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THE LIFESTYLE DISORDER PCOD: AYURVEDIC STRATEGIES FOR MODERN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD) is increasingly recognized as a lifestyle disorder rooted in modern habits such as unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, stress, and irregular daily routines. These factors disturb the equilibrium of *Doshas*, impair *Agni* (digestive fire), and lead to the accumulation of *Ama* (toxins), ultimately affecting the *Artavavaha srotas* (reproductive channels). Ayurveda considers PCOD as a *Santarpanajanya Vyadhi*—an ailment arising from over-nourishment and metabolic imbalance. The Ayurvedic approach aims to address the underlying causative factors by adopting holistic strategies that promote *Dosha* balance, restore *Agni*, and cleanse the *Srotas*. The line of treatment includes *Kapha-Vatahara Chikitsa* to manage excess *Kapha* and vata vitiation, avarana chikitsa to remove obstruction in pathways, and granthi chikitsa to resolve cystic formations. Panchakarma therapies like udwarthana (dry massage), ruksha swedana (dry fomentation), vamana (therapeutic emesis), virechana (purgation), and basti (medicated enema) play a vital role in detoxification, metabolic correction, and weight management. Internal medications with deepana (digestive), pachana (carminative), srotoshodhana (channel-cleansing), and medohara (anti-obesity) properties support the treatment by enhancing ovulation, regulating menstrual cycles, and improving fertility outcomes. Ayurveda also emphasizes lifestyle modifications including pathya ahara (wholesome diet) and vihara (balanced routine) to prevent recurrence. By combining detoxification, internal medications, and lifestyle correction, Ayurveda offers a comprehensive, sustainable solution for modern women facing PCOD as a lifestyle disorder.

KEYWORDS: PCOD, Lifestyle Disorder, Santarpanajanya Vyadhi, Kapha-Vatahara Chikitsa, Pathya Ahara & Vihara, Agni.

INTRODUCTION

Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD) has emerged as one of the most common endocrine disorders affecting women of reproductive age, largely due to modern lifestyle habits.

Rapid urbanization, erratic eating patterns, excessive intake of processed foods, sedentary behaviour, chronic stress, and disturbed daily routines are key factors that disrupt hormonal balance and reproductive health. From an Ayurvedic perspective, these lifestyle irregularities disturb the natural balance of doshas, weaken agni (digestive and metabolic fire), and cause ama (metabolic toxins) to accumulate, blocking the artavavaha srotas (channels responsible for reproductive health). Ayurveda classifies PCOD under Santarpanajanya Vyadhi, indicating that it is a disorder born from over-nourishment and improper metabolic function.

Unlike conventional treatments which often rely on hormonal pills and insulin sensitizers, Ayurveda provides a holistic roadmap to tackle PCOD at its root. It aims to restore doshic harmony, strengthen dhatwagni, remove srotorodha (blockages), and re-establish the normal physiology of the reproductive system. Through Panchakarma therapies, internal herbal medicines, and well-guided lifestyle modifications, Ayurveda offers modern women a safe, sustainable, and natural way to manage PCOD, regularize cycles, and support fertility.

This paper highlights Ayurvedic principles and practical strategies to address PCOD as a lifestyle disorder, bridging ancient wisdom with modern health needs.

AIM

To explore Ayurveda's holistic approach to PCOD as a lifestyle disorder and promote sustainable management through detoxification, herbal treatment, and lifestyle correction.

OBJECTIVES

1. To explain PCOD's Ayurvedic pathophysiology (Santarpanajanya Vyadhi).
2. To identify key lifestyle and dietary causes.
3. To outline Ayurvedic treatments (Panchakarma & internal medicines).
4. To stress diet, routine, Yoga, and Pranayama for prevention.
5. To bridge Ayurveda and modern health practices for PCOD care.

"Medically, Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD) is an endocrine disorder characterized by chronic anovulation, hyperandrogenism, and polycystic ovaries. Modern lifestyle factors — such as unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, obesity, and stress — play a major role in its development and worsening. Hence, PCOD is now widely considered a lifestyle disorder where lifestyle modification forms the cornerstone of management."

