

**Prophylactic and Therapeutic Potentials of Vyayama (physical exercise) -
Literary evidences from Brihatrayi (Greater trio of Ayurveda classics)**

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ABSTRACT

Any physical activity that involves the efforts of the body is termed as ‘Vyayama’ in ayurvedic literature. Vyayama (physical exercise) is mentioned as a part of the daily regimen, whose practice limit is half the energy level of an individual. Acharya Charaka has emphasized that it is the best one amongst all the factors which attribute firmness to the body. While Acharya Sushruta has regarded moderate physical exercise as one amongst the *Ekantahitakara Viharas* (absolutely wholesome regimen conducive to better maintainence of health). Ancient ayurvedic seers have delineated specific guidelines for the practice of Vyayama. Otherwise, it may lead to severe adverse effects. On the other hand, lack of Physical Exercise also leads to the manifestation of several lifestyle-related disorders. In the present era, it has to be practiced in moderation with apt control and proper duration, which may vary according to the individual and season. Hence, the present review work is aimed to explore the prophylactic and therapeutic potentials of Vyayama dealt in the ayurvedic literature in context to *Brihatrayi* (Greater trio of Ayurveda classics).

Keywords: Vyayama, Physical exercise, Physical Activity, *Ekantahitakara Vihara*, *Brihatrayi*, Ayurveda, Lifestyle disorders.

Introduction:

Ayurveda, the ancient science of life, being practiced for thousands of years, advocated Vyayama as a part of the daily regimen, which is to be followed by an individual to maintain a healthy status. Acharya Charaka has defined that any physical movement intended towards bringing stability, enhancing the body’s strength and suitable to the body is coined as Vyayama

(Physical exercise).¹ The work involving the exertion/efforts of the body is known as '*Vyayama*' or Physical exercise. Acharya Sushruta stated that physical exercise helps in the development, enhances luster, compactness of body parts, stimulates the digestive power, maintains healthy status, eliminates idleness, brings stability, robustness, clean and light physique, tolerance to fatigue, exhaustion, thirst, heat, cold etc. It also offers optimum immunity.² This has to be practiced in moderation with intelligent control and proper duration.³ Acharya Charaka has quoted that it is the best one to bring firmness or hardness in the body.⁴ Acharya Sushruta has included it as one of the five types of *Ekantahitakara-vihara*. *Ekantahitakara* means which can be followed by any individual in the universe to maintain a healthy status without any contradictions.⁵ Assessment of a person's capacity to exercise can be ascertained by his or her ability and strength to do physical work. Following capacity for work, strength is inferred as of three types viz. weak, moderate, and good.⁶

Guidelines for the practice of *Vyayama* (Physical Exercise) ^{7,8}

- * The limit for *Vyayama* is up to *Ardhashakti* that is half of one's physical strength.
- * Acharya Chakrapani has clearly stated that the *Vyayama* should be practiced up to the state of *Doshakshaya* (mitigation of dosha) and *Agnivridhhi* (increase digestive power) but should not produce *Shrama* (Exhaustion), *Klama* (Fatigue) etc.⁹
- * This is the rule mentioned for the healthy person, habitually taking an unctuous diet, in the cold and spring season only; while for others and in other seasons like summer and rainy, one should perform to a milder degree.
- * Perspiration, increase in respiratory rate, feeling of lightness in the body, and congestion in cardiac (heart) region and such other organs of the body are signs of reaching the threshold of exercise, and then one should stop the exercise.

Adverse effects of *Ativyayama* (Excessive Physical Exercise) ¹⁰

- Exhaustion fatigue
- Wasting (of body tissues)
- Thirst
- Bleeding from different parts of the body (*Raktapitta*)
- Dyspnea with fainting (*Pratamaka*), coughing (*Kasa*)

- Fever and vomiting are also caused by excessive physical exercise.

