



Review Article

THERAPEUTIC EFFECTS OF SHATKARMA ON HEALTH THROUGH AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Man has made tremendous progress in almost every walk of life objects once considered impossible to be achieved, have now been achieved by us. Modern researchers and scientists have fundamentally altered our way of life. However, pollution of air, water, body, and mind is also the result of science, with the advance of civilization mankind is getting weaker day by day. The fundamental changes in our lifestyle brought about by industrialization, changes in diet, physical activity, the nature of the job sitting hours together in front of the computer, roaming always in the vehicles, and lack of active exercise have paved the way to many diseases like diabetes, heart disease, obesity, etc. Routine health problems like constipation, uneasiness, gaseous distention, burning of eyes, sinusitis, headache, indigestion, etc. require a suitable treatment modality to overcome. Every day persons cannot consume medicines for these problems. The human body needs a kind of physical training to show its efficient results. These results are gained by practicing the so-called 'Shatkarma' which is able to bring good results if practiced forever. Body cleansing is gained through the practice of Shatkarmas or the six purificatory techniques. They are very important from the point of view of physical and mental health, and these simple techniques are also highly valuable in healing internal disorders which are the aim of writing this paper.

INTRODUCTION

The Yoga Upanishads' description of *Hatha Yoga* includes *Shatkarmas* i.e., *Dhauti, Basti, Neti, Trataka, Lauliki, and Kapalabhati*. The *Shatkarmas* are six sets of purifying rituals. The word '*Shatkarma*' originated from the combination of two words i.e., '*Shat*' and '*Karma*'. *Shat* means six, *Karma* means action or *Kriyas*. The goal of *Hatha Yoga*, and therefore of the *Shatkarmas*, is to harmonize the two main *Pranic* flows, *Ida* and *Pingala*, in order to achieve bodily and mental balance and cleansing.^[1] The *Kapha, Pitta*, and *Vata* doshas, or bodily humour, are likewise balanced using the *Shatkarmas*. Ayurveda and *Hatha Yoga* both claim that sickness results from a *Dosha* imbalance. Practices of *Shatkarma* are also employed prior to *Pranayama* and other advanced yoga techniques.

It facilitates the removal of pollutants from the body and guarantees secure advancement on the spiritual path. These effective methods should never be taught by untrained instructors or learned from books. In the *Hatha Yoga* tradition, only individuals who have received guru instruction are permitted to instruct others.

It is necessary to receive personalized instruction about the *Shatkarmas*, taking into account each person's unique demands and limits.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gheranda Samhita, Shiva Samhita, and Hatha Ratnavali* are the four main scriptures of the *Hatha Yoga* tradition. Among these, the purification of the body is discussed in reference to six different cleaning techniques in the *Gheranda Samhita* and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.^[2,3] The subtypes and advantages of the *Shatkriya* are thoroughly described in the *Gheranda Samhita*. The newest of the *Hatha Yoga* scriptures, *Hatha Ratnavali*, describes eight different cleaning methods.^[4] However, among yoga practitioners, the six purification methods listed in Swami Swatmarama's *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* are the most often used. *Shatkriya's* primary goal is to

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balance the body's three humours-mucus (*Kapha*), bile (*Pitta*), and wind (*Vata*)-which are known as the *Tridoshic* system.^[2]

Shatkarma, a core component of traditional Yoga practice, encompasses a set of six purification techniques that promote physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. These techniques have been passed down through generations and are rooted in the belief that a clean and balanced body is essential for the pursuit of higher states of consciousness and overall health. The six *Shatkarma* practices are *Dhauti*, *Basti*, *Neti*, *Trataka*, *Nauli*, and *Kapalabhati*, each addressing specific aspects of purification.^[5]

The aspirant should practice the *Shatkarmas* namely *Dhauti*, *Basti*, *Neti*, *Nauli*, *Trataka*, and *Kapalabhati*.

Neti (Nasal cleansing)

Neti is a yogic nasal cleansing technique that involves the use of a saline solution to clean and purify the nasal passages. This practice is part of the *Shatkarma*, a set of six purification techniques in Hatha Yoga.^[6] *Neti* is specifically designed to maintain the health of the nasal and respiratory passages by removing excess mucus and pollutants. *Neti* means the drawing of a thread through the nose and mouth. The aspirant should insert a fine thread of nine inches in length into a nostril and pull it out through the mouth. This is known as *Neti*. There are two types of *Neti*.^[7]

- **Sutra Neti (Cleansing by Thread)**

Sutra Neti is a more advanced technique that involves using a soft thread, typically made of waxed cotton or rubber, to cleanse the nasal passages. The thread is gently inserted into one nostril and guided out through the mouth, then pulled back and forth to remove impurities. This is **a more intricate and advanced practice compared to Jala Neti**.

