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PCOD and Ayurveda: Steering the Ailment Through Lifestyle Interventions

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Abstract

Ayurveda is the science of life having myriad of means to attain a long and healthy life. The individualistic and holistic approaches of Ayurveda pose better ways to a healthier living. In the age of physical, mental, and environmental stressors, it's important to make your health a priority. While arranging for the monetary wealth, whilst disregarding the health, lands to a disarrayed state of health. Numerous diseases spring about because of remission of the fundamental conducts of life. PCOD is one such present-day disease that arise due to erratic lifestyle. It may progress if kept unchecked. Projecting and maintaining the integrity of health should be a mandate to sustain health and longevity. This can be achieved by posing a healthy lifestyle that durably prevents from advancement of a disease. Ayurveda has proposed several meters to promote and preserve the state of health in the form of lifestyle regimens. From diet to sleep, the way you spend the body and sense, all are included under lifestyle. Deflection from a healthy lifestyle due to consumption of odds may obscure the path of health. To overcome this, lifestyle modifications when enforced, can prove to enhance the quality of living by preceding the risk of disease. Rather than prescribing dozens of medicines, Ayurveda focuses on lifestyle and dietary changes alongside. A poised approach towards the physical, mental, and social wellbeing furnishes a healthy living. Here, the concept of eminent lifestyle changes that may show a positive impact in the lifestyle disorders have been proposed.

Keywords: Ayurveda, lifestyle, PCOD, health

INTRODUCTION

Ayurveda, the science of life since time immemorial stands as a testament amidst the hustle and bustle of present times. As per Ayurveda, life is sustained by the tripod of physical, mental, and spiritual elements as constituted by sharira, indriya, satva, and atma. The physical world around us, comprising of the human body, is derived from the specific combinations of Panchamahabhootas and the Atma [1]. The tridosha, saptadhatu, and trimala are derived from the panchamahabhootas. Amongst them, tridoshas carry out the physiological activities that are responsible for sustaining the integrity of the human body. But owing to faulty diet and lifestyle, equilibrium of the doshas get vitiated. These vitiated doshas derail the equilibrium of dhatus and malas, causing their vitiation, which later develops as multifarious diseases in the body. Apart from providing specified therapeutic measures for distinct ailments, Ayurveda emphasizes on maintenance, promotion, and preservation of health through diet and lifestyle.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study included reviews on managing PCOD through lifestyle interventions from

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Brihatrayi and various articles, including any relevant commentary. While collecting information from the above-mentioned materials, it is elucidated how lifestyle modifications can prove to mend PCOD.

IMPACT OF LIFESTYLE

Lifestyle is a configurational discipline that is followed, and lifestyle diseases are those health illnesses that respond to the incorrect ways of leading a lifestyle. Nowadays, lifestyle disorders have become more extensive and affect most of the population, thus posing proportional health threats around the world. Lifestyle disorders are caused mostly by poor diet and lack of physical activity. Diversion from physical exercise and adhesion towards sedentary lifestyle may lead to a variety of health problems. Lifestyle disorders originating due to poor lifestyle include poor dietary and eating habits, consumption of incompatible food, lack of exercise, poor sleep, stress, and increased exhaustion because of unhealthy lifestyle regimes.

Lifestyle encompasses of choices and habits that have been cultivated in the routine chores. From the food we eat, the time we sleep, and the exercise we do, all the disciplines that are chosen to be followed can be included under lifestyle. These key lifestyle components play an important role in moulding a potentially healthy life. Leading a healthy lifestyle has a major influence on the mental well-being and resilience, along with bringing a positive impact on the physical and social dimensions of the health. Thus, lifestyle choices play a pivotal role in shaping an overall well-being. On the other hand, an impoverished lifestyle leads to decreased well-being. Thus, having significant prominence, prime importance should be given for maintaining an optimum lifestyle.

With increased urbanization, there's been a significant deterioration in the optimal lifestyle giving rise to several diseases. One such common disorder that prevail because of this flawed lifestyle is Polycystic Ovarian Disease, abbreviated as PCOD. "Poly" means "many", and "cyst" means "a closed, pouch-like tissue structure that may be filled with fluid, air, pus, or other material". PCOD is a major lifestyle disorder prevails in multiple females these days. It is a complex multifactorial disease that leads to metabolic, endocrine, psychological, fertility and pregnancy-related complications. Prolonged depleted lifestyle including wrong dietary and sedentary habits may subjectively lead to PCOD. As per a study, inimical dietary and environmental factors are said to have an impact on developmental programming of susceptible gene variants in women with PCOD [2].

PCOD is characterized by elevated androgen levels that may lead to menstrual irregularities. It is a multifaceted, oligogenic disorder in which small cysts may be present on one or both ovaries [3]. PCOD is a heterogeneous disorder that affects around 7–15 % of the women worldwide. The disease may ascend by the interaction of several genetic and environmental factors that determine the clinical and biochemical phenotype [4]. Environmental factors implicated in PCOD can exacerbate by poor dietary choices, physical inactivity, infectious agents, and toxins. Appropriate diet, weight loss practices, and exercise may reverse PCOD.

