



**Review Article**

**SYNERGISTIC APPROACH OF AYURVEDIC PRINCIPLES AND LIFE STYLE MODIFICATIONS TO  
COMBAT PSYCHOSOMATIC DISORDERS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The modern world has come to a challenge where most of the untreated conditions are resulting into complications and are burdened over society. To fetch all these, physicians are trying to limit such conditions by applying various scientific theories and methods to explain the basic underlying mechanism of health and diseases. Understanding of physical conditions through psychological approach is the mainstream of such conditions and is termed as Somatoform disorders or psychosomatic illnesses as explained by World Health Organization in international Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems. Stress is the contributing factor that doesn't allow the individual to remain in harmony with the surroundings and threatens the body's ability to maintain homeostasis. Dietary changes, mind-body therapies including meditation, stress relaxation techniques and Yoga can bring harmony back to individual suffering from such disorders.

**KEYWORDS:** Stress, Somatoform disorders, Psychosomatic illness.

**INTRODUCTION**

From civilization to modern world, man has grown up with a challenging environment where he has to come up with the dynamicity of social transformation and every change in the environment or society may bring certain changes in the harmony of individual. The recent trends in medical research have led both clinicians and investigators to reconsider the role of psychosocial factors in understanding many diseases of modern world like Diabetes, Hypertension, Bronchial Asthma, Peptic ulcers, Obesity, Cancer etc. that are not treated by medicine alone. Hypothesis over substantial role of social environmental and its integration in health and disease in general have gained significance emphasis over the last decade. In particular, prospective epidemiological studies have demonstrated association between life stress, social positions or status, and quality of social relationship- that is social networks an individual ties to friends, family work and community through social and religious group and health. All these lead to a paradigm shift that reconsiders the overlap between biological determinants and psychosocial factors in understanding the rising disease burden.

**Aims:** This review highlights the significant insight into the field from multidisciplinary perspective rather than being an exhaustive overview of subject.

**Physiology of Psychosomatic Disorders**

Stress is defined as non specific response of body to any factor which threatens the body's ability to maintain homeostasis. The term stress in this context was first coined by Austro-Canadian Endocrinologist Hans Selye, who defined the general adaptation syndrome in 1936.<sup>[1]</sup>

Psychological stressors have been associated with the activation of sympathetic and hypothalamic pituitary adrenocortical (HPA) axis that results in increased secretion of adrenaline and noradrenaline from adrenal medulla. The hypothalamus produces corticotrophin releasing hormone which triggers the anterior pituitary gland to secrete Adrenocorticotrophin hormone ACTH which in turn activates the adrenal cortex to secrete corticosteroid which has known anti inflammatory effects.<sup>[2]</sup>

Although hormone of sympathetic and adrenal medullar and HPA system are most often discussed, as alteration in a range of other hormones, neurotransmitters and neuropeptides formed in stress may also play a part in the health effect of stress. For example, stressor associated increase in growth hormone and prolactin secreted by pituitary gland.

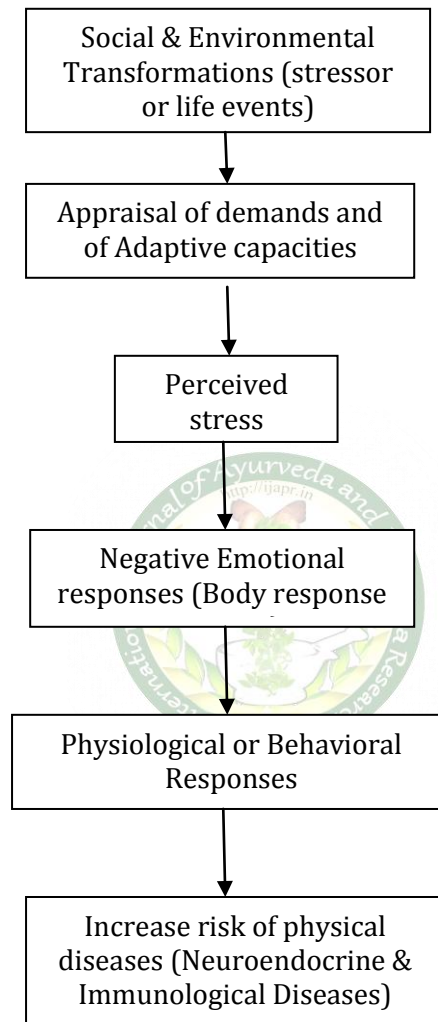
### Stages of stress

**Stage 1/Alarming sign:** when the stressor is identified, the body's stress response is a state of alarm. Adrenaline is produced to bring about the flight or fight response.

**Stage 2/ Resistance:** if stressor persists, body begins to try to adapt to the strain of environment and can't keep this up indefinitely, so its resources are gradually depleted.

### Stress module of disease

**Stage 3/Exhaustion:** all body's resources are eventually depleted and body is unable to maintain normal function. At this point the initial symptoms may reappear like sweating, raised heart rate etc., if extended long term damage results as the capacity of glands and immune system is exhausted resulting in decompensation manifestation into illness e.g., ulcers, depression, cardiovascular problems and mental illnesses.