- **Jala Neti (Cleansing by Water)**

In *Jala Neti*, a saline solution is used to cleanse the nasal passages. The practitioner typically uses a special pot called a "*Neti pot*" to pour the saline solution into one nostril while tilting the head to allow the solution to flow out through the other nostril. This process is then reversed, ensuring both nostrils are thoroughly cleansed.

Jala Neti is generally safe when performed correctly. However, it's essential to use sterile water, a clean *Neti pot*, and non-iodized salt to avoid any complications.

Dhauti (Washing up of the Digestive Tract)

Dhauti is one of the six purification techniques, collectively known as "*Shatkarma*," in traditional *Hatha Yoga* practice. It is an ancient yogic practice that focuses on cleansing the digestive system and

promoting overall gastrointestinal health. *Dhauti* is considered an essential practice for achieving physical and mental purity, which is integral to the yogic path.

Dhauti is a kind of penance consisting of washing a strip of white cloth, swallowing it, and then drawing it out of the mouth. *Dhauti* involves the cleansing of the stomach and the upper digestive tract.^[8] Also, *Dhauti* means to wash out. As the name itself suggests, this process is suggested for washing the stomach and intestines. *Dhauti Kriya* should be well carried out in the early morning on an empty stomach after the evacuation of the bowels.

There are three types of Dhautis

- **Jala Dhauti or Vamana Dhauti (Induced vomiting)**

Vaman Dhauti, also known as "*Kunjal Kriya*" or "*Gaja Karani*," is one of the cleansing practices in the tradition of Hatha Yoga. This technique focuses on purifying the stomach and upper digestive tract by inducing controlled vomiting. *Vaman Dhauti* is a part of the *Shatkarma*, a set of six purification practices in traditional yoga, and it is considered an essential step in the process of physical and mental cleansing.^[9] The aspirant should drink water slowly by the mouth so that it fills (the stomach) up to the throat, and then push it by moving the abdomen and evacuating it through the lower passage.

- **Vastra Dhauti (Washing with Cloth)**

In this technique, a long strip of gauze or cloth is swallowed and then gradually pulled out of the stomach through the mouth. This process helps in removing impurities from the digestive system.^[10] The aspirant should swallow slowly a strip of thin wet cloth which is four fingers in width, either nineteen cubits or twenty-five cubits in length, and then draw it out again slowly. This is called *Vastra Dhauti*.

Danda Dhauti (Washing with Tube)

Here, a smooth, thin, and flexible wooden stick is swallowed and then gently moved back and forth to cleanse the esophagus and stomach.^[11] The stick is not rigid, making it safe for the practitioner. The aspirant should push the stalk of a plantain, turmeric, or a cane into the gullet, move it there, up and down, and then slowly draw it out.

Dhauti is believed to have various physical and mental benefits. It is thought to clear the digestive system of accumulated waste, improve digestion, and help in preventing or alleviating digestive disorders. In addition, practitioners often report increased mental clarity and a sense of lightness after performing *Dhauti*. It is also considered a preparatory practice for more advanced yogic techniques and meditation.

Nauli (Abdominal massage)

Nauli, often referred to as "*Nauli Kriya*," is an advanced yogic purification technique that focuses on massaging and toning the abdominal organs, particularly the digestive organs, and the abdominal muscles.^[12] It is one of the six classical *Shatkarma* practices in Hatha Yoga, aimed at enhancing physical and internal purification. The aspirant should move the abdomen rapidly from side to side, this process is known as *Nauli* and it destroys all the diseases and increases the heat of the body. *Nauli* also called *Naulika* means a kind of penance.

There are 4 stages of abdominal massage

- **Madhyama Nauli (Central Abdominal Contraction)**

Madhyama Nauli is an intermediate-level yogic practice that is part of the *Shatkarma* techniques in Hatha Yoga. *Nauli* is a set of advanced abdominal and stomach cleansing practices aimed at massaging and strengthening the abdominal organs. "*Madhyama*" means "middle" or "intermediate," so *Madhyama Nauli* is considered an intermediate level within the *Nauli* practice progression.

