Vyayam As a Determinant of Swasthya Lakshana: An Analytical Review

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***Abstract*—Ayurveda identifies vyayam (exercise) as an essential component of daily routine (dinacharya) for preserving health, delaying ageing, and preventing disease. The concept of swasthya lakshana (indicators of health) describes not merely the absence of illness but a state of complete balance of dosha, dhatu, mala, and agni, along with clarity of mind, stability of senses, and inner contentment (prasannatmendriya manah). Classical texts repeatedly highlight the benefits of regular and moderate physical activity, while cautioning against overexertion. With the rise of lifestyle disorders such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease, the ancient wisdom regarding vyayam remains profoundly relevant. This review examines Ayurvedic descriptions of vyayam, its role in determining health parameters, and its resonance with modern exercise physiology and preventive medicine.**

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ayurvedic definition of health is holistic and multidimensional. Sushruta Samhita (Sutra Sthana 15/10) defines health as:

"समदोषः समाग्निश्च समधातु मलःक्रियाः ।प्रसन्नात्मेन्द्रियमनः स्वस्थ इत्यभिधीयते ॥"

A healthy individual is one whose doshas (vata, pitta, kapha) are in equilibrium, agni (digestive and metabolic fire) is balanced, dhatus (tissues) are properly nourished, malas (waste products) are eliminated appropriately, and whose soul, senses, and mind are content.

This definition goes beyond the biomedical model, which largely emphasizes absence of pathology. Ayurveda insists that health is a dynamic state of balance, experienced both physiologically and psychologically.

The role of vyayam in achieving this balance is emphasized in several Ayurvedic treatises. Charaka Samhita (Sutra Sthana 7/31) describes vyayam as a practice that bestows lightness, strength, endurance, stability, and the ability to work without fatigue. In the modern era, where sedentary lifestyles have become the norm, this ancient insight resonates with contemporary recommendations for daily physical activity.

II. CLASSICAL REFERENCES ON VYAYAM

Charaka Samhita

Charaka outlines the benefits of exercise as follows (Ch. Su. 7/32):

- Laghutva (lightness of body)
- Karmasamarthya (capacity to work)
- Daurbalya nasha (removal of weakness)
- Agnivardhana (enhancement of digestive fire)
- Dosha samya (balance of doshas)

He also warns that excessive exercise leads to exhaustion, emaciation, thirst, bleeding disorders, cough, fever, and debility (Ativyayam).

Sushruta Samhita

Sushruta recommends exercise as a preventive measure against obesity (sthoulaya) and circulatory stagnation. He describes its role in maintaining youthful vigor, improving complexion, and strengthening body tissues.

Ashtanga Hridaya

Vagbhata stresses moderation, advocating ardhashakti vyayam exercise up to half of one's strength. He emphasizes that those who overexert age prematurely, while those who practice moderate exercise attain stability, enthusiasm, and long life (A.H. Sutra Sthana 2)

Kashyapa Samhita

Kashyapa particularly highlights the importance of exercise in childhood and adolescence, linking it with proper growth, development, and prevention of kapha-related disorders.

III. VYAYAM AND SWASTHYA LAKSHANA

1. Dosha Balance
Excess kapha is reduced through activity, preventing stagnation, heaviness, and fat deposition (meda vriddhi). Vata, when moderated through controlled movements, maintains joint flexibility and circulation. Pitta benefits indirectly through improved metabolic regulation.
Modern correlation: Exercise prevents obesity, improves lipid metabolism, stabilizes blood pressure, and reduces risk of metabolic syndrome

2. Dhatu Poshan (Tissue Nourishment)
Vyayam strengthens muscles (mamsa dhatu), increases bone density (asthi dhatu), and maintains proper functioning of other tissues.
Modern correlation: Resistance training enhances muscle hypertrophy; weight-bearing exercise improves bone mineral density; regular activity supports healthy metabolism.

3. Agni Deepana (Metabolic Enhancement)
Exercise kindles jatharagni and regulates metabolism. Proper functioning of agni is considered the root of health.
Modern correlation: Exercise enhances insulin sensitivity, increases basal metabolic rate, and supports efficient nutrient absorption.

4. Mala Pravrutti (Elimination)
Through sweating, urination, and bowel movement, exercise aids in the elimination of wastes and keeps srotas (channels) clear.
Modern correlation: Sweating promotes thermoregulation and excretion of minor toxins; exercise enhances bowel motility and renal clearance.

5. Manasika Swasthya (Mental Health)
Ayurveda recognizes the psychosomatic effect of exercise, describing its role in uplifting mood and stabilizing the mind.
Modern correlation: Studies show exercise increases serotonin, dopamine, and endorphin release, reducing depression and anxiety while enhancing cognitive function

6. Vyadikshamatva (Immunity)
Classical texts indirectly link exercise with enhanced disease resistance.
Modern correlation: Moderate activity improves immune surveillance, enhances T-cell activity, reduces systemic inflammation, and increases resilience to infections.

IV. PREVENTIVE AND CURATIVE ASPECTS

- Obesity and Metabolic Disorders: Ayurveda recognizes sthaulya as a kapha disorder managed by exercise. Modern science confirms exercise as a cornerstone in weight management.
- Diabetes: Charaka links exercise with prameha prevention; current evidence supports improved glucose metabolism.
- Cardiovascular Health: Strengthens cardiac muscles, improves circulation; modern parallels include higher VO_2 max and reduced hypertension.
- Mental Health: Exercise is both preventive and therapeutic for stress-related conditions.
- Ageing: Ashtanga Hridaya notes that those who exercise moderately delay ageing; modern gerontology confirms improved muscle retention, bone strength, and neuroplasticity.

V. DISCUSSION

Ayurveda views vyayam not only as a physical regimen but as a psychosomatic and spiritual discipline. It is individualized—considering constitution (prakriti), age, season, and strength. This is in contrast to the standardized guidelines of modern exercise science, yet resonates with today's growing emphasis on personalized medicine.
For example, a kapha dominant individual thrives on vigorous activity like running or strength training, whereas a vata person benefits from gentler practices such as yoga, walking, or stretching. This adaptive approach makes Ayurvedic recommendations timeless.

VI CONCLUSION

Vyayam is a determinant of health as envisioned in Ayurveda's swasthya lakshana. It maintains dosha balance, kindles metabolic fire, nourishes tissues,

regulates elimination, uplifts the mind, and strengthens immunity. Modern research affirms these benefits, linking exercise to prevention of lifestyle disorders, improved longevity, and enhanced quality of life.

Future research should aim to define Ayurvedic measures such as ardhashakti vyayam in quantifiable biomedical terms and assess their outcomes. Bridging classical wisdom with modern evidence can enrich global health strategies with a truly holistic model of wellness.

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