



Excercising the Trunk

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Unhygienic Overweight

Quite in contrast to slimness, suppleness and elasticity is the problem of unhygienic overweight. Aesthetically, the slim figure is the aim and desire of all women-and properly so. For not only is the slim figure a thing of beauty but it is also a sign that the owner is careful about her health and its civic and social implications, and further more that she is adhering to some sound principles of living. Of course, all women may not have slim figures of exactly the right proportion, but, certainly, all women can have figures free from the unbeatiful rolls of flesh which sometimes gather above the hips and from thence spread to other parts of the body.

Corroborated by biostatistical evidence, it is now generally recognized that every pound of flesh above the approximate normal weight—especially in persons over the age of forty—proportionately shortens a year of solid living from the tenure of life. The redundance of fat—the exact opposite of what is commended by Hathayoga as the delicate slimness of a lotus-stalk (*Mrnalakomalavapu*)—should, therefore, be dreaded for two simple reasons : first, because it is unlovely, and, secondly, because it is detrimental to good health and longevity.

Added to this fact, during recent years, slimness has come in fashion; and, as a consequence, the feminine public has decidedly become weight—conscious. To the modern woman, therefore, the Hathayoga ideal of a slim figure must have a special appeal whether for good health, beauty or longevity—let aside its higher and psychic perspective.

Unfortunately, however, the beauty aspect in health has been so much over-emphasized in recent years that quite a number of queer measures are resorted to by fat people to acquire a slim figure. The treatments extend from strict dietary to swallowing of patent remedies. In a majority of cases these slimming measures have not only proved useless but even injurious. In countries where at present fashion rules the feminine vanity, even deaths have been reported through undernourishment and misadventure.

- (a) Overweight : Its Causes and Treatment : In the first place, it may be observed that the abnormal accumulation of unhealthy fat should be considered more a symptom rather than a disease, especially in view of the recent findings which ascribe the

accumulation of fat also to psychological factors. In the second place apart from the subnormal functioning of certain endocrine glands which apply to limited cases only, unhygienic overweight is, more often than not, due physiologically to over-nutrition, to under oxidation or to a combination of both acting together. The unused surplus is then stored up as deposits of fat in the tissues least disturbed by muscular action. This excess when limited to omentum and mesentery is hardly noticeable, but, when the local deposits are made in the region of the abdominal walls and the hips, they not only present an ugly appearance but also offer great difficulty in their removal.

Further, while most people acquire fat because of such faulty habits of living as habitual over-eating and lack of exercise, the most common cause, however, may be traced to improper elimination. Especially in the case of women, constipation is usually the predisposing factor, even though there are many other minor functional disturbances which may naturally lead to overweight. Here again, women are constitutionally a little more subject to the curse of constipation than men because of the anatomicophysiological differences of the pelvic floor besides keen sensitiveness to psychological affects.

If you are a victim of sedentary habit or occupation, drugging, irregularity in response to calls of Nature, displacement, buldge or crowding of the correct standing and sitting habits, replace sitting by strolling and take to short walks once or twice a day. Even with these simple formulas, when yoga physical education is supplemented, to yoga psychosomatic at the clinical level, the results obtained have been remarkable.

Keeping in mind the fact that the physical training and the need of the fair sex, therefore, consist also, besides other things, in taking care of her abdominal and pelvic viscera, the value of certain yoga postures for exercising the trunk as an essential course of physical training for women becomes self-evident. The clinical experience of half a century at the Institute indicates that the best way to fight fat is first to fight constipation itself by gradually stopping the use of laxatives and substituting the same by suitable yoga physical exercises which take good care of the mid-trunk. The specific advantages of the yoga posture-exercises which invigorate the muscles and walls of the abdomen, as an unailing treatment of chronic functional constipation, have in recent years been fully acknowledged by many scientists.

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- (b) Food for Health—The problem of quantity and quality of food is as important for health as is the problem of physical exercise. No amount of exercise could offer all the hygienic good it can, if the quantity and quality of food remains unadjusted to individual physiologic need.

Especially in fighting constipation, food—the right kind of food—deserves proper attention. Bulk in the form of green leafy vegetables is as good for health as it is for curing constipation and, thus, for reducing weight. Cutting down the quota of essential nutrients with a view to reducing weight is unhygienic and even dangerous. Food is a source of energy which no woman should overlook in her craze to look slim and sylphlike. It too often occurs that more women than is ordinarily believed deny themselves enough food in the false hope that it will lead to some reduction in the size of their figure. Unfortunately, this assumption is so prevalent that girls even from their earliest teens begin to discard solid and sustaining food, and take to liquid or soft diet.

The consequence of such low, unbalanced and inadequate diet is that the pelvic development—the mainstay of woman's health, strength and beauty—is arrested. And though the girls may grow normally in other respects the size and strength of their pelvic organs remain like that of an immature girl. Apart from the loss of proportion which an ill-developed figure fosters, there is also the added risk to health both of the body and the mind due to impaired functions of the ovaries. For it is a scientific fact that on the normal functioning of the ovaries not merely the health but also the charm, personality and behaviour of a woman as woman depends.

In the light of the above, the same course of action would be to eat the right quality of food in the right quantities. Given adequate and balanced diet, the individual has only to rely upon the influence of rational exercising to keep in check any tendency of the figure to outgrow the limits of changing fashion. Here it is that the yoga Physical Education and hygiene come to the help of the fair sex in an admirable way. What is more, the yoga postural training offered requires no accessories not much of personal guidance, less of muscular exertion and the least of violence which is involved in the too frequent repetitions as happens to be the case with all other systems of physical exercise.

—Santa Cruz, Bombay