Clinical Features

1. Abdominal obesity is seen in about half of the patients. Around 70% of affected women experience menstrual irregularities, such as infrequent periods (oligomenorrhea), complete absence of menstruation (amenorrhea), or abnormal uterine bleeding (DUB). Infertility is also common. A typical sign of anovulation is infrequent menstruation combined with heavy menstrual flow.
2. Notable signs include excessive hair growth (hirsutism) and acne, which are present in roughly 70% of cases, while true virilization is uncommon.
3. Acanthosis nigricans, caused by insulin resistance, appears as thickened, darkly pigmented (greyish-brown) skin. Commonly affected areas include the back of the neck, groin, inner thighs, and armpits.
4. When PCOS is associated with hyperandrogenism, insulin resistance, and acanthosis nigricans, it is termed HAIR-AN syndrome. Hirsutism is assessed using the Ferriman-Gallwey scoring system, with a score above 8 indicating significant excess hair growth.

Diagnosis

According to the Rotterdam criteria established by the ASRM, a diagnosis of PCOS can be made if any two of the following three features are present.

1. Infrequent or absent ovulation
2. Evidence of excessive androgen levels, either clinically or through lab tests
3. Polycystic ovaries on ultrasound, defined by the presence of at least 12 small follicles (each 2–9 mm in size) and/or an ovarian volume greater than 10 cm^3.

Ayurvedic Perspective of PCOD as a Lifestyle Disorder

In Ayurveda, Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD) is primarily viewed as a Santarpanajanya Vyadhi — a disease caused by excessive or improper nourishment, coupled with poor lifestyle practices. The root cause lies in an imbalance of the Kapha and Vata doshas, which is aggravated by today's sedentary habits, irregular sleep, lack of physical activity, mental stress, and consumption of heavy, oily, junk, and processed foods.

When such lifestyle factors persist, they disturb Agni (the body's digestive and metabolic fire), resulting in the formation of Ama (toxins or undigested metabolic waste). This Ama accumulates and blocks the Artavavaha Srotas — the subtle channels responsible for carrying and forming the female reproductive tissues and hormones. Blockage of these channels disrupts the normal maturation and release of ova (eggs), leading to anovulation, irregular cycles, and cyst formation in the ovaries.

Nidana (Causative Factors)

Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) can be understood in Ayurveda by correlating it with Nashartava and Bandhya Yonivyapad. Although there is no direct reference to its specific causation in classical texts, the general causative factors mentioned for Yonivyapad can be applied here.

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Mithyachara

This includes inappropriate food habits (Mithyaahara) such as frequent intake of processed, oily, spicy, and junk foods like pizza, burgers, bread, and carbonated drinks. Likewise, improper daily routines (Mithyavihara) such as a sedentary lifestyle, excessive daytime sleeping (Diwaswapna), late nights (Ratrijagarana), mental stress, constant competition, and negative emotions like envy (Irshya), anger (Krodha), and hatred (Dvesha) contribute significantly. Collectively, these factors lead to weight gain and obesity, which is a major contributing factor in the development of PCOS.

Bijadosha

This covers hereditary and chromosomal anomalies that may predispose an individual to the disorder.

Daiva

Certain causes remain unexplained or idiopathic and are grouped under Daiva. Pradushta Artava.

In this context, Aartava refers to ovarian hormonal functions. Menstrual blood is produced due to cyclical endometrial shedding regulated by the hormones of the hypothalamic-pituitary-

ovarian (HPO) axis. Disturbances in the CYP17 enzyme — which facilitates androgen production in the adrenal glands and ovaries — may be a key pathological factor behind hyperandrogenism in PCOS.

All these factors collectively contribute to the manifestation of this disorder.

