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The Influence of Stress and Inactivity on Health: An Ayurvedic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Sedentary behavior, defined as activity that involves little to no movement of the body and, consequently, low energy expenditure, has recently gained attention as a potential indicator of the physical and mental health of adult populations. Sedentary behavior has been linked to mental health problems like anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. These days, life is extremely busy - almost chaotic. Despite our increased productivity, we still feel there is never enough time to accomplish our true goals. This extremely rapid pace and the pressure that follows to "get things done" are serious issues that have a deeper impact on our bodies and minds than we may realize. We are all making ourselves sick by stressing about something that is not even a small inconvenience. The body contains thousands of homeostatic regulatory mechanisms. Among the most crucial ones are the control of body temperature, the maintenance of cell nutrition, the removal of waste, and the proper balance of hormones. So, the term "stress" is fairly wide and can take many various forms, it can interfere with several vital physiological processes.

Key words: Mental Health, Sedentary Lifestyle, Stress.

INTRODUCTION

कर्मण्यकर्म यः पश्येदकर्मणि च कर्म यः |

स बुद्धिमान्मनुष्येषु स युक्तकृत्स्नकर्मकृत् ||18|| (Gita Chapter 4 Versus 18)

Those who see action in inaction and inaction in action are truly wise amongst humans. Although performing all kinds of actions, they are *Yogis* and masters of all their actions.

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समदोषः समाग्निश्च समधातुमलक्रियः |

प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रियमनाः स्वस्थ इत्यभिधीयते ||४१||^[1]

It means that *Vata, Pitta, Kapha*; fire; *Rasa-Raktadi 7 Dhatus; Vinn-Mutraadi Mala*; all of them should be in perfect balance in the body. Health can be achieved, if all these physiological parameters are in equal balance with healthy mind, intellect and all senses. The term "Health" is very much comprehensive and inclusive in *Ayurveda*.

Before we even recognized how much our physical health affects our mental health, the phrases "no mental health without physical health" and "no physical health without mental health" were written in our ancient book.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

To establish and in-depth understanding of how sedentary behaviour and stress influence mental health.

रसवाहीनि दुष्यन्ति चिन्त्यानां चातिचिन्तनात् ||१३||^[2]

Stress causes the digestive system's blood flow and energy (*Prana*) to decrease, which swiftly decreases the system's ability to break down food and produces toxins (*Ama*) and undigested food. This waste product that promotes inflammation can build up quickly and clog the body's pathways. This is one of the main reasons for illness.

Agnimandya (poor digestion) in *Ayurveda* refers to a reduced digestive fire that is unable to convert *Rasa* (nutrients) into life-sustaining *Ojas*. Not only does poor digestion contribute to a number of illnesses, but it is also a health problem in and of itself.

अत्यम्बुपानाद्विषमाशनाच्च सन्धारणात् स्वप्नविपर्ययाच्च |
कालेऽपि सात्म्यं लघु चापि भुक्तमन्नं न पाकं भजते नरस्य |
|७|

ईर्ष्याभयक्रोधपरिप्लुतेन लुब्धेन रुग्दैर्न्यनिपीडितेन |
प्रद्वेषयुक्तेन च सेव्यमानमन्नं न सम्यक्परिपाकमेति ||८||^[3]

Disadvantages of taking food in more quantity than normal

Food taken in excessive quantity aggravates all three *Doshas*. Symptoms due to each *Dosha* are as follows:

Vata: Produces colic pain, constipation, malaise, dryness of mouth, fainting, giddiness, irregularity in the power of digestion, the rigidity of sides, back, and waist, and contraction and hardening of vessels.

Pitta: Causes fever, diarrhoea, internal burning sensation, thirst, intoxication, giddiness, and delirium.

Kapha: Causes vomiting, anorexia, indigestion, cold fever, laziness, and heaviness in the body

In addition to regulating mucosal secretions and GI muscle mostly through inhibitory effects, the sympathetic nervous system also controls GI blood flow by neurally mediated vasoconstriction. In contrast, the parasympathetic nervous system regulates the tone and motility of the stomach and intestines (i.e., milling, absorption, secretion, and feces) in both an excitatory and an inhibitory manner, suggesting a more complicated and finely balanced control over GI activity. The autonomic nervous system governs gastrointestinal functions, which typically

transpire without conscious awareness. However, higher CNS centers modulate the regulation and modulation of the GI tract by the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, which in turn affect homeostatic control, cognitive, and behavioral functions.