- **Vama Nauli (Left Isolation)**

Vama Nauli, also known as "Left *Nauli*," is an advanced yogic practice that is part of the *Nauli Kriya* techniques in Hatha Yoga. "*Vama*" means "left," and as the name suggests, *Vama Nauli* involves isolating and contracting the muscles on the left side of the abdomen. This practice aims to massage and strengthen the abdominal organs, particularly on the left side, promoting digestive health and inner purification.

- **Dakshina Nauli (Right isolation)**

Dakshina Nauli, also known as "Right *Nauli*," is another advanced yogic practice in the *Nauli Kriya* techniques of Hatha Yoga. "*Dakshina*" means "right," and this practice involves isolating and contracting the muscles on the right side of the abdomen. The goal of *Dakshina Nauli* is to massage and strengthen the abdominal organs on the right side, particularly the liver and right kidney, promoting digestive health and inner purification.

- **Abdominal rotation or Churning**

Abdominal rotation, often referred to as "*Nauli*," is a specialized and advanced yogic practice within the Hatha Yoga tradition. *Nauli* involves the isolation and rhythmic rotation of the abdominal muscles, typically in four directions: left, right, up, and down. It is primarily used for cleansing and toning the abdominal organs, enhancing digestive health, and promoting core strength and stability.^[13]

Basti (Yogic Enema)

Basti, also known as "*Shankhaprakshalana*" or "*Varisara Dhauti*," is a yogic purification technique that focuses on cleansing the lower digestive tract, specifically the colon and rectum.^[14] *Basti* is one of the six classical *Shatkarma* practices in Hatha Yoga, and it is designed to remove accumulated waste, toxins, and impurities from the gastrointestinal system. *Basti* means the bladder, the lower belly abdomen; *Basti karma* means the application of an enema or injection.

Basti is known to be of two kinds namely *Jalabasti* and *Shushka Basti*. *Jala Basti* is practiced in the water while *Shushka Basti* is performed always on the ground.

- **Jala Basti**

Assuming the *Utkatasana* posture in deep water, up to the navel with a tube inserted in the rectum, the aspirant should perform *Jala Basti* by relaxing and contracting the rectum.

- **Shushka Basti**

Raising the lower part of the back in the supine position and moving the pelvic region of the abdomen, the aspirant should dilate and contract the rectum by *Ashwini Mudra*. Additionally, it degasses and cleans the colon.

Basti is typically practiced under the guidance of an experienced yoga instructor or teacher. It is important to approach this practice with caution and to receive proper instruction, as it can be intense and should be performed with care. It is also essential to practice *Basti* on an empty stomach, as consuming food shortly before or after the practice can lead to discomfort or interfere with its effectiveness.

Kapalabhati (Cleansing of the Head or Frontal Brain Cleansing)

Kapalabhati is a breathing technique in yoga that falls under the category of *Pranayama* (breath control practices). The word "*Kapalabhati*" is derived from two Sanskrit words: "*Kapala*," which means "skull," and "*Bhati*," which means "shining" or "illuminating." This technique is often referred to as the "skull-shining breath" because of the clarity and vitality it is believed to bring to the mind and body.^[15] *Kapalabhati* is a particular sort of penance (consisting of alternate suppression and emission of the breath). The aspirant should practice *Kapalabhati* in three different kinds namely *Vatakrama*, *Vyutkrama*, and *Sitkrama*, thus it cures the disorder of phlegm (*Kapha*).

The three methods are like

- **Vatakrama Kapalabhati (Air Cleansing)**

Vatakrama Kapalabhati is a variation of the traditional *Kapalabhati pranayama*, a yogic breathing exercise that involves forceful exhalations followed by passive inhalations. While

Kapalabhati is a dynamic and energizing practice, *Vatakrma Kapalabhati* is a milder and gentler version.^[16] It is often recommended for individuals who may not be able to perform the standard *Kapalabhati* due to certain health conditions or physical limitations.

