

Ayurvedic Insights on Prameha: Traditional Approaches to Managing Diabetes in the Modern Fast-Food Era

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Abstract: *The rise of lifestyle diseases in the fast-food era includes Prameha, which closely resembles diabetes mellitus. Prameha is extensively described in Ayurvedic texts, including the Vedas and the three primary Ayurvedic texts: Caraka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Vagbhata Samhita. The pathogenesis of Prameha involves ten Dushyas, with Kapha being the primary dosha. The treatment principle is to counteract Kapha dosha through various regimens, medications, and diets targeting medas (fat tissue). Unlike modern medicine's lifelong medication and insulin injections, Ayurveda focuses on rejuvenating the body to control blood sugar levels and prevent complications. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased the prevalence of diabetes and heart disease due to heightened fear and anxiety. Ayurvedic treatment for Madhumeha (diabetes) involves a holistic approach, including lifestyle changes, medication, and a balanced diet, to ensure a healthy and active life. Diabetes Mellitus, a common non-communicable disease in India, is characterized by chronic hyperglycemia and disturbances in carbohydrate, fat, and protein metabolism. In Ayurveda, it is known as Madhumeha, a type of Vataj Prameha where the patient passes honey-like sweet urine. Main causative factors include a sedentary lifestyle, excessive intake of dairy products, sweets, non-vegetarian foods, jaggery, and heavy meals. Ayurveda advocates managing Madhumeha conservatively through diet, exercise, and medication. Herbs such as Khadir, Lodhra, Guduchi, Shilajit and Jambu have proven effective in controlling Madhumeha. This review highlights the Ayurvedic perspective on managing Prameha and the potential of Ayurvedic herbs in treating this condition.*

Keywords: Vataj Prameha, Diabetes Mellitus, Madhumeha, Ayurvedic Herbs, hyperglycemia

1. Introduction

Ayurveda mentions three major vital places in the body which includes Hridaya, Sirsa and Vasti, known as Trimarma.^[1] Prameha, a group of diseases affecting the Vasti (bladder), is characterized by excessive passage of turbid urine. The term Prameha is derived from 'Miha - Sechane,' meaning watering. 'Pra' implies an excess of urine in both frequency and volume.^[2] Hence, Prameha signifies excessive urination ("Prabhut-mutrata") and turbid urine ("Aavil-mutratha"). If neglected, any type of Prameha can ultimately develop into Madhumeha due to the nature of the illness.^[3] Prameha refers to a collection of urinary disorders, particularly those marked by excessive urination with various abnormal attributes due to imbalances in doshas. In Madhumeha, the urine appears sweet and honey-like. This disorder is classified into two main types: one due to Vata aggravation resulting from tissue depletion (Dhatukshya) and the other due to obstruction caused by Kapha and fat tissue (Meda Avarana) combined with aggravated Vata.^[4]

Ayurvedic texts explain the involvement of Ama (toxins), Agni (digestive fire), Meda (fat tissue), and Ojas (vital essence) in the development of Prameha. It is a fast-growing global disease and silent killer, classified into ten types of Kaphaja, six types of Pittaja, and four types of Vataja.^[5] Despite this classification, all three Doshas (Vata, Pitta, and Kapha) are involved in Prameha Vyadhi (disease).^[6] Prameha is considered Mahagada, a difficult-to-cure disease, as it involves all Doshas and almost all Dhatus (tissues).^[7]

Diabetes Mellitus is a multifaceted metabolic disorder characterized by sustained high blood sugar levels. It involves

disturbances in the metabolism of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins.^[8]

Ayurvedic scriptures, including the Vedas and the foundational texts known as Bruha-trayi (Caraka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita, and Vagbhata Samhita), provide extensive insights into Prameha. The progression of the disease involves ten specific bodily tissues, with Kapha being the primary contributing dosha. Treatment principles in Ayurveda focus on mitigating Kapha through various therapeutic regimens, medications, and dietary adjustments targeting fat tissue. Unlike modern medical approaches, which often require continuous medication and insulin injections, Ayurveda emphasizes rejuvenating the body to manage blood sugar levels and prevent complications.^[9] The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased the incidence of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases due to heightened stress and anxiety. Ayurvedic management of Madhumeha includes comprehensive lifestyle changes, appropriate medications, and dietary plans to enhance overall well-being.

