṣa* involvement, and seasonal appropriateness.

Fasting also serves as an entry point to lifestyle discipline and self-awareness. In the Vedic and Upanishadic texts, food is seen not only as nourishment but as a sacred offering, and restraint in its consumption is considered essential to mental clarity and spiritual progress. The *Rgveda* and *Atharvaveda* encourage *Mitāhāra*—moderate eating—as a way to maintain balance and sattvic consciousness. Naturopathic philosophy reflects this by treating fasting as an inward journey, allowing the senses to withdraw, the mind to settle, and the body to recalibrate its innate rhythm.

The therapeutic impact of fasting on obesity is most profound when followed by an appropriate refeeding protocol, similar to the *Sansarjana Krama* described in Ayurveda. After cleansing, light and digestible foods such as warm vegetable soups, rice gruels, or herbal decoctions are slowly introduced to protect the rekindled *Agni* and prevent recurrence of *Āma*. This gradual progression ensures that the metabolic reset achieved through fasting is sustained, and the body is not shocked by sudden re-exposure to complex or heavy foods.

Personalization is key in the success of fasting as a therapeutic practice. Both naturopathy and Ayurveda stress the need for individual assessment, considering factors such as body constitution, current health status, digestive capacity, mental stability, and seasonal influences. An approach that works wonders for one may aggravate symptoms in another, especially if fasting is done excessively or improperly. Over-fasting, particularly in individuals with predominant *Vāta* or in cold, dry seasons, can lead to dryness, anxiety, and weakness. Hence, professional supervision and appropriate scheduling are essential to prevent adverse effects and maximize benefits.

In essence, naturopathic fasting, when practiced in alignment with Ayurvedic principles, becomes a powerful

Langhana Upāya that restores not only physical health but mental clarity and emotional balance. It offers a path back to simplicity, awareness, and internal harmony. It awakens the dormant healing intelligence of the body, strengthens digestive fire, dissolves excessive *Meda*, and clears the mind. It is not merely an absence of food—it is the presence of balance.

Conclusion

Obesity, recognized in Ayurveda as *Sthaulya*, is a complex *Santarpanjanya Vyādhi* marked by impaired *Agni*, accumulation of *Meda Dhātu*, and dominance of *Kapha Doṣa*. Its roots lie not merely in dietary excess, but in the weakening of digestive and cellular intelligence, the accumulation of *Āma*, and the disruption of natural rhythms. The classical Ayurvedic wisdom offers *Langhana*—a profound principle of lightening—as the foundational approach to restore balance, reduce pathological heaviness, and rekindle the sacred fire of metabolism. *Langhana* is not a single act but a comprehensive process involving therapeutic fasting (*Upavāsa*), digestive stimulation (*Pachana*), purificatory procedures (*Shodhana*), and the disciplined intake of *Laghu Ahāra* that nourishes without burdening.

Naturopathic fasting, guided by the principle of the body's self-healing power, mirrors this concept with remarkable precision. It emphasizes rest, elimination, and renewal, allowing the digestive system to repair, hormones to recalibrate, and mental clarity to emerge. Scientific studies have increasingly affirmed the benefits of structured fasting in promoting fat loss, insulin sensitivity, and detoxification—echoing what Ayurveda has long taught about the role of *Upavāsa* in clearing *Kapha*, reducing *Meda*, and enhancing *Agni*.

The integration of *Langhana* and naturopathic fasting offers a holistic, non-pharmacological, constitutionally aligned, and spiritually rooted pathway for managing obesity. It transforms the very physiology of disease by working with, rather than against, the rhythms of nature and the individuality of the person. This path does not merely aim for weight loss but for *Swasthya*—a state of dynamic equilibrium between *Doṣas*, *Dhātus*, *Agni*, and *Manas*. When followed with proper understanding, personalization, and care, this integrative approach uplifts not only the body, but also the mind and soul—inviting the individual toward clarity, lightness, and balance both within and without.

As the ancient Ayurvedic seers declared, "*Laghutvam cha sharirasya, karanam balasya hi*"—lightness of the body is the cause of true strength. In this lightness, health is restored, disease is prevented, and wellness flourishes.

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