- **Vyutkrma Kapalabhati (Sinus cleansing)**

Vyutkrma Kapalabhati is a variation of the traditional *Kapalabhati Pranayama*, a yogic breathing exercise that involves forceful exhalations followed by passive inhalations. In *Vyutkrma Kapalabhati*, the emphasis is on the forceful exhalation and the cleansing effect it has on the upper respiratory passages, particularly the sinuses.^[17]

- **Sheetkrma Kapalabhati (Mucus Cleansing)**

Sheetkrma Kapalabhati, also known as "Cooling *Kapalabhati*," is a variation of the traditional *Kapalabhati Pranayama*, a yogic breathing exercise that involves forceful exhalations followed by passive inhalations. While the standard *Kapalabhati* is considered warming and energizing, *Sheetkrma Kapalabhati* is designed to have a cooling and calming effect on the body and mind.^[18]

Trataka (Concentrated Gazing and Cleansing of the Eyes)

Trataka is a yogic technique that involves concentrated gazing or steady fixation on a specific point or object. It is often used as a meditation technique and is recognized as one of the *Shatkarma* practices in traditional *Hatha Yoga*. The primary goal of *Trataka* is to enhance concentration, mental focus, and inner stillness. The aspirant without winking, should gaze a minute at an object until the tears start falling from the eyes. This is called *Trataka*, by the wise ones. The method of fixing the eye on the object is known as *Trataka*.

Commonly two types of Tratakas are practiced

- **Jyoti Trataka**

Jyoti Trataka is a yogic practice that involves gazing at a candle flame or any other source of light with focused attention. "*Jyoti*" means "light" in Sanskrit, and "*Trataka*" means "gazing" or "steady gaze." This practice is a form of meditation and concentration that helps develop mental focus, clarity, and inner calm.^[19]

- **Bindu Trataka**

Bindu Trataka is a yogic meditation technique that involves gazing at a single point or a tiny dot, known as a "*Bindu*," with intense concentration. This practice is used to cultivate mental focus, inner stillness, and deep meditative states.^[20]

Bindu, in Sanskrit, refers to a point, and *Trataka* means "steady gaze."

DISCUSSION

The six types of *Kriya: Neti, Dhouti, Kapalabhati, Basti, Nauli*, and *Trataka* are training the bodily organs in the form of cleansing massaging evacuating and rapid movements like the diaphragm and cheek muscles along with abdominal muscles. If keenly observed the practices of *Shatkriya*, are mostly concerned with the vision, the intestines, the respiratory system, the cardiovascular system, and also smooth muscles of the body. Of course the gastrointestinal tract has its own significance in bringing good or bad effects on the human body.^[21] Though external respiratory passage has all kinds of requirements like filtration of air removal of dust particles and olfaction, even then there is a small lacuna that requires some sort of smoothening effect in one or another way. Since in classics, there has been no authenticity about *Jala Neti* but today it can be seen that it is the ideal practice to minimize respiratory problems by simple practice of *Neti Karma*.^[22]

It is felt that during heaviness of the throat or change of voice due to some errors in the vocal cords, just simple salt water gurgling gives us good relief and even a feeling of change in the localized anatomical structures.^[23] These are all due to the use of salt water. Salt water which consists of sodium and chloride ions is very useful here to bring mucolytic scraping of mucous and clearing the passages by means of anti-inflammatory effect.^[24] Hence, it is essential to practice for everybody to treat and even prevent, diseases like the common cold, runny nose, headache, sinusitis, etc.^[25] It has been shown in many numbers of patients that it is one of the very useful procedures to overcome such problems. These other procedures like *Nauli, Basti, Dhauti, and Kapalabhati* are also essential nowadays. By mere massage of the small intestinal part certainly helps the individual in increasing its peristaltic movements and even the glandular functions of the small intestine. In the same way, though a procedure like *Dhauti* to *Vastradhouti* is difficult, it clears all the debris like mucous and other glandular secretions. Even *Kapalabhati* also brings very good exercise amongst the facial muscles; intercoastal muscles, anterior abdominal muscles, and also the diaphragm. During the act there will be to and from motion of the central tendon of the diaphragm this activity helps or exercises the apex of the heart.

To attain positive health *Yogic Kriyas* are essential tools for every individual. To overcome the influences of stress and strain in daily routine like *Shatkarmas* are the ultimate solution.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Shatkarma* practices offer a unique and holistic approach to health and well-being, addressing both the physical and mental aspects of a person's life. They are deeply embedded in the tradition of Yoga and Ayurveda and can be highly beneficial when practiced correctly and under proper guidance. However, it's essential to approach them with respect for their cultural and philosophical context and to consider individual health needs and limitations before embarking on these practices.

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