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Panchakosha Theory and Yoga for Lifestyle Disease Prevention: A Conceptual Framework for Contemporary Health Management

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Abstract

Lifestyle diseases have emerged as a major challenge to contemporary health and public health systems. Inactivity, sedentary behaviour, unhealthy dietary practices, psychological stress, inadequate sleep, and changing patterns of daily living have contributed to increasing risk of obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular diseases and other non-communicable diseases. Although contemporary health management has traditionally emphasized physiological risk factors and clinical treatment, lifestyle diseases are influenced by interconnected physical, physiological, psychological, cognitive, behavioural and experiential dimensions of human life.

The Panchakosha theory, described in the Taittiriya Upanishad, provides a traditional Indian perspective of human existence through five interconnected dimensions: Annamaya Kosha, Pranamaya Kosha, Manomaya Kosha, Vijnanamaya Kosha and Anandamaya Kosha. Yoga encompassing practices such as asana, pranayama, meditation, relaxation, self-awareness, and lifestyle discipline, may be conceptually associated with these dimensions. The present conceptual paper examines the relevance of Panchakosha theory and yoga to lifestyle disease prevention and contemporary health management.

Annamaya Kosha is considered in relation to physical health and lifestyle behavior; Pranamaya Kosha in relation to breathing and physiological regulation; Manomaya Kosha in relation to psychological and emotional balance; Vijnanamaya Kosha in relation to health awareness and self-regulation; and Anandamaya in relation to well-being and positive health. The paper argues that lifestyle disease prevention may be understood more comprehensively when physical health is considered together with psychological balance, behavioral



awareness, self-regulation and well-being. Panchakosha theory therefore offers a culturally grounded conceptual perspective through which yoga can be viewed as part of a multidimensional approach to contemporary health promotion and lifestyle disease prevention.

Keywords

Panchakosha, yoga, lifestyle, non-communicable diseases, holistic health, Indian knowledge system, lifestyle management.

1. Introduction

Lifestyle diseases have become a significant health concern in contemporary society. Rapid urbanization, technological development, sedentary occupations, reduced physical activity, unhealthy dietary patterns, psychological stress, and inadequate sleep have substantially transformed everyday lifestyles. These changes have contributed to increasing risks of chronic conditions such as obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes mellitus, and cardiovascular diseases.

The term lifestyle diseases is commonly used to describe chronic health conditions in which behavioral and environmental factors play an important role. Many of these conditions fall within the broader category of non-communicable diseases. The World Health Organization identifies physical inactivity and unhealthy diet, tobacco use and harmful alcohol use among the important behavioural risk factors for non-communicable diseases [1]. These factors can contribute to raised blood pressure, overweight and obesity, elevated blood glucose and abnormal blood lipids.

The increasing burden of lifestyle-related diseases demonstrates that health management cannot focus exclusively on clinical treatment. Greater emphasis is required on prevention, healthy lifestyle behaviour, psychological well-being, physical activity, self-regulation, and health awareness.

Yoga has gained considerable attention in this context. Although commonly understood as a form of physical exercise, the traditional scope of yoga extends beyond physical postures. It includes breathing practices, concentration, meditation, relaxation, self-observation, and behavioral discipline [9].

The Panchakosha theory provides a distinctive Indian philosophical perspective for understanding human existence through five interconnected dimensions: Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya, and Anandamaya [3].

The present paper conceptually examines the relevance of Panchakosha theory and yoga in relation to lifestyle disease prevention. The central argument is that a multi-



dimensional understanding of human functioning may provide a broader conceptual basis for contemporary lifestyle health management.

2. Lifestyle Diseases: A Contemporary Perspective

Lifestyle diseases are chronic conditions influenced by a combination of behavioral, environmental, biological, psychological, and social factors. They include obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes mellitus, dyslipidaemia, cardiovascular disease, metabolic disorders and some lifestyle associated cancer.

These conditions generally develop through multiple interacting factors rather than a single cause. Genetic predisposition may interact with physical inactivity, unhealthy dietary behaviour, psychological stress, inadequate sleep, environmental influences, and other lifestyle factors.

Physical inactivity is particularly important in the context of lifestyle disease. Insufficient physical activity is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and other chronic health conditions [2].

Dietary behavior is another major determinant. Poor dietary quality, excessive intake of energy-dense foods, and irregular eating patterns may contribute to obesity and metabolic abnormalities.

Psychological stress may also influence lifestyle behavior. Stress can affect food choices, sleep, physical activity, emotional regulation, and adherence to healthy routines.

Thus, lifestyle disease prevention requires attention to several interconnected dimensions of human life rather than focusing exclusively on physical symptoms or biomedical risk factors.