मात्रयाऽप्यभ्यवहृतं पथ्यं चान्नं न जीर्यति |
चिन्ताशोकभयक्रोधदुःखशय्याप्रजागरैः ||^[4]

Ayurvedic stressors, or factors that induce stress, can be divided into two categories: those that cause psychological stress, such as anger, fear, grief, or anxiety, and those that cause environmental stress, such as high altitudes and extended exposure to intense heat from the sun or fire. (C.Ni. 1/19, 22).

All sorts of morbidities stem from eating unhealthy food, following an irregular or incorrect schedule, and experiencing mental disturbances such as *Krodha* (anger), *Soka* (grief), *Loba* (greed), *Moha* (attachment), *Ayasa* (confusion), and *Bhaya* (fear).

But because of their altered lifestyles, today's upper and middle classes also experience stress—mostly psychological stress. Particularly the younger generation experiences stress focused on achieving goals. This kind of stress is different from situational crisis stress since it stems from an internal drive to achieve objectives. Success stress frequently results in work-related alcoholism, which includes sleep deprivation and erratic eating patterns. Additionally, the diet is typically high in fat and calories, which jointly vitiate both the *Vata* and the *Kapha Doshas*, which again have opposing qualities.

आस्यासुखं स्वप्नसुखं दधीनि ग्राम्योदकानूपरसाः पयांसि |

नवान्नपानं गुडवैकृतं च प्रमेहेतुः कफकृच्च सर्वम् ||^[5]

High levels of sedentary behaviour, defined as “any waking behaviour characterized by an energy expenditure ≤ 1.5 metabolic equivalents (METs), while in a sitting, reclining, or lying posture.^[6]” are associated with a variety of adverse physical health outcomes among adults, including increased incidence of cardiovascular disease, type two diabetes mellitus, cancer and all-cause mortality.^[7] Mental health may

also be negatively impacted by sedentary behaviour, as more sedentary time has been associated with a higher risk of experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety.^[8,9] Additionally, work-related sedentary behaviour and poor mental health status have both independently been associated with lower productivity levels at work.^[10,11]

Researchers are also investigating the possibility of a link between high levels of cortisol release and an increased risk of type 2.

Stress-related overeating may potentially play a role in the development of type 2 diabetes. Some people overeat in stress response, which can cause them to gain a lot of weight.

In addition to raising the risk of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease by two-fold, sedentary lifestyles also raise the risk of colon cancer, high blood pressure, osteoporosis, lipid disorders, depression, and anxiety. Sedentary lifestyles are a major public health concern of our time, however they are not adequately addressed, as 60 to 85% of people worldwide - from both developed and developing nations - lead sedentary lifestyles. According to estimates, about two thirds of kids lack sufficient physical activity, which could have detrimental effects on their long-term health.

Which health hazards are associated with a sedentary lifestyle?

It is abundantly evident that a sedentary lifestyle increases the risk of cardiovascular disease and other illnesses:

1. Less fit and inactive people are more likely to acquire high blood pressure.
2. Research indicates that individuals who engage in physical activity have a lower risk of developing coronary heart disease compared to those who do not. This is even after the researchers took nutrition, alcohol consumption, and smoking into account.
3. Depression and anxiety can worsen if you don't exercise.

4. A sedentary lifestyle may raise your risk of developing some malignancies.
5. People who are overweight or obese but engage in regular physical activity dramatically lower their risk of disease

According to *Ayurveda*, the development of lifestyle problems is mostly caused by *Ahaar* and *Vihaar*. Eating food that is not *Satmya* has a key role in *Adhyashan*, *Shamshan*, and *Ajirnashana* as well as *Prakriti*, *Desha*, *Kala*, and *Vaya* of an individual. Adopting an unhealthy lifestyle, or *Vihaar*, such as smoking, drinking alcohol, stressing out, not exercising, or being overweight, exacerbates the illness and prolongs its duration.

High fat diet consumption, a sedentary lifestyle, and inactivity all contribute to atherosclerotic alterations in blood vessels, which cause the blood vessels to lose tone and raise peripheral resistance and blood pressure (*Asyasukham* and *Swapnasukham*). One can relate this to *Dushti Kapha Dosha*.

CONCLUSION

In the long run, sitting for long days and dealing with constant stress can make it really tough to maintain good internal health. Not moving around much weakens our bodies and affects how our intelligence work, making us more prone to stress and its negative impacts. At the same time, ongoing stress can make a sedentary life indeed worse, creating a circle that harms our internal well-being. Breaking out of this cycle means adding regular physical exercise to our day and discovering ways to manage stress more. Doing this can boost our mood, enhance internal health, and make our overall quality of life better. Embracing a more active, balanced lifestyle isn't only about physical fitness - it's crucial for nurturing our mental health as well.

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