Gunas (Properties) of Vyayama:

Although the properties of *Vyayama* were not dealt directly in the literature, yet various indirect references pointing out at it have been found focusing on the physiological effects on the body. For example, Acharya Charaka has quoted it as one amongst ten types of *Langhana* (fasting)¹¹ and one amongst ten types of *Niragni Swedas* (sudation without fire).¹² Acharya Sushruta has also stated that it is one type of *Niragni sweda* indicated to reduce the additional *Kapha* and *Medas* in the body.¹³ Acharya Vagbhata has quoted that it is that which brings lightness in the body, which enhances digestion capacity, reduces extra *Kapha* and *Medas*.¹⁴ Hence, it can be assumed that *Vyayama* has the properties viz. *Laghu* (light), *Ushna* (warm), *Ruksha* (dry), *Tikshna* (sharp), *Kaphahara* (antiphlegmatic), *Medohara* (burns fat) etc.

Exercise, laughing, speaking, walking, sexual activity and staying awake at night should not be practiced in excess by an intelligent person even if they are accustomed (or habituated) to doing such activities.¹⁵ One who indulges in these and such other activities in excess will die or perished like a lion trying to drag a huge elephant.¹⁶ The dietary substances and activities that do not adversely affect the body systems and are liked by the mind are regarded as *Pathya* (wholesome). Likewise, dietary articles and activities that adversely affect the body system and are disliked by the mind are regarded as *Apathya* (unwholesome). However, food articles and drugs do have a variety of effects depending on the dosage, time, mode of preparation, geographical location, the body constitution, and body humors.¹⁷ hence, the physician who desires success in the treatment shall consider the effects of the natural properties of drugs and dietary articles, as well as the usage patterns associated with such articles. Food is like the vitality of life for human beings, but the same may be fatal if ingested improperly. The poison is fatal, but it can be *Rasayana* (vitalizing) if used reasonably and appropriately.¹⁸ In some disease conditions, *Vyayama* is contraindicated whereas in some *Avyayama* (abstinence of physical activity) acts like a causative factor for disease manifestation. For example *Sthaulya* (obesity), *Prameha* (Diabetes), *Krimi* (Worm) etc. Hence, the present review work was carried out to explore the diseases manifested due to *Avyayama* (lack of physical activity), conditions where *Vyayama* (physical exercise) is a wholesome factor as well as a causative factor and the diseases in which it is contra-indicated.

Aim and objectives:

1. To explore the archives of *Vyayama* (physical exercise) articulated in *Brihatrayi* (Greater trio of Ayurveda classics) in context to both the health and disease conditions.
2. To highlight the prophylactic and therapeutic potentials of *Vyayama* (physical exercise) in health as well as disease conditions.

Materials & Methodology:**Materials:****Primary Resources:**

In order to achieve the aim and objectives of the present review work, *Brihatrayi* (Greater trio of Ayurveda classics) viz. Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya, along with their well-known available Sanskrit commentaries were used as primary resources.

Secondary resources:

Secondary resources were subject related published research papers, PG and Ph.D. Dissertations and data compiled from web sources. The key words 'Vyayama in Ayurveda', Physical activity and Physical exercise were used to search the web sources.

Methodology:

The above mentioned primary resources were thoroughly screened to collect the various references of *Vyayama* in different contexts through a manual search strategy. The collected references were segregated under different sections like *Avyayama* as an etiological factor, *Vyayama* as a treatment modality, contra-indications of *Vyayama* and *Vyayama* (in the form of *Ativyayama*) as a causative factor for various diseases.

