

Salt, Weight Gain and Cellular Water Retention

- a SVA perspective -



Being your active exuberant self is sometimes not easy when you have to log around extra pounds! Weight gain (and therefore weight loss) is probably one of the most - if not *the* most – debated and researched issue in the US today as excess weight and obesity are the fastest growing source of disease and death in the US. Almost 10 years ago, Surgeon General Richard Carmona observed that nearly two of out of every three Americans were either overweight or obese, mainly because of poor food choices and lack of exercise. Some 31% of the population suffered from actual obesity. One in every eight deaths in the U.S. was caused by illnesses directly related to issues of weight. Life expectancy rates, which have been rising for 200 years, are now going into reverse because of the preponderance of excess weight gain trends.



It's not just adults who are at risk. In the 1960s, just over 4% of 6 to 17-year-olds in the U.S. were overweight. Since then, the number has more than tripled to

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over 15%. Private insurance spending on weight-related illnesses in the U.S. has grown more than tenfold since 1987, with the increase in weight gain and obesity fueling a dramatic rise in the amount spent on treating heart disease, high cholesterol levels and various forms of Diabetes. And yet, after decades of analysis and billions spent in research and development, we have still barely begun to understand the underlying causes of what has become a health epidemic.

Ayurveda knew, thousands of years ago, that weight-gain is definitely not a carb-counting low-fat diet straightforward phenomenon. It can be triggered by imbalances occurring on different tissue levels, organs, or organ-systems; it can be a local problem or a more involved one encompassing a set of factors. Unless we have a holistic understanding of the human physiology and its workings such as the one Ayurveda offers, it will be difficult if not impossible to try to correct it.

Vaidya Mishra reminds us that based on the Tri Sutra Ayurveda,¹ weight gain has many hetu-s or etiological factors. Most common hetu-s are: 1) poor fat metabolism and 2) poor diet, primarily the use or overuse of bad salt. As a result of these, a person may accumulate unwanted weight either in the fat tissue, muscle tissue, or they may just gain weight due to water retention. There may also be a combination of weight gain in the fat or muscle tissues in

¹ Tri-Sutra Ayurveda highlights the importance of first paying attention to the hetu or etiological factor, then lingam or symptoms and pathogenesis and then aushadi gyanam, and finally recommending the herbs needed to correct the root causes. While this may sound straightforward, it is often ignored, and symptoms are usually given precedence over the etiological factors. (The full verse says: hetu lingam aushadhi gyanam).

addition to water retention. However, water retention does not necessarily always result in weight gain, that is: you can have water retention but not experience weight gain; however, when left unchecked, water retention can lead to weight gain as well as other health issues.

What exactly is water retention? Water retention is when the body stores excess fluids instead of releasing it.

Why and when does the body retain water? It can retain water due to several reasons: it is dehydrated and unable to process the water that is ingested: **dehydration leads to water retention** because the body cannot function correctly without sufficient water. The cardiovascular system, digestive system, nervous system, general metabolism and hormone production are just three of the most important life functions that rely heavily on water. Since these systems are vital to basic life support, the body automatically switches to water retention mode if the intake is insufficient by storing water in the cells. The problem with a high cellular water level is that it is largely unavailable to the systems that need it; therefore, these systems begin to function sub-optimally and eventually succumb to chronic diseases. You could also be retaining water because your macro circulatory channels or **srotas** are clogged due to a poor diet and proper elimination is thus impaired. Finally, there are other local and medical conditions affecting one or more organs (the heart, the kidneys, etc) that can trigger water retention to compensate for the poor organ functioning.

How can you tell if you have water retention or not?

Here are some common signals that can indicate water retention: have you ever felt stiffness in your limbs after

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sitting at your office desk for extended hours? Or, after a long flight? Do you feet get swollen on and off? Have you ever noticed how a ring on any of your fingers feels stuck and won't come off in the morning when you wake up, but seems to be looser in the afternoon?

Or perhaps you notice that you gain and lose weight easily and your weighing scale goes up and down several pounds per day whimsically? Or do you experience



uncontrollable thirst? Perhaps your face looks “puffy” or swollen, particularly in the morning. You must consult with your medical doctor if you notice any of the above symptoms to make sure you do not have a medical condition, because water retention and bloating can be a symptom of cardiovascular disease, kidney disease, digestive disorders, hormonal imbalance. If your medical doctor confirms that this is common water retention not related to a pre-existing medical condition, then there are several things you can do.

If you do not have a medical condition, then water retention can be primarily due to a poor diet. Does

your diet contain extra salt/sodium? This does not mean that you are adding too much salt when cooking or sprinkling extra salt on your sandwiches, but that you have to examine, for example, the sodium content of pre-packaged food and drink items



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you might be consuming, even those that are labeled organic and healthy! Cutting down salt intake is the biggest step you can take in helping to minimize fluid retention. But you can't have too little salt either! Too much or too little salt in the diet can lead to muscle cramps, dizziness, or electrolyte disturbance, which, in turn, can cause neurological problems or death. Drinking too much water with insufficient salt intake puts a person at risk of water intoxication (hyponatremia).

Salt is a necessarily mineral according to Ayurveda not just for its nutritional content though. Ayurveda explains that any food item has many levels of impact on the body, starting with taste that triggers specific centers in the brain down to its ultimate bio-chemical post-digestive effect on deep tissue levels and organs. Salt, according to Ayurveda, has a typical **prabhava** (or subtle post-digestive effect) called **kledana**. When you eat food with **kledana prabhava** in moderation, it rehydrates the cellular system, it keeps the mucous membrane moist, and prevents from overall dryness as salt is involved in regulating the water content or fluid balance of the body. Furthermore, the sodium ion itself is used for electrical signaling in the nervous system. Salt also protects the body from getting parched out due to the fiery **agneya** activity of all 13 metabolic fires like **pachak agni** or **dhatuagni** (cellular agni).