ETIOLOGY AND PATHOGENESIS OF PCOD

The term "etiology" signifies the science of causes. A cause is the matter that produces an effect. From a medical perspective, all the diseases must have some underlying cause that led to expression of certain disease. Essentially all diseases have a multifactorial causation in varying combinations that produce the resultant effect. These causative factors give rise to a composite window of health and illness. The tissues and organs operating at biological level, and perception and experience at psychological level are critical in understanding the clinical picture. In a briefer context, etiology implicit a clear pathway of the underlying causation of a disease.

The Chief Causative Factors That May Lead to Development of PCOD

- *Poor lifestyle:* A woman is more likely to have PCOD if she follows a sluggish or sedentary lifestyle. Increased weight because of lack of exercise or abstinence from any kind of body

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movement may subsequently result in excessively increased weight that subsequently led to several ailments including PCOD.

- *Excessive stress:* The adrenal glands get chronically activated under high stress levels that result in overproduction of androgens in the female body, this eventually head towards PCOD.
- *Unhealthy diet:* A diet loaded with junk food like pizza, burgers, sugary substances, processed or red meat, along with carbonated energy drinks may cause PCOD.
- *Hormonal imbalance:* Due to stress, and overthinking, when certain hormones are produced in excess, it may lead to hormonal imbalance in the body that can ultimately result in PCOD.

The term "pathology" refers to the developmental, structural or functional changes that are associated with a disease. Each disease entity develops through a series of chemical and cellular divergences. This stepwise gradual advancement of disease is referred as its pathogenesis. PCOD is one such endocrinopathic disorders that is primarily seen in the women of reproductive age. Biochemically, it may result from insulin resistance and the compensatory hyperinsulinemia. The pathophysiology of PCOD involves primary defects in the hypothalamic–pituitary axis, insulin secretion and action and the ovarian function. It is an endocrinal condition where many immature or partially matured eggs are produced by the ovaries that eventually transform to cysts. Although the accurate cause of PCOD is not known, it may be linked to hormonal imbalance, insulin resistance and obesity as the key factors. Insulin has pivotal role in regulating the ovarian function. Excess insulin production is reprised by producing androgen that may cause anovulation and follicular maturation arrest, thus leading to an ovarian abnormality. Clinical signs of PCOD include elevated luteinizing hormone (LH) and gonadotropin releasing hormone (GnRH) levels. While the levels of follicular-stimulating hormone (FSH) remain unchanged or muted. As a result of the thus increased GnRH and stimulated ovarian thecal cells, more amount of androgen is produced thus leading to PCOD [5].

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

A sign is objective evidence of the disease. Signs and symptoms are the body's ways of getting acquainted with the metabolic disturbances. PCOD may be characterized by hirsutism, alopecia, menstrual irregularity, severe obesity, acne, fatigue, abnormal weight gain, mood swings, facial hair growth, pelvic pain, and enlarged ovaries with numerous small cysts. It can be clinically diagnosed as hyperandrogenism and oligo-ovulation or anovulation. Dysregulation of androgen synthesis plays a key role in the pathogenesis of PCOD. The disease may ascend when the genetic factors align with the environmental ones. Sedentary lifestyle, and dietary habits may also be triggered by the genomic variants that are related to hyper androgens.

AYURVEDIC CORRESPONDENCE

Ayurveda interprets the body as a composite of dosha, dhatu, and mala. Based on this, PCOD can be understood in relation with the dosha, dhatu, upadhatu, and srotas involved. In PCOD, Kapha predominance can be apprehended through increased weight, subfertility, hirsutism, diabetic tendencies and coldness. Hair loss, acne, painful menses, and heart related problems depict pitta predominance. Vata predominance is evident with painful menses, scanty or less menstrual blood and severe menstrual irregularity. Aartava kshaya can be correlated with PCOD as scanty or nonappearance of menstrual blood occurs in the condition. In this condition, pitta and kapha doshas, medas, rasa, and shukra dhatu and rasa, rakta, and artava vaha srotas get affected [6].

MANAGEMENT OF PCOD THROUGH LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS

निदान परिवर्जनम् एव चिकित्सा ।

Avoiding the causative factors is the first line of treatment. PCOD that occurs mainly due to unhealthy lifestyle can be treated by restoring it. Ayurveda employs a holistic approach towards managing PCOD. Personalised treatment as per an individual's prakriti aims to address the root cause of the disease and restore the bodily equilibrium [7]. Obesity is one of the principal concerns among women suffering from PCOD. It has been reported that the risk of obesity among patients with PCOD is four times higher

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than that among healthy individuals. Higher BMI might cause metabolic abnormalities, such as increased insulin resistance and exacerbation of hyperandrogenemia [8]. Increased body weight and insulin resistance are the implicated causes for obesity in individuals suffering from PCOD. Maintaining BMI may help to restore fertility and ovulation, as well as in improving the insulin resistance. Higher levels of insulin is believed to increase androgens in women with PCOD that worsen the risk of complications.