Samprapti of PCOD as a Lifestyle Disorder (Ayurveda)

Due to Mithya Ahara-Vihara (improper diet & lifestyle) like excessive intake of guru, snigdha, madhura ahara (heavy, oily, sweet food), sedentary habits, stress, and irregular routine, Kapha and Vata dosha get aggravated. This leads to Agnimandya (weak digestive/metabolic fire) and Ama (toxins) formation. The Kapha causes meda dhatu vriddhi (increase in fat tissue) and obstruction in Artavavaha srotas (reproductive channels). Vata dosha, especially Apana Vata, gets vitiated, disturbing follicular maturation and ovulation. This results in Artava Dushti (menstrual disorders), leading to Nashartava, Bandhya or Pushpaghni Jatharini (anovulatory infertility).

AYURVEDIC TREATMENT FOR PCOS

Ayurvedic treatment aim to remove the aggravated dosha from the artava marga thereby restoring and normalizing the function of arthavavaha srotas. Mode of action of the treatment is in the subtle level of causative dosha's that result in correcting dhatwagni (regain the agneya guna of artava) in which the end result is dhatu poshana leading to proper formation of dhatu. The treatment modalities aim at providing comprehensive care by correcting the ama dosha achieving koshta shuddhi and regulating tridoshas, by this the menstruation is regularized and fertility is restored.

The line of treatment adopted is kapha-vatahara chikitsa, avarana vata chikitsa, sthoulya hara chikitsa, granthi chikitsa.

Panchakarma treatments – Udwarthanam, ruksha swedanam, nabhi pichu, avagaha swedam, vamanam, virechnam, matra vasti, lekhana vasti. Benefits are – reduces body weight, decrease insulin resistance, regulates normal hormone secretion, remove the excess kapha from the srotas, corrects body metabolism, promotes fertility.

Internal medication which have the property of- deepana, pachana, srothoshodhana, medohara, lekahana, kshara guna, brmhana will be prescribed. Benefits are – destroys the cyst, stimulates ovulation, induces menstruation, normalize the function of artava and aides

conception naturally.

Life style modification in PCOD

Pathya-Aahara

While planning Ayurvedic treatment for PCOS, certain dietary and lifestyle guidelines must be followed.

Nidana Parivarjana – One should strictly avoid causative factors, both dietary (Aharaja) and lifestyle-related (Viharaja). Foods with a low glycemic index are recommended to help balance metabolism.

Prefer foods that aid digestion (Deepana Pachana), regulate Vata (Vatanulomana), and pacify Kapha (Kapha Shamana).

Healthy Diet and Lifestyle Principles

Avoid junk and fried foods, carbonated drinks, packaged and processed items. Minimize intake of excess fats, sugars, and refined carbohydrates.

Use containers made of tin or glass instead of plastic for storage. Always consume freshly cooked meals.

Incorporate daily physical activity such as a brisk walk for at least 30 minutes, five times a week.

Adopt a daily practice of Yoga and Pranayama, starting with 15 minutes and gradually increasing the duration.

Maintain a consistent sleep routine, with fixed bedtime and wake-up hours, ensuring 6–8 hours of sound sleep every night.

Early Morning

Begin your day with a glass of warm water.

Drink a glass of water with 1 teaspoon of chia seeds soaked overnight — these boost fertility and help balance hormones.

Also, drink lukewarm water with 1 teaspoon of fenugreek (Methi) seeds soaked overnight and chew the seeds — this may help reduce ovarian cysts.

Early Morning Routine

Start your day by drinking a glass of warm water to activate digestion.

Next, have a glass of water containing one teaspoon of chia seeds that were soaked overnight.

Chia seeds are packed with more than 60% omega-3 fatty acids and about 20% protein, which help enhance egg quality, promote fertility, and regulate testosterone levels.

Also, soak one teaspoon of fenugreek (Methi) seeds in a glass of lukewarm water overnight. In the morning, drink this water and chew the soaked seeds as well. Research indicates that fenugreek seed extract can significantly reduce ovarian volume and cyst size.

Breakfast Ideas

For breakfast, choose foods that boost digestion (Agni), help reduce Kapha-related conditions, and aid weight management. Examples include.