Observations:

After a thorough screening of the entire Charaka Samhita, a total of seventy three (73) references of *Vyayama* are found. Out of them, five (05) references are traced out in the context of *Avyayama*, eleven (11) references are related to *Vyayama* as a wholesome or a treatment factor, nine (09) references are about *Vyayama* as a contraindication, and eighteen (18) references are related to *Vyayama* as an etiological factor. In Sushruta Samhita, a total of sixty eight (68) references of *Vyayama* are found. Out of them, four (04) references are in the context of *Avyayama*, five (05)

references are *Vyayama* as a wholesome or a treatment factor, fifteen (15) references are contraindications of *Vyayama*, thirteen (13) references are *Vyayama* as a causative factor. In *Ashtanga Hridaya*, a total of thirty three (33) references of *Vyayama* are found. Out of them, nine (09) references are as a wholesome or a treatment factor; four (04) references are contraindications of *Vyayama*, and five (05) references of *Vyayama* found as a causative factor. In *Charaka Samhita* thirty (30) references, *Sushruta Samhita* thirty one (31) references and *Ashtanga Hridaya* twenty five (25) references are not relevant for inclusion under these categories. The details of the diseases caused by *Vyayama* have been shown in table no. 1. Table no. 2 shows the references of *Vyayama* as a wholesome or treatment factor. While the details of contraindications (*Aphaya*) for *Vyayama* are shown in table no. 3. Diseases manifested due to *Vyayama* as a causative factor are shown in table no. 4.

Table No.1: Diseases manifested due to *Vyayama* (lack of physical activity) as a causative factor - References in *Brihatrayi*

Sr. No.	Context	Ref. No.
1.	<i>Madhumeha, Prameha hetu</i>	Ch. Su. 17/79, Ch. Ni. 4/5, Su. Ni 6/3
2.	<i>Sthaulya</i>	Ch. Su. 21/4, Su. Su. 15/32
3.	<i>Kaphaja Udararoga</i>	Ch. Su. 13/29
4.	<i>Kaphaja Madatyaya</i>	Ch. Chi. 24/96
5.	<i>Kapha Prakopa karana</i>	Su. Su. 21/23
6.	<i>Krimi roga hetu</i>	Su. Ut. 54/3

Table No. 2: *Vyayama* as a wholesome or treatment factor- References in *Brihatrayi*

Sr. No.	Context	Ref. No.
1.	<i>Vasanta ritu,</i> <i>Hemanta Ritu</i>	Ch. Su. 6/24; A. H. Su. 3/19; Su. Ut. 64/36
2.	<i>Chhardi Vegadharana</i>	Ch. Su. 7/15; A. H. Su. 4/18
3.	<i>Niragni Sweda</i>	Ch. Su. 14/64; Su. Chi. 32/15
4.	<i>Sthaulya, Karshya</i>	Ch. Su. 21/28; Su. Su. 15/32-33
5.	Types of <i>Langhana</i>	Ch. Su. 22/18; A. H. Su. 14/7

6.	<i>Santarpanajanya Vikara</i>	Ch. Su. 23/8, 23/25
7.	<i>Viruddhahara</i>	Ch. Su. 26/106; Su. Su. 20/22; A. H. Su. 7/47
8.	<i>Prameha</i>	Ch. Chi. 6/50, 6/61; Su. Chi. 11/11; A. H. Chi. 12/33
9.	<i>Majja-Shukra pradoshaja vikara</i>	Ch. Su. 28/28
10.	<i>Kaphaja Madatyaya</i>	Ch. Chi. 24/185
11.	<i>Sweda kshaya</i>	A. H. Su. 11/33
12.	<i>Kaphaja Vikara</i>	A. H. Su. 13/11
13.	<i>Sanyasa</i>	A. H. Chi. 7/114
14.	<i>Urustambha</i>	A. H. Chi. 21/53