However, Ayurveda is in accord with modern science: if you consume too much salt then its **kledana prabhava** can clog your physical channels, disturb your rehydration process, retain water that will disturb your nerve impulses, and put undue pressure on your kidneys. The kidneys play a major

role in balancing sodium retention and helping us make the most out of our salt intake.

Ayurveda and modern science both contend that sodium helps to balance your bodily fluids, transmits nerve impulses and facilitates the contraction and relaxation of your muscles. So we need sodium for sure, but as per the ayurvedic perspective, industrially manufactured synthetic sodium produced through isolating and binding the sodium and chloride molecules, and adding potassium and magnesium is not recommended.

Scientifically we know that sodium is balanced by potassium because potassium helps in releasing the fluids from the body. Unfortunately, in this day and age it is common to use high sodium content food items (canned or pre-packaged foods for preservation purposes) that are very detrimental to health. The beneficial role of potassium becomes minimal in this situation.

There is another facet to this problem as well. You may also be consuming good salt but too much of it. More than you need on a daily basis. According to a recent study, the present average sodium intakes, approximately 3000–4500 mg/day in various industrialized populations, are very high, that is, 2–3-fold in comparison with the current Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) of 1500mg. The sodium intakes markedly exceed even the level of 2500 mg, which has been recently given as the maximum level of daily intake that is likely to pose no risk of adverse effects on blood pressure or otherwise (see “Why and how to implement sodium, potassium, calcium, and magnesium changes in food items and diets?” H Karppanen et al, *Journal of Human Hypertension* (2005) 19, S10–S19).

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But why do we add too much salt to our meals? Most cultures do not consume as many spices as the typical balanced ayurvedic diet. Spices are necessary as they are not merely flavor enhancers but carry out essential metabolic functions, particularly enhancing it and connecting the digestive system to the brain centers. In the absence of spices, salt remains the only **agneya** or metabolic enhancement ingredient. In addition, the sharp taste of salt activates the taste buds, or **bodhak kapha**, sharpening the appetite and preparing the physiology for digestion. This is why, in the absence of spices, we tend to increase our salt intake. Vaidya Mishra recommends adding balanced spices mixes or (activating the salivary glands that initiate the digestive process in the oral cavity) **masala-s** to your diet to



Salivary glands

help balance digestion and elimination. Mum's Masala™, Shroto Shudhi Masala™, Pitta, Masala™, (to read more about this masala-s go to

www.chandika.com and search for them by name) or your own

individualized masala mix to suit your ayurvedic make-up and current imbalances. Spice blends or masala-s activate the taste buds, help open the channels and also supply **agni** and support the flame and digestive/metabolic fires. You will be less tempted to add salt. Spices will also help the kidneys to support the storage and processing of sodium intelligently, specifically when you add coriander seeds, or the **punarnava** herb. In terms of vegetables, asparagus, or white daikon radish, are great for supporting the kidneys. Sodium and potassium are necessary, but a healthy kidney

and healthy cellular channels are even more necessary to process the bodily fluids, use the fluid for rehydration and eliminate from the body through urination and sweat. So this cycle should function without retaining any water.

We tend to overlook the fact that we do not only receive sodium from added salt in our daily meals but from many alternative sources like snacks, precooked food, packaged foods that contain high levels of sodium, not to mention MSG or mono-sodium glutamate.

Monosodium glutamate (MSG) is a flavor enhancer commonly added to Chinese food, canned vegetables, soups and processed meats. Although the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has classified MSG

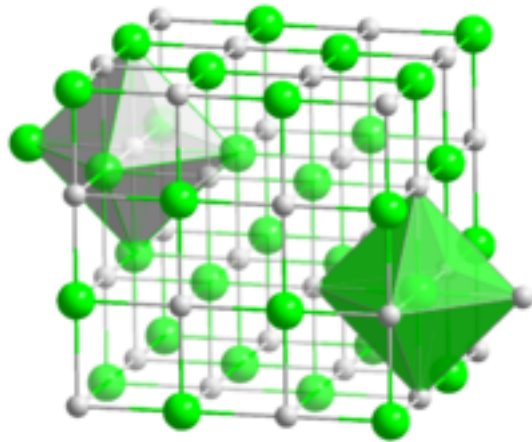


as a food ingredient that's "generally recognized as safe," the use of MSG remains controversial. For this reason, when MSG is added to food, the FDA requires that it be listed on the label. There is a list of adverse reactions to foods containing MSG. These reactions — known as MSG symptom complex — include: headache; flushing; sweating; facial pressure or tightness; numbness, tingling or burning in the face, neck and other areas; rapid, fluttering heartbeats (heart palpitations); chest pain; nausea; weakness. Since researchers have not found definitive evidence for linking these symptoms to MSG, its use is not prohibited, but must be listed on the ingredients list.

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So you want to not only monitor your salt intake in terms of what you add to your food, but also of what you are consuming outside by checking the labels. Surveys indicate that 9 out of 10 people are gaining weight and retaining extra fluid (up to 2-4 lbs weekly) without having any medical symptoms.

Last but not least, what type of salt are you consuming? You may have noticed how your health food store carries dozens of different types of salts nowadays. There are not only dozens but hundreds of naturally occurring types of salts, each with distinct ratios of sodium content and mineral make-up. The Carak Samhita was well aware of this fact thousands of years before we started to artificially manufacture the most lethal kind of salt in our labs by joining together molecules of sodium and chloride. Using what is considered regular iodized edible table salt that can be purchased for less than a dollar is the worst decision you can make for your health.



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You could choose to go with natural sea salt, or different types or Himalayan rock salts, however, the Carak Samhita