Flatbreads (roti) made from barley, pearl millet (Bajra), or whole wheat flour with bran, paired with vegetables like broccoli, cabbage, mushrooms, cauliflower, tomatoes, okra (Bhindi), green beans, or carrots — all low glycemic index vegetables that help control insulin resistance and blood sugar, thus lowering the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Vegetable pancakes (Cheela) prepared with gram flour (Besan), maize (Makki) flour, or barley flour, mixed with veggies like fenugreek leaves, grated carrot or beetroot, spinach, etc. Use only a teaspoon of ghee for cooking.

Poha — a light, iron-rich dish, high in fiber, antioxidants, and essential B vitamins.

Oats — an excellent source of soluble fiber, which helps manage cholesterol and blood sugar levels by slowing the absorption of fats and sugars. Oats are also rich in B vitamins that can help regulate progesterone levels and support PCOS reversal.

Mid-Morning Snack

Between breakfast and lunch, enjoy seasonal fruits with a sprinkle of Trikatu or Panchakol Churna to aid digestion and metabolism.

Lunch and Dinner Suggestions

For main meals, include.

Unpolished red rice (Rakta Shali), which balances all three doshas, served with legumes such as chickpeas, kidney beans, soybeans, lentils (Masoor, yellow moong dal, black chickpeas), which all have a low glycemic index. Add a side of garlic or mint chutney for taste and added health benefits.

Flatbreads made from barley, pearl millet, or bran-rich wheat flour, combined with the same variety of low GI vegetables mentioned above to maintain healthy blood sugar and insulin levels.

Before Bed

At bedtime, mix half a teaspoon of cinnamon powder into lukewarm water — cinnamon is known to improve insulin sensitivity.

You may also drink a glass of warm low-fat milk with a pinch of turmeric, which has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties and supports blood sugar control, reducing the risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

Seed Cycling

Seed cycling is a natural method that involves including specific edible seeds in your diet during different phases of your menstrual cycle. This practice is known to help manage PCOS symptoms by supporting hormonal balance.

Days 1–14 (Menstrual & Follicular Phase)

In the first half of your cycle, include 1–2 teaspoons of freshly ground flaxseeds and pumpkin seeds daily.

Flaxseeds are rich in lignans — plant compounds that act like phytoestrogens — which help reduce excess androgens and balance estrogen levels. They also provide fiber and omega-3 fatty acids, which aid in lowering blood sugar, cholesterol, inflammation, and the risk of metabolic issues.

Pumpkin seeds supply healthy fats that support hormonal health and help regulate cycles. They contain beta-sitosterol, which blocks the enzyme that converts testosterone to DHT, helping reduce hair fall and cholesterol levels.

Days 15–28 (Luteal Phase)

In the second half of the cycle, switch to black sesame seeds and sunflower seeds.

Sesame seeds are packed with B vitamins (thiamine, niacin, B6), calcium, magnesium, and phytoestrogens, all of which help balance hormones by boosting progesterone levels. Their high zinc content also supports ovulation and eases menstrual discomfort.

Sunflower seeds are rich in vitamin E, which further promotes healthy progesterone levels and helps build a strong endometrial lining.

For best results, continue this seed rotation consistently for at least 3–4 months to naturally support hormonal harmony.

Heal and Balance PCOS with Yoga

Regular practice of specific yogic postures (asanas) and breathing exercises (pranayama) helps regulate endocrine function, balance hormones, and reduce stress by calming adrenal and

cortisol levels in women with PCOS.