Table No. 3: Contraindications for Vyayama - References in Brihatrayi

Sr. No.	Context	Ref. No.
1.	<i>Grishma ritu, Varsha ritu, Pravrit ritu</i>	Ch. Su. 6/29, 6/31; Su.Ut. 64/10, 64/40, 64/49; A. H. Su. 3/27
2.	<i>Snehapana</i>	Ch. Su.13/63
3.	<i>Swedana</i>	Ch. Su. 14/67
4.	<i>Karshya</i>	Ch. Su. 21/29
5.	<i>Jwara</i>	Ch. Chi. 3/332; Su. Ut. 39/157; A. H. Chi. 1/174
6.	<i>Visarpa</i>	Ch. Chi. 21/115
7.	<i>Ashmari</i>	Ch. Chi. 26/76
8.	<i>Vatarakta</i>	Ch. Chi. 29/49; Su. Chi. 5/17
9.	<i>Vrana</i>	Su. Su. 5/39, 19/20, 23/21; A. H. Su. 29/78
10.	<i>Bandhana (Karna sandhi bandhana)</i>	Su. Su. 16/16

11.	<i>Garbhini paricharya</i>	Su. Sha. 3/16
12.	<i>Siravedha</i>	Su. Sha. 8/24
13.	<i>Bhagna</i>	Su. Chi. 3/4; A. H. Ut. 27/35
14.	<i>Bhagandara</i>	Su. Chi. 8/54
15.	<i>Antra Vriddhi</i>	Su. Chi. 19/3
16.	<i>Vishatura</i>	Su. Ka. 6/31

Abbreviations: Ch. Su.- Charakasamhita Sutrasthana, Ch. Ni.- Charakasamhita Nidanasthana, Ch. Chi.- Charakasamhita Chikitsasthana; Su. Su.- Sushrutasamhita Sutrasthana, Su. Ni.- Sushrutasamhita Nidanasthana, Su. Sha.- Sushrutasamhita Sharirasthana, Su. Chi.- Sushrutasamhita Chikitsasthana, Su. Ka.- Sushrutasamhita Kalpasthana, Su. Ut.- Sushrutasamhita Uttaratantra; A. H. Su.- Ashtangahridaya Sutrasthana, A. H. Ni.- Ashtangahridaya Nidanasthana, A. H. Chi.- Ashtangahridaya Chikitsasthana, A. H. Ut.- Ashtangahridaya Uttarasthana.

Table No. 4: Vyayama (Ativyayama) as a causative factor for manifestation of diseases-References in Brihatrayi

Sr. No.	Context	Ref. No.
1.	<i>Vataja Hridroga, Hridroga</i>	Ch. Su. 17/30, Ch. Chi. 26/77
2.	<i>Vidradhi</i>	Ch.Su. 17/92; Su. Ni. 9/16
3.	<i>Kshaya</i>	Ch. Su. 17/76
4.	<i>Garbhopghatakara bhava</i>	Ch. Sha. 8/21
5.	<i>Vataja Jwara</i>	Ch. Ni. 1/9
6.	<i>Vataja Gulma</i>	Ch. Ni. 3/6
7.	<i>Vataja Prameha</i>	Ch. Ni. 4/36
8.	<i>Kushtha</i>	Ch. Ni. 5/6, Ch. Chi. 7/5; Su. Ni. 5/3
9.	<i>Shosha</i>	Ch. Ni. 6/4; Su. Ut. 41/16, 22, 24
10.	<i>Rogotpatti</i>	Ch. Chi. 1/2/3
11.	<i>Vataja Arsha</i>	Ch. Chi. 14/13
12.	<i>Shakhashrita Kamala</i>	Ch. Chi. 16/125; A. H. Chi. 16/46
13.	<i>Kshudra Hikka, Hikka</i>	Ch. Chi. 17/34; Su. Ut. 50/4
14.	<i>Chhardi</i>	Ch. Chi. 20/7
15.	<i>Mutrakrichha</i>	Ch. Chi. 26/32
16.	<i>Ardhavabhedaka</i>	Ch. Si. 9/74
17.	<i>Karshya</i>	Su. Su.15/33