Diabetes Mellitus, common in India, is similar to Madhumeha in Ayurveda and is marked by persistent high blood sugar levels and metabolic disruptions. Major contributing factors include sedentary lifestyles, excessive intake of dairy, sweets, non-vegetarian foods, jaggery, and heavy meals. Ayurvedic management promotes a conservative approach with diet, exercise, and medicinal herbs. Shilajit, Khadir, Lodhra, Guduchi, and Jambu are known for their effectiveness in controlling Madhumeha.

Ayurveda categorizes Prameha as Sadhya (curable), Yapya (manageable), and Asadhya (incurable) depending on Dosha involvement. Sushruta described Prameha based on physical appearance as Sahaja Prameha (congenital, related to Bija

Dosha) and Apathyanimittaja (due to lifestyle and aging). Ayurveda identifies Bahudravasleshma and Bahuabadhameda as the main pathological factors for Prameha. Nidana Sevan (etiological factors) aggravates Kapha, which vitiates Meda Dhatu, leading to the clinical manifestation of diabetes.

Aims and Objectives

- To establish that Madhumeha is both a metabolic and urinary disorder.
- To explore the primary management strategies for Madhumeha, including the use of Ayurvedic herbs.
- To evaluate the significance of lifestyle modifications in managing Madhumeha.

2. Material and Method

A comprehensive review of Ayurvedic texts, journals, research papers, articles, and reputable websites was conducted to study the Ayurvedic approach to Prameha and assess its effectiveness in the manifestation and management of Prameha in relation to Diabetes Mellitus.

Nidana (Etiology) of Prameha ^[10, 11]

- Prameha arises from two main etiological factors. The first is Sahaja, which is hereditary or congenital and related to the morbidity of shukra (semen) and shonita (blood). The second factor is Apathyanimittaja, which results from improper diet and lifestyle habits.
- Contributing factors include a sedentary lifestyle, excessive daytime sleeping, and consumption of meat soup from domestic or aquatic animals, dairy products, jaggery, and similar items. The intake of Kapha-promoting substances, laziness, and consumption of cold, unctuous, fatty, and sweet foods also contribute to the development of Prameha.
- Foods, drinks, and activities that aggravate meda (fat tissue), mutra (urine), and Kapha are significant etiological factors for Prameha. Moreover, all factors associated with santarpanotha vikara (diseases caused by over-nutrition) are responsible for the onset of Prameha.

According to Acharya Charak

आस्यासुखं स्वप्नसुखं दधीनि ग्राम्यौदकानूपरसाः पर्यासि। नवात्रपानं गुडवैकृतं च प्रमेहेहेतुः कफकृच्च सर्वम्॥ (च.चि.6/4)

Extended periods of sitting on soft cushions, lack of physical activity, excessive sleeping, and the consumption of curds, meat from domestic, aquatic, or marshy animals, milk and its derivatives, fresh grains, fresh water, and sugary puddings made with jaggery, among other similar factors, contribute to the increase of Kapha in the body. According to Ayurveda, these lifestyle and dietary habits are identified as causes for the development of Prameha (diabetes). ^[12]

Samprapti (Pathogenesis) of Prameha (diabetes)

According to Acharya Charka

मेदश्च मांसं च शरीरजं च क्लेदं कफो बस्तिगतं प्रदूष्यकरोति मेहान् समुदीर्णमुष्णैस्तानेव पित्तं परिदूष्य चापि॥
क्षीणेषु दोषेष्ववकृष्य बस्तौ धातून् प्रमेहाननिलः करोति। दोषो हि बस्तिं समुपेत्य मूत्रं सन्दूष्य मेहाञ्जनयेद्यथास्वम्॥ (च.चि.6/5-6)

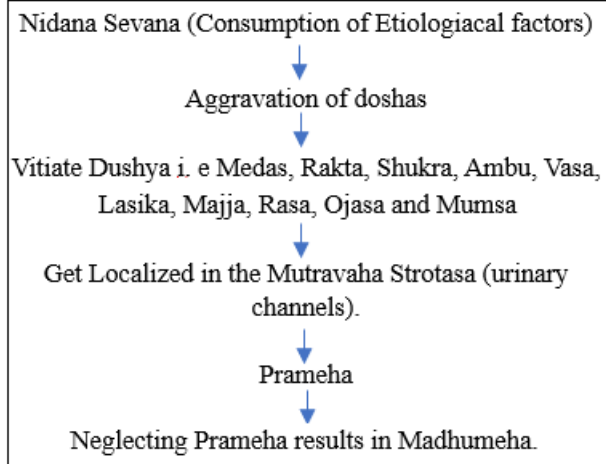


Figure: General samprapti chakra of Prameha (diabetes)