1. *Surya Namaskar* (Sun Salutation): This dynamic sequence improves blood circulation, stimulates the reproductive glands, supports menstrual cycle regularity, lowers blood sugar, boosts metabolism, and aids in healthy weight loss.
2. *Baddha Konasana* (Butterfly Pose): Opens the pelvic region, relaxes the groin muscles, eases menstrual discomfort, and calms the mind to reduce stress.
3. *Chakki Chalanasana* (Mill Churning Pose): Stimulates the hormonal glands and supports proper endocrine function, helping balance hormone secretion naturally.
4. *Paschimottanasana* (Seated Forward Bend): Stretches the spine, hips, and hamstrings, tones abdominal organs, supports a regular menstrual cycle, and promotes fertility.
5. Naukasana (Boat Pose): Strengthens the abdominal muscles, increases blood flow to the ovaries, and helps reduce stubborn belly fat.
6. Halasana (Plow Pose): Enhances digestion and metabolism, helps manage weight, and supports menstrual cycle regularity.
7. Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose): Massages and energizes the abdominal and pelvic organs, improving ovarian function.
8. Dhanurasana (Bow Pose): Stimulates the reproductive organs, relieves menstrual pain, and supports cycle regularity.
9. Shavasana (Corpse Pose): Deeply relaxes the body and mind, effectively reduces stress and anxiety, which is crucial for managing PCOS.

Breathing Techniques (Pranayama) for PCOS

1. Anulom Vilom (Alternate Nostril Breathing or Nadi Shodhan Pranayama).

‘Nadi’ refers to energy channels in the body, while ‘Shodhana’ means cleansing. Practicing Nadi Shodhana helps clear these energy pathways, enhancing vitality and calming the nervous system. It effectively reduces stress and anxiety by balancing the flow of vital life force (Prana).

2. Bhramari Pranayama (Bee Breathing):

This technique helps ease mental tension and promotes deep relaxation. The gentle humming sound produced during practice has a calming impact on the mind and nervous system, helping reduce anger, restlessness, and insomnia, while boosting the body’s natural healing ability.

3 Kapalbhati Pranayama (Skull Shining Breath).

‘Kapalbhati’ comes from ‘Kapal’ (forehead) and ‘Bhati’ (shine or light). This cleansing breath

is a dynamic practice that boosts oxygen supply to the body's tissues and organs, improving blood circulation and flushing out toxins. It helps reduce belly fat, regulates glandular functions, and supports the balance of hormones by positively influencing the brain-pancreas-endocrine connection, thus addressing issues like insulin resistance and abnormal lipid levels.

DISCUSSION

Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD) is now widely seen as a lifestyle disorder strongly linked to unhealthy diet, lack of exercise, stress, and irregular routines. These modern habits lead to obesity, insulin resistance, and hormonal imbalances — key factors that trigger PCOD.

Ayurveda describes PCOD as a Santarpanajanya Vyadhi, a disease caused by over-nourishment and metabolic disturbance. Improper diet and lifestyle weaken Agni (digestive fire) and create Ama (toxins), which block the Artavavaha Srotas (reproductive channels) and disturb Kapha and Vata doshas, resulting in cyst formation and menstrual irregularities.

Modern treatment mainly uses hormonal pills and insulin sensitizers, which often give temporary relief but do not tackle root causes. Ayurveda, on the other hand, focuses on cleansing, metabolic correction, and restoring balance through Panchakarma, herbal medicines, and proper diet.

Equally important are lifestyle changes like daily Yoga, Pranayama, a balanced diet, and regular exercise. Yogic practices such as Surya Namaskar, Baddha Konasana, Paschimottanasana, and breathing techniques like Anulom Vilom and Kapalbhati help reduce stress, regulate hormones, and support healthy cycles.

In summary, viewing PCOD as a lifestyle disorder shows the need for an integrated approach that combines modern understanding with Ayurvedic principles. This holistic care helps women manage symptoms naturally, restore fertility, and improve long-term well-being.

CONCLUSION

PCOD has emerged as a common lifestyle disorder driven by poor dietary habits, sedentary living, stress, and irregular routines. Modern medicine offers symptom-based relief but often overlooks the deeper root causes. Ayurveda provides a holistic roadmap, focusing on cleansing, balancing doshas, improving metabolism, and correcting lifestyle factors.

By combining Panchakarma therapies, herbal medicines, a mindful diet, daily Yoga, and

Pranayama, Ayurveda helps restore hormonal balance, regularize menstrual cycles, and support natural fertility.

Thus, an integrated approach that blends ancient wisdom with modern understanding can empower women to manage PCOD naturally and improve their overall health and quality of life.