18.	<i>Vata Prakopa</i>	Su. Su. 21/ 19; A.H. Ni. 1/15
19.	<i>Vatarakta</i>	Su. Ni. 1/40; A. H. Ni.16/39
20.	<i>Siraja Granthi</i>	Su. Ni. 11/18; A. H. Ut. 29/10
21.	<i>Kasa, Kshataja Kasa</i>	Su. Ut. 52/4, 52/11
22.	<i>Ushnavata</i>	Su. Ut. 58/22; A. H. Ni. 9/15

Discussion:

In general, *Vyayama* is prescribed or advised for the reduction of aggravated (excess) *Kapha Dosha* and increased *Medo Dhatu*.^{19,20} Hence, *Avyayama* (lack of physical exercise) increases *Kapha Dosha* and *Medo Dhatu*. Table no. 1 illustrates that the diseases enlisted are appeared to be caused by *Avyayama*. In the condition of *Krimi roga*, *Avyayama* acts like a co-causative or associated factor along with *Adhyashana* (intake of diet just after the previous diet) and *Ajirna* (indigestion) as all these three factors togetherly increase *Kapha Dosha*.^{21,22} Moreover, *Avyayama* reduces the immunity, there by leading to frequent worm infestations.

Vyayama having *ruksha,laghu,ushna* etc. properties resulting in decrease of excessive *kleda* and *sneha* of body (leads to *shamana* of *kapha*), increasing *agni* (of all 13 types) with similarity in properties, hence beneficial for proper *Dhatu nirmana* (production of normal body tissues). In both the *Hemanta* (early winter) and *Vasanta* (spring) seasons, *Vyayama* is indicated as the strength of an individual is naturally at its best in both of these seasons. Moreover, both of them are *Kapha* predominant seasons.^{23,24} *Vyayama* is meant to bring lightness in the body.²⁵ Hence it is enlisted as one amongst the ten-fold *Langhana*.²⁶ *Vyayama* reduces the stiffness in the body. It is mentioned as one of the varieties of *Niragni Swedana*.²⁷ *Vyayama* is indicated as a wholesome regimen to be followed in various disease conditions like *Santarpanjanya Vikara*, *Sthaulya*, *Prameha*, and *Kaphaja Madatyaya* because all these are manifested due to increased *Kapha dosha* as well as *Medo Dhatu*. In the management of *Karshya*, *Vyayama* is indicated in the mild form, so as to increase the digestive fire but at the same time it should not increase the *Vatadosha* in excess.²⁸ In the condition of *Chhardi Vegadharanajanya Vikaras*, *Vyayama* is prescribed as a treatment factor followed by the *Shodhana* procedure as it removes or reduces the remaining *Kapha Dosha*. *Vyayama* increases immunity and enhances the digestive capacity of an individual. Thus, those who perform or follow physical exercise regularly can easily tolerate the

adverse effects of *Viruddhahara* (incompatible diets). Physical activity strengthens the joints and muscles; hence it is indicated as a treatment factor for *Majja-Pradoshaja Vikaras* in which they are weakened, for restoring their strength. *Vyayama* is indicated as a wholesome or therapeutic measure in the *Shukra-Pradoshaja Vikaras*, as it might be helpful to remove the obstruction in the channels resulting in production of normal *shukra* dhatu.