3. Panchakosha Theory: The Conceptual Foundation

Panchakosha is a traditional Indian philosophical concept associated with the Taittiriya Upanishad. The term Pancha means five, while kosha may be understood as a sheath, layer or covering [12]. The theory describes five interconnected dimensions of human existence:

1. Annamaya Kosha
2. Pranamaya Kosha
3. Manomaya Kosha
4. Vijnanamaya Kosha
5. Anandamaya Kosha

These dimensions provide a progressively broader understanding of human functioning.



3.1 Annamaya Kosha

Annamaya Kosha represents the physical, food-derived dimension of the human being. It provides the conceptual foundation for understanding physical health, bodily functioning, nutrition, movement and physical well-being.

3.2 Pranamaya Kosha

Pranamaya Kosha represents the vital dimension traditionally associated with prana. It is commonly discussed in relation to vitality and the regulation of life processes.

3.3 Manomaya Kosha

Manomaya Kosha represents the mental and emotional dimension, including thoughts, feelings and psychological experiences.

3.4 Vijñanamaya Kosha

Vijñanamaya Kosha represents knowledge, understanding, discrimination, awareness, and higher cognitive functioning.

3.5 Anandamaya Kosha

Anandamaya Kosha represents a deeper experiential dimension traditionally associated with bliss, harmony and well-being.

Contemporary educational discussions of Panchakosha similarly describe these dimensions in terms of physical, vital, mental, intellectual, and experiential aspects of human development [5]. Importantly, Panchakosha should not be interpreted as a modern anatomical or physiological model. The value of the theory in the present paper is its ability to provide a multidimensional conceptual understanding of human health.

4. Yoga as a Multidimensional Health System

Yoga is traditionally much broader than physical exercise. Its various components include physical practices, breathing regulation, concentration, meditation, behavioral discipline, and self-awareness. Important components include asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, relaxation, self-observation, and ethical and behavioral principles [9, 11].

In contemporary health settings, yoga is often adapted to promote physical activity, stress management, relaxation, psychological well-being, and healthy lifestyle behaviour. The multidimensional character of yoga makes it conceptually compatible with Panchakosha theory. Asana may be associated with physical health and body awareness. Pranayama may be considered in relation to breathing and regulation. Meditation and relaxation may be relevant to psychological balance. Self-observation and reflective practices may support awareness and self-regulation.



However, individual yoga practices should not be assumed to affect only one kosha. The five dimensions are conceptually interconnected. Thus, yoga may be understood as a practical discipline through which multidimensional health can be cultivated.

5. Annamaya Kosha and Lifestyle Disease Prevention

Annamaya Kosha represents the physical dimension of human existence and has an obvious conceptual relationship with lifestyle diseases. Many lifestyle-related conditions are associated with physical inactivity, excess body weight, poor physical fitness, sedentary behaviour, unhealthy dietary patterns, and reduced movement.

Yoga asana provides opportunities for physical movement, flexibility, balance, muscular endurance, postural awareness, and body awareness. From the perspective of lifestyle disease prevention, Annamaya Kosha may therefore represent the physical foundation of health. A healthy physical dimension involves not only exercise but also appropriate nutrition, adequate rest, healthy body composition, and regular movement. However, physical behaviour is influenced by psychological and cognitive factors. Consequently, physical health cannot be considered independently from the other koshas.

6. Pranamaya Kosha and Physiological Regulation

Pranamaya Kosha is traditionally associated with prana, the vital principle. It would not be scientifically appropriate to equate prana directly with oxygen, respiration, autonomic nervous system activity, or any particular physiological variable. Such an interpretation would reduce a traditional philosophical concept to a modern biomedical construct. Nevertheless, the traditional emphasis on breath provides an important conceptual connection with contemporary health research. Pranayama involves conscious regulation of breathing [13]. Contemporary research may examine its relationship with measurable physiological variables such as respiratory rate, heart rate, heart rate variability, blood pressure, respiratory function, and perceived relaxation. Within the present conceptual interpretation, Pranamaya Kosha may therefore be considered the vital and regulatory dimension of human functioning.

This perspective provides an opportunity to connect traditional yogic understanding with contemporary interest in breathing, relaxation, physiological regulation and stress management while maintaining conceptual distinctions between the two knowledge systems.

7. Manomaya Kosha and Psychological Health

Manomaya Kosha represents the mental and emotional dimension of human existence. This dimension is highly relevant to lifestyle disease prevention because psychological conditions can influence everyday health behaviour. Persistent psychological stress may be associated with emotional eating, sleep disturbance, reduced physical activity, poor adherence to health routines, unhealthy coping behaviours, and psychological distress.



Yoga practices such as meditation, relaxation, pranayama, and mindful movement may be incorporated into health promotion approaches that address psychological regulation [7, 10]. From the Panchakosha perspective, psychological health is not isolated from physical health. Mental and emotional states may influence physical behaviour, while physical experiences may influence psychological well-being. Therefore, Manomaya Kosha provides an important conceptual dimension for understanding lifestyle disease beyond purely physical risk factors.