A poor diet can precisely contribute towards progression of PCOD. There are certain foods that may prove to be beneficial in PCOD. On the contrary, certain food articles, if consumed can make the condition worse. Thus, it becomes pivotally important to have good and nutritious diet that can be beneficial in the ailment. PCOD can be managed by following a well-managed diet.

A few salutary food articles that may correct PCOD include:

- *Dietary fibre:* Increasing the amount of fibre in the diet may help in combating insulin resistance. Foods with high fibre content include beans, lentils, green peas, spinach, broccoli, kale, beetroot, cauliflower, sweet potatoes, cucumber, and coriander. These can be made to soups, salads and sprouts for ingestion.
- *Anti-inflammatory foods:* Intake of spinach like green leafy vegetables, almonds and walnuts, fruits, such as oranges, and cherries may help in reducing the inflammation.
- *Whole grains:* Though carbohydrates are part of a balanced diet, they in turn increase blood sugar post digestion. Whole grains are high in fibre and won't affect the blood sugar levels as much as refined carbohydrates does.
- *Go ghrita:* Ghee contains medium-chain fatty acids, which can be readily converted into energy that aids in fat burning. It is additionally rich in conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), that is known to reduce body fat and promotes lean muscle mass by supporting weight loss [9].

Food articles that should be avoided by an individual suffering from PCOD include eggs, chicken, red meat, and seafood when consumed in excess and loaded with fatty acids, saturated fat, and cholesterol. Excess consumption of these food articles may worsen the condition by increasing the risk of obesity, and cardiovascular disorders. These may also contribute to hormonal imbalance, thus concurrently PCOD. Excess consumption of alcohol and smoking makes the nervous system weak from inside that may results in irregular periods or reduced fertility. Thus, these substances should be strictly avoided to get rid of PCOD. It has also been evident that healthy dietary patterns will significantly help in disease prevention and its regression. Thus, a healthy shift towards dietary habits may improve the overall health.

Vihara

In this fast-growing era where everyone is busy topping the charts of success, health is certainly put at stake. Stressful schedules, lack of time for self, and diet patterns lead to poor functioning of the body that result in hormonal imbalance. Aerobic exercises, including brisk walking, biking, swimming may prove to be rewarding while treating PCOD.

Yoga

The term "yoga" is derived from "yuj" which means "union". Yoga is thus an effort to connect atma and parmatma, the union of physical body and the mind. Yoga offers a complete body-mind workout, a perfect combination of exercise, and medication, with the maintenance of the vital breath-prana. Yoga provides a retreat from the chaotic life to restore health. It has proved to have a positive impact while dealing with physical and psychological ailments and aids to curb them. Practicing yoga may effectively decrease the testosterone levels and alleviate the symptoms of anxiety and depression that prevail in women with PCOD. Summating such integrative approach may prove to be beneficial as the diseased individuals may show an increased prevalence of depression and anxiety. The auxiliary mood disorders contribute to stress, depression, infertility, hormonal imbalances, etc., to compensate these health issues,

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one should indulge in mind – body practices, such as yoga. Hence, regular practice of yoga promotes strength, endurance, flexibility, and greater self-control, cultivating a sense of calmness and well-being.

Some of the Yogasanas That May Be Beneficial for Women Suffering from PCOD

- *Surya namaskara:* Practicing this asana harmonizes the bodily systems and glands by providing them with sufficient blood supply. It supresses the hormonal malfunctions by balancing the endorine system.
- *Baddha konasana:* Practicing this asana relaxes the body and relieves menstrual discomfort and stress.
- *Chakki chalasana:* It is one of the best asanas for women suffering from PCOD as it helps to reduce belly fat, tones abdominal muscles, improves digestion, and may regulate the menstrual cycle.
- *Dhanurasana:* It balances the adrenal gland secretion thereby stabilizing the endocrine and metabolic systems.
- *Bhujangasana:* This asana exerts soothing pressure on the stomach and pelvic area, thus aiding and stimulating the ovarian functions. It improves the power of digestion and reduces stress.
- *Marjaryasana and bitilasana:* Stimulates and massages the abdominal muscles, the reproductive organs, and boosts the functions of the nervous system.
- *Supta baddhakonasana:* Strengthens the groin and stimulates the blood flow around the pelvic region.
- *Naukasana:* This asana helps in strengthening and toning the muscles of abdominal area.
- *Malasana:* Strengthens the pelvic floor
- *Padmasana:* Practicing this asana stimulates more blood flow towards the pelvic region and tones the muscles. This also calms the mind.
- *Nadi shodhana pranayama:* A practice where the channels carrying prana, the vital breath gets purified, allowing it to flow freely and more efficiently, thus bringing peace and calm at the body and mind [10].

CONCLUSION

Life is a subtle congregation of the traits that are developed in the meantime. Your health reflects the way you lead your life. To maintain the healthy state of life, statutory measures governing the same should be observed. Defying the course of healthy regimes may lead to occurrence of lifestyle disorders in due course. The costs of illness can be saved by prevention. Averting the causes that lead to diseases and incorporating the healthier ways of living will grant a sound health to the body and mind. It's always better to live on food than on pills.

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