In the ayurvedic literature, it is clearly stated that if any wholesome food substance or regimen (activity) is not used or appropriately followed with a view by considering *Matra* (quantum), *Kala* (season), *Deha* (the body), and *Dosha* (body constitution), it may be harmful to the body or becomes unwholesome to the body.^{29,30} Hence, it is recommended that one has to follow the rules and regulations mentioned for *Vyayama* strictly. In table no.3, the contra-indicated conditions are cited. In *Grishma* (summer), *Varsha* (rainy), and *Pravrit* (between summer and rainy) seasons, *Vyayama* is contraindicated as in these seasons, the strength of an individual is comparatively less than other seasons.³¹ *Vyayama* is also contraindicated in both the *purvakarmas* of *Panchakarma*- i.e *Snehana* and *Swedana* as it initiates a negative feedback mechanism. In general, *Purvakarma* is intended to transfer the morbid factors from *Shakha* to *Koshtha*, thereby eliminating from the body through the nearer orifices. If *Vyayama* is performed in such conditions, the aim of these *purvakarmas* will not be fulfilled which will hamper the outcome.^{32,33} *Vyayama* is contraindicated in emaciated condition³⁴ as it leads to the aggravation of *Vata Dosha* in the body, which is life threatening. If anybody performs *Vyayama* in *Jwara* (fever) condition, it may lead to further complications as well as relapses. Hence, *Vyayama* is contraindicated till *Jwara-muktata* (relief from fever).^{35,36} As a matter of fact, *Vyayama* increases *Vata* and *Pitta*. Hence, *Vyayama* is contraindicated in *Visha*, *Bhagna*, *Visarpa*, *Vatarakta*, and *Vrana* conditions as it aids in the progression of these diseases, as well as leads to the development of complications. Moreover, in the condition of *Visha* (poisonous state), *Vyayama* spreads the *Visha* (like *Dosha* from *Koshtha* to *Shakha*) hence contraindicated. In other cases, like *Bhagna* etc. it decreases *Snehamsha* (unctuousness) of the body, which is essential for the reunion and compactness of the affected region or limbs. In general, physical exercise contraindicated in the post-operative conditions as it increases the pain of the individual. Moreover, the strength of an individual is also less. Heavy physical exercise is contraindicated in pregnant ladies as it is *ruksha*, *tikshna* and increases *ushnabhavas* and may lead to either miscarriage/abortion or adversely affect the growth and development foetus in the womb. In diseases like *Amavata*, *Vyayama*, at a specific time is

contraindicated. Though the disease is *Ama* predominant; hence, *Vyayama* should act as wholesome for the disease and part of the treatment protocol, but *Vyayama*, just after meals (particularly *Snigdha Bhojana*) has been considered as one of the main etiological factor of the disease. This can be understood on the basis of concept of *Dosha Gati* (here *Ama*) i.e. movement of *Ama* from *Koshtha* to *Shakha* due to *Vyayama* during the diseased condition.

The irregular patterns and quantum of *Vyayama* cause several diseases. In some disease conditions, *Vyayama* acts as the primary or associated causative factor. The excess amount of *Vyayama* increases *Vata Dosha*. Hence in *Vata* predominant disease conditions, like *Vataja Gulma*, *Vataja Hridroga*, *Vataja Jwara*, and *Kshudra-Hikka*, *Vyayama* acts like a causative factor, which may further progress the disease condition. *Vyayama* generates *Ushnata* (heat) in the body, which leads to *Rakta-dushti*; because of this, *Vyayama* in excess amount acts as a causative factor in some disease conditions such as *Vidradhi*, *Shakhasrita Kamala*, *Siraja granthi*, and *Ushnavata*. *Vyayama* to be performed in the prescribed time, or otherwise, it may lead to adverse reactions. For example, if *Vyayama* performed after eating, it causes various skin diseases as it triggers the free-radical and auto-immune mechanisms in the body.

Conclusion:

All the three classics of Ayurveda have agreed on the fact that *Vyayama* should be an inevitable part of daily regimen for maintenance of health, but it has to be practiced upto *Ardhashakti* of an individual with due consideration of quantum, body constitution and season. There are specific guidelines prescribed or enlisted by ayurvedic seers to get better results through *Vyayama*, which not only help to prevent future ailments but also help to combat the various diseases. Thus the literary evidences regarding the prophylactic as well as therapeutic potentials of *Vyayama* (physical exercise) have been delineated in *Brihatrayi*. Besides this, the present review work might be serve as a database on *Vyayama* exclusively from *Brihatrayi*. which will be further beneficial for planning of new research works by upcoming research scholars and young scientists to generate an evidence-based reliable data on *Vyayama*, thereby the wisdom of ayurvedic treasure gets validated.

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