8. Vijnanamaya Kosha and Lifestyle Behaviour

Vijnanamaya Kosha represents knowledge, understanding, discrimination, awareness, and self-reflection. This dimension is particularly relevant to lifestyle disease prevention because knowledge alone does not necessarily result in healthy behaviour. An individual may know that regular physical activity is beneficial, but remain physically inactive. Similarly, awareness of healthy dietary practices does not necessarily guarantee healthy food choices. Sustainable lifestyle behavior requires health awareness, self-monitoring, decision making, self-regulation, behavioral control, and reflection. Vijnanamaya Kosha may therefore be conceptually understood as the awareness and self-regulatory dimension of lifestyle behaviour.

Yoga practices involving self-observation, concentration, meditation, and reflective awareness may potentially support this dimension. In this context, yoga is not considered merely a physical activity; it may also be viewed as a discipline that encourages individuals to become more conscious of their habits, choices, responses, and patterns of behaviour. Such awareness may be relevant to the development and maintenance of healthier lifestyles.

9. Anandamaya Kosha and Positive Well-being

Anandamaya Kosha represents a deeper experiential dimension traditionally associated with bliss, harmony and inner well-being. For contemporary health discussions, it should not be reduced to a single measurable biomedical variable. It may instead be considered conceptually in relation to subjective well-being, life satisfaction, positive mental health, quality of life, inner harmony, and overall well-being. Contemporary approaches to health increasingly recognize that health is not simply the absence of disease. Positive well-being and quality of life are also important aspects of healthy living. From this perspective, lifestyle disease prevention should not be limited to reducing disease risk. It should also encourage a balanced, meaningful and sustainable way of living. Anandamaya Kosha therefore provides a conceptual dimension concerned with positive health and well-being.



10. Implications for Lifestyle Disease Prevention and Health Promotion

The Panchakosha perspective has potential relevance for contemporary lifestyle disease prevention and health promotion because it encourages consideration of multiple dimensions of human functioning. At the physical level, attention can be given to regular movement, physical fitness, body awareness, nutrition, and healthy daily routines. At the physiological level, breathing practices and relaxation may be incorporated into lifestyle management programs [6, 8]. At the psychological level, yoga-based practices may be used as complementary approaches to stress management, emotional regulation, and psychological well-being. At the cognitive and behavioral level, self-awareness, reflection, decision making, and self-regulation can be emphasized as important components of sustainable lifestyle change. At the well-being level, the focus can extend beyond disease avoidance toward positive health, quality of life, resilience, and overall well-being.

This integrated perspective may have particular relevance to physical education and yoga education. Physical education can extend beyond the development of physical fitness by incorporating healthy behaviour, stress management, self-awareness, and lifelong wellness. Similarly, yoga education can move beyond the teaching of postures and introduce students to broader dimensions of yogic living. The Panchakosha perspective may also provide a culturally relevant conceptual orientation for health promotion programs in educational institutions, workplaces and communities. However, yoga should be regarded as a complementary component of health promotion and not as a replacement for appropriate medical diagnosis or treatment of established chronic diseases.

11. Conclusion

Lifestyle diseases represent a complex contemporary health challenge influenced by physical inactivity, sedentary behaviour, unhealthy dietary practices, psychological stress, inadequate sleep and other lifestyle factors. The Panchakosha theory provides a distinctive Indian philosophical perspective for understanding human existence through five interconnected dimensions: Annamaya, Pranamaya, Manomaya, Vijnanamaya and Anandamaya. Within the conceptual perspective developed in this paper, these five dimensions can be related respectively to physical health, physiological regulation, psychological balance, lifestyle awareness and self-regulation, and positive well-being. Yoga provides a practical discipline through which several of these dimensions may be addressed through asana, pranayama, meditation, relaxation, self-awareness, breathing practices and lifestyle discipline. The central conceptual relationship can therefore be expressed as: Panchakosha theory and yoga leading to multidimensional health, a healthy lifestyle, and lifestyle disease prevention.



This relationship should be understood as a conceptual interpretation rather than a claim of direct biomedical causation. Panchakosha is a traditional philosophical framework and should not be presented as equivalent to modern physiological systems. Nevertheless, integrating Panchakosha theory with yoga offers a culturally grounded perspective for understanding lifestyle disease prevention beyond a purely physical or biomedical approach. It emphasizes that sustainable health involves the body, physiological regulation, mind awareness, behaviour and overall well-being. Such a perspective may contribute to contemporary discussions in physical education, yoga education, health promotion, wellness and lifestyle disease prevention, particularly within the broader context of the Indian Knowledge System.

Author Contributions

Single-authored manuscript: conceptualisation, writing — original draft, and writing — review and editing were carried out by A. K. Shukla, who has read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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