DOI: 10.53469/jcmp.2026.08(01).13

Exploring the Mechanism of Traditional Chinese Medicine Yoga for Weight Management Based on Qi and Blood Theory

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Abstract: ***Obesity has become a significant challenge in global public health, characterized by complex pathological mechanisms closely linked to metabolic disorders, endocrine imbalances, and lifestyle factors. Integrating traditional Chinese medicine theory with classical yoga systems, Chinese medicine yoga emerges as an innovative health intervention. Centered on the core target of "qi and blood harmonization," it employs multidimensional approaches—including postural exercises, breath regulation, and meridian stimulation—to achieve dual objectives of weight management and holistic health enhancement. This paper systematically examines the compatibility between TCM qi-blood theory and yoga practice, delves into the core mechanism of "qi-blood nourishment for weight management" in TCM yoga, and offers new insights for comprehensive obesity intervention.***

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Medicine Yoga, Qi and Blood Theory, Obesity, Weight Management, Meridian Stimulation.

1. Introduction

In the TCM framework, obesity is often categorized under syndromes such as "phlegm-dampness" and "obesity." Its core pathogenesis is attributed to impaired qi and blood circulation and dysfunction of the zang-fu organs, particularly characterized by deficient spleen-stomach transformation, internal phlegm-dampness accumulation, and qi stagnation with blood stasis [1]. Traditional weight-loss methods like dieting and intense exercise may yield short-term results but often lead to qi and blood depletion, high rebound rates, and adverse effects such as menstrual irregularities and fatigue. Originating in ancient India, yoga is a mind-body regulation system. Its asanas (postures), pranayama (breathing techniques), and dhyana (meditation) emphasize "unity of body and mind," aligning closely with Traditional Chinese Medicine's principles of "holistic perspective" and "differentiated diagnosis and treatment. "TCM Yoga integrates meridian theory and qi-blood principles into yoga practice. Through targeted asana design, breath guidance, and acupressure stimulation, it promotes qi-blood circulation and harmonizes organ functions, thereby achieving "nourishing slenderness" — not merely weight loss, but improving body composition (reducing fat percentage, increasing muscle mass) while enhancing metabolic function and overall health [2].

2. Core Alignment Between Traditional Chinese Medicine Qi and Blood Theory and Yoga

2.1 Qi and Blood as the Foundation of Nourishing Slimness

TCM posits that "qi" serves as the fundamental driving force of life activities, responsible for propulsion, warming, and consolidation; while "blood" nourishes and moistens organs and tissues. Qi and blood share a common origin and are mutually dependent [3]. Obesity often involves three pathological mechanisms: qi deficiency, blood stasis, and phlegm-dampness. Qi deficiency weakens propulsive force, slowing blood circulation and causing stasis. Inadequate qi transformation leads to fluid retention and phlegm accumulation. The interplay of phlegm-dampness and blood stasis further disrupts metabolism, creating a vicious cycle: "obesity → qi-blood imbalance → increased obesity." Yoga's core principle lies in "regulating qi." Through specific postures that stretch meridians and breath control that modulates qi flow, it aligns perfectly with Traditional Chinese Medicine's therapeutic principle of "harmonizing qi and blood."

2.2 Correspondence Between Meridians and Yoga Poses

The meridian system in TCM serves as pathways for qi and blood circulation. Among these, the Spleen-Stomach, Liver-Gallbladder, and Bladder meridians are most closely linked to obesity: The Spleen-Stomach meridian governs transformation and transportation; its dysfunction leads to internal phlegm-dampness. The Liver-Gallbladder meridian governs free flow; its dysfunction causes qi stagnation and blood stasis. The Bladder meridian governs excretion; its dysfunction results in water-damp retention. Classic yoga poses such as Cat-Cow Pose, Vajrasana (Diamond Pose), and Crescent Pose precisely target stretches and compressions along these meridian pathways: Cat-Cow Pose stretches the Bladder Meridian along both sides of the spine, promoting fluid metabolism; Vajrasana clears the three Yin meridians of the lower limbs (Spleen, Liver, and Kidney Meridians), enhancing spleen-stomach transformation; Crescent Pose fully stretches the Bladder Meridian, improving qi stagnation and blood stasis. This targeted correspondence between "posture-meridian-viscera" makes Traditional Chinese Medicine Yoga more precise in harmonizing qi and blood [4].