Both the duration and frequency of experienced stress are important determinants of its impact on health and diseases. Psychological stress and its biological concomitants can last for a few minutes or for years.

Though this modern approach of health and disease has attained central theme of current trends, but it has been the basis of Ayurveda from its beginnings. And it is pertinent to focus on the diseases through multidisciplinary approach- the concomitant role of Mind and Body. An approach that cognizes an object in relation to its surrounding is termed as holistic approach and this is the core concept of determining the cure of rather potential serious conditions of present era of modern world.

### Ayurvedic Concepts of Health & Diseases

According to Ayurveda, Health is a state of wholesome interaction between physical and spiritual components of an individual and any unwholesome interaction between these two factors or between individual and his surroundings results in disease production.

Ayurvedic approach to health and disease is totally psychosomatic in nature. Perverted, Negative and excessive use of time, intellect and sense objects is the threefold cause of both Psychic and Somatic disorders described in Classics.<sup>[2]</sup> These threefold actions having three subdivisions is taken as *Prajnapradha* (Intellectual error)<sup>[3]</sup> and it is pertinent

to state that all these causative factors ultimately results in a stress diathesis and produce illnesses.

Here in a nutshell, factors that are responsible for psychosomatic illness and are described in Ayurveda, are elaborated here:

1. **Metaphysics Level** – its being controlled by *Atma* which don't have any pathology due to its *Nirvikara* (without any ill effects) but previous *Papakarma* (Deedful sins) may initiate pathogenesis.<sup>[4]</sup>
2. **Intellectual Level** – at intellectual level like *Mana* (Mind), *Bhuddhi* (Cognition) *Ahankara* (Ego) etc., *Indriyas* (Sensory System) play an important role.
3. **Body Level** – relation of various *Manas Bhava* (Properties of Mind) and its effects is well reflected on body is obvious like *Bhaya* (Phobia), *Shoka* (Sadness), *Cinta* (Anxiety) etc. have their effect on *Vata Dosha*, *Krodha* (Anger), *Matsarya* etc have their effect of *Pitta*, *Harsha* (Happiness) has its effects on *Kapha*.<sup>[5]</sup>

Similarly Effect of various *Aahar-Vihara* (Dietary regimes & Life styles) is also play an important role.

### Life style modification

Since the disorder correlates both mind and body, hence its treatment also involves measures from both medical and psychological fields. A person with psychosomatic illnesses is first screened for the presence of stress factors, before appropriate treatment is provided. Thus therapies to alleviate these psychological factors like stress, anxiety, depression etc. are essential to heal the physical diseases. Stress and its devastating sequel can be deal with by reducing and later curing the life style disorders by dietary changes, Mind body therapies including meditation, stress relaxation techniques and Yoga.<sup>[6]</sup>

Life style modification involves altering long term habits, typically of eating or physical activity and maintaining the new behavior for months or years. It includes pattern of social relations, entertainment and individual's outlook. A specific lifestyle means a conscious and unconscious choice between two different sets of behavior. Our routine work and day today life depends on social, political, economical, religious, family background and various environmental factors. The lifestyle that leads to more and more tension and unhappiness and ultimately psychosomatic ailments is called improper lifestyle.

There are certain ways by which one can adopt the life style changes:

1. **Know thyself**- complete knowledge of inner self with relation to its surroundings.
2. **Organize your work**- make a plan for year, months or a day, consider environmental changes, holidays, family functions etc.
3. **Make positive changes**- in your overall outlook towards others, in the style of communication, clothes, exercises, hobbies etc.
4. **Learn to calm down yourself**- on your emotions/ thoughts/ actions.
5. **Accept your faults**- and mistakes you have done.

### Behavioral therapy

Behavioral techniques may be useful in conjunction with diet and exercise programs to improve long-term benefits. Behavioral treatment is usually performed by a psychologist who analyses your eating, physical activity and thinking habits. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a classic example which encourages you to change these behaviors and take responsibility for your lifestyle changes. Other strategies may include stress management, relapse prevention, counseling, and techniques such as hypnosis and psychotherapy.

Some basic steps may include:

- **Self monitoring:** Identifying and recording any adverse patterns of behavior.
- **Stimulus control:** This involves removing factors that encourage you to indulge in improper lifestyle.
- **Problem solving:** Identifying and addressing problems associated with eating and physical activity.
- **Reward systems:** You could reward yourself for positive behaviors such as exercise by treating yourself to new clothes.
- **Social support:** Strong social support from your friends and family can improve the conditions. It may be beneficial for you to enroll in a commercial program which offers a social support network.

### CONCLUSION

As the world faces increasing, chronic, psychosomatic, stress and life style disorders, Ayurveda with its different understanding of human body and distinctive approach in understanding diseases, can play a crucial role in future healthcare. Medical scientists are beginning to realize that it is difficult to understand the totality of health by understanding individual system. The reductionist approach of western medicine and its belief in linear causality faces limitations. On the other hand, health and illness are more holistically understood in conceptual framework of Ayurveda, which differ in

fundamental ways. Ayurveda with its holistic perspective and different approach to health and disease and emphasis on diet and lifestyle activities can play an important role. Its experience and expertise accumulated over several millennia should be used to benefit suffering people.

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