Acharya Vagbhatta explains the pathogenesis (Samprapti) of Madhumeha, stating that it can develop in two main ways: first, through the aggravation of Vata caused by Dhatukshya (tissue depletion), and second, by the obstruction of Vata due to the covering by other doshas. Madhumeha resulting from Dhatukshya usually occurs in individuals who are thin and weak due to the loss of Ojas (vital essence), a condition known as Ojakshaya (imbalance in Ojas). In Margavaranjanya Madhumeha, the vitiated Kapha and Meda block the passage of Vata. The obstructed Vata becomes further aggravated and carries Ojas to the Basti (urinary bladder), leading to the manifestation of Madhumeha. ^[13]

Specific Pathogenesis ^[14]

- Kaphaja Prameha: The disturbed Kapha infects the fat, flesh, and bodily fluids gathered in the urinary bladder, leading to 10 types of Prameha.
- Pittaja Prameha: Likewise, Pitta, aggravated by the intake of hot foods and other factors, contaminates the fat, flesh, and bodily fluids, resulting in 6 types of Pittaja Prameha.
- Vataja Prameha: When Pitta and Kapha reduce in quality and quantity relative to Vata, the Vata dosha becomes aggravated and draws tissues such as fat (Vasa), marrow (Majja), vital essence (Ojas), and lymph (Lasika) into the urinary bladder, causing 4 types of Vataja Prameha.

Poorvarupa of prameha ^[15]

During the premonitory stage of Prameha, the aggravation of all three doshas leads to a range of characteristic symptoms. These include-

- Sweda (Sweat)
- Angagandha (Body odor)
- Shithilangta (Weakness and lethargy)
- Shayyasana (lying down and resting in bed)
- Ghana Angata (heaviness)
- Keshha, Kha, Nakha Ativridhi (Excessive growth of hair, nails)
- Sheeta Priyata (Preference for cold)
- Gala Talu Shosha (Dryness of the throat and palate)
- Madhura Aasya (Sweet taste in the mouth)
- Kara Pada Daha (Burning sensation in hands and feet)
- Mutre Pipilika (Presence of ants around the urine)

Signs and Symptoms (Rupa) ^[16]

- Frequent urination (Prabhootha Mutrata)
- Turbid urine (Aavil Mutrata)

- Sticky sensation on the body (Anga Snehana)
- Excessive thirst (Atipipasa)
- Urine becomes sweet like honey.
- The entire body exhibits a sweet characteristic.

According to Sushrutacharya

- Individuals with Sahaja Meha (congenital diabetes) are usually Krisha (thin built).
- Individuals with Apathyanimittaja Meha (diabetes due to improper diet and lifestyle) are usually Sthula (obese).

Classification of Prameha:

- Kaphaj Prameha: 10
- Pittaj Prameha: 6
- Vataj Prameha: 4

Classification of Diabetes Mellitus^[17]

- 1) Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus (IDDM): Previously known as juvenile-onset diabetes, Type 1 diabetes is typically diagnosed in children, teenagers, and young adults. It can also develop in adults. This autoimmune disease results in the destruction of the pancreas's beta cells, leading to absolute insulin deficiency.
- 2) Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (NIDDM): Formerly referred to as adult-onset diabetes, Type 2 diabetes is the most common form and often has a gradual onset. It is frequently seen in adults but can occur in children as well. Significant weight loss is rare unless hyperglycemia is severe, and ketosis is uncommon. Familial inheritance is very common in Type 2 diabetes. The disease usually starts with insulin resistance, accompanied by compensatory hyperinsulinemia. Over time, the pancreas loses its ability to produce sufficient insulin in response to meals, resulting in clinical diabetes.

Differential Diagnosis

If urine is yellow or has blood without prior symptoms of Prameha, it should be diagnosed as Rakta-Pitta instead. This helps differentiate Prameha from other urinary disorders based on specific urine color changes and the presence of blood, without early signs.^[18]

Prognosis (Sadhya-Asadhyata) and Incurability^[19]

- Kaphaja Prameha: curable (Sadhya) due to its treatable nature.
- Pittaja Prameha: Manageable (Yaapya) but not completely curable, as it tends to fluctuate.
- Vataja Prameha: Incurable (Asadhyata).

Diabetes syndrome present from birth due to genetic defects is considered incurable. If not properly treated, all stages of diabetes syndrome can lead to severe complications such as chronic renal failure (CRF), retinopathy, and multiple organ failure, which are also deemed incurable. These conditions highlight the importance of early and effective management to prevent severe complications.

Line of treatment^[20]

- a) **For Krisha Pramehi (Type 1 Diabetes Mellitus patients):** Advised to take Brighan medication (anabolic) to promote the increase of Dhatus (tissues) in the body and Diet should support the nourishment and growth of bodily tissues.

- b) **For Apathyanimittaja Rogi (Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus patients):** Obese diabetic patients with optimal body strength and a significant increase in Doshas should undergo Samshodhan (purification) of the body. This includes:

- Snehana (Oleation)
- Shodhana (Detoxification)
- Virechana (Purgation)
- Vasti (Therapeutic enema, both Asthapana and Niruha types)
- Shamana (Pacification)

Additionally, incorporating exercise and lifestyle modifications is crucial:

- Regular physical activity and exercise
- Practicing Yogasana and Pranayama (breathing exercises)
- Maintaining a regular routine for sleep and food.
- Following Dincharya (daily regimen) and Ritucharya (seasonal regimen).

Ayurvedic Herbs in the Management of Prameha (Diabetes Mellitus)-

Since Kapha dosha predominates in Prameha, and the affected tissue (Dusya) Meda (fat) shares a similar nature, Ayurveda recommends using drugs with Tikta (bitter), Katu (pungent), and Kasaya (astringent) Rasa for treatment. Acharya Susruta specifically highlights the efficacy of a decoction made from Salasaradi Gana herbs combined with Shilajatu (Shilajit) for treating "Prameha/Madhumeha".

Drugs^[21]

- Haridra (Curcuma longa)
- Nimba (Azadirachta indica)
- Karela (Momordica charantia)
- Bela (Aegle marmelos)
- Haritak (Terminalia chebula)
- Patola (Trichosanthes dioica.)
- Guggulu (Commiphora wightii)
- Amalaki (Phyllanthus emblica)
- Musta (Cyperus rotundus)
- Daruharidra (Berberis aristata)
- Arjuna (Terminalia arjuna)
- Khadir (Acacia catechu)
- Lodhra (Symplocos racemosa)
- Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia)
- Patol (Trichosanthes dioica)
- Vata (Ficus bengalensis)
- Gudmar (Gymnema sylvestre)
- Shilajit (Purified Bitumen)
- Shigru (Moringa oleifera)
- Usir (Vetiveria zizanioides)
- Jambu (Syzygium cumini)

Formulations use in Prameha (Diabetes Mellitus)-^[22, 23]

- a) Amalaki Curna (Phyllanthus emblica) – with honey (A.H.Ut. 40/48)
- b) Guduchi swarasa (Tinospora cardifolia) – with honey (A.H.Ci 12/6)
- c) Vati: Chandraprabha Vati, Shivagutika, Shilajativati, Vati, Guggulu, Panchatiktaghrita Guggulu.
- d) Avaleha: Saraleha (Bhavaprakash), Gokshuradyavaleha (Bhavaprakash)
- e) Kwatha: Darvi, Surahwa, Triphala, Musta, Vishala.

- f) Aasav/ Aarisht: Madhwaasav, Dantyaasav, Lodhrasav.
 g) Other formulations: ^[24, 25]
- Nyagrodhadi churna, Eladi churna, Mustadi kwatha, Vidangadi kwath
 - Chandrakala gutika
 - Chandraprabha vati
 - Shalmali grhuta
 - Dadimadi ghruta
 - Vaidangadi lauha
 - Devtarvyarishta

3. Discussion

Ayurveda offers a comprehensive approach to understanding and managing Diabetes Mellitus (Madhumeha) by integrating traditional principles with modern insights. It emphasizes balancing doshas (Vata, Pitta, Kapha) and highlights the role of genetics (Sahaja) and lifestyle factors (Apathyanimittaja) in the condition. Madhumeha is viewed as a systemic disorder, not just high blood sugar, affecting various bodily functions. Dosha imbalances, especially Vata and Kapha, play a key role. Ayurveda's focus on body rejuvenation, dietary regulations, herbal medications, and lifestyle modifications helps control blood sugar and prevent complications.

4. Conclusion

Ayurvedic management of Madhumeha combines dietary guidelines, lifestyle changes, and medicinal herbs with conventional treatment, emphasizing dosha balance and tissue health. Herbs like Shilajit, Khadir, Lodhra, Guduchi, and Jambu, along with lifestyle adjustments, form the core of its therapy. Early detection and intervention are crucial. Ayurveda also addresses stress management and mental well-being, making it a valuable complement to modern medicine.

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