3. Core Mechanism of "Qi and Blood Nourishing Leanness"

3.1 Spleen and Stomach Regulation

TCM holds that the spleen governs transformation and transportation. When spleen-stomach function is deficient: 1) Nutrient essences from food cannot be transformed into qi and blood, leading to "qi deficiency"; 2) Dampness cannot be properly metabolized, accumulating as phlegm to form "internal retention of phlegm-dampness"; 3) Impaired transformation causes food stagnation, further burdening the spleen-stomach and creating an initial cycle of "spleen deficiency → phlegm-dampness → obesity" [5]. Modern medical research confirms that obese individuals commonly exhibit reduced digestive enzyme activity, dysbiosis of the gut microbiota, and insulin resistance. These findings closely align with the clinical manifestations of "spleen-stomach deficiency" in Traditional Chinese Medicine (fatigue, abdominal distension, loose stools), suggesting a direct correlation between spleen-stomach function and metabolic levels [6]. Therefore, nourishing qi and blood for weight management primarily involves restoring spleen-stomach function rather than dietary restriction: 1) Warming and Activating Spleen Yang: The spleen thrives on warmth and abhors cold; spleen-stomach deficiency often accompanies insufficient spleen yang. Moxibustion at Zusanli (ST36) and Zhongwan (CV12) acupoints, or consuming medicinal foods like dried ginger and Chinese yam, can enhance spleen yang's transformative capacity and alleviate "internal water retention." 2) Strengthen the spleen and dispel dampness: Use spleen-tonifying and dampness-expelling herbs like Poria cocos and Coix seed, combined with abdominal massage and gentle yoga poses (e.g., Hero Pose, Child's Pose) to promote gastrointestinal motility and reduce phlegm-damp accumulation; 3) Harmonizing Spleen-Stomach Qi: Imbalance in spleen-stomach qi leads to abdominal distension and poor appetite. Using qi-regulating ingredients like dried tangerine peel or citron, or practicing abdominal breathing exercises, can unblock spleen-stomach qi and enhance digestive efficiency. Clinical studies indicate that after solely regulating the spleen and stomach, obese individuals show significantly reduced spleen deficiency symptom scores, increased proportions of beneficial gut bacteria (e.g., bifidobacteria), and decreased fasting insulin levels, laying a metabolic foundation for subsequent qi and blood activation [7][8].

3.2 Unblocking Meridians to Reduce Phlegm-Dampness and Stagnation

Following restoration of spleen-stomach function, the postures in TCM yoga emphasize gradual practice rather than intense exertion. They follow a "stretch-compress-release" cycle to mechanically stimulate meridian circulation: stretching releases meridian blockages, compression enhances local blood flow, and release facilitates qi and blood return. Simultaneously, integrating "breathing techniques" and "breath control methods" enhances diaphragmatic movement, massages abdominal organs, promotes spleen-stomach transformation, and reduces phlegm-damp accumulation [9]. Moreover, yoga meditation reduces cortisol levels, diminishing stress-induced fat accumulation (particularly visceral abdominal fat), thereby breaking the pathological chain of "stress → elevated cortisol → visceral obesity" [10].

In yoga, supine poses such as the Bridge Pose stimulate the thoracic and abdominal cavities by elevating the hips and stretching the chest, thereby enhancing spleen and stomach motility and boosting qi and blood production. Meanwhile, standing balance poses like Mountain Pose and Tree Pose regulate qi and blood circulation in the lower limbs, improving "lower-body obesity" caused by spleen deficiency. Clinical studies reveal that after TCM yoga intervention, obese individuals experience significant reductions in body mass index (BMI) and waist circumference, alongside marked improvements in spleen deficiency symptom scores (fatigue, abdominal distension, etc.), indicating concurrent enhancement of organ function and qi-blood status [11].

4. Outlook and Limitations

"Qi and Blood Nourishment for Weight Loss" organically integrates traditional Chinese medical theory with modern yoga systems, achieving the dual goals of "weight reduction + health preservation." This approach advocates regulating the spleen and stomach first, followed by clearing stagnation, and finally strengthening qi and blood production. Its essence lies in restoring the body's inherent metabolic capacity to achieve "inner-to-outer" weight loss. Its advantages include minimal side effects, low rebound rates, and holistic mind-body health benefits, offering a novel therapeutic paradigm for comprehensive obesity intervention. However, current research has limitations: most studies feature small sample sizes and short follow-up periods, lacking long-term efficacy data; personalized treatment protocols lack standardized guidelines, limiting clinical implementation. Future efforts should include large-scale, long-term randomized controlled trials with follow-up periods. Integrating modern diagnostic technologies (such as MRI and metabolomics) will deepen understanding of its mechanisms of action. Concurrently, developing standardized exercise protocols based on Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) syndrome differentiation will advance the standardized application of TCM yoga in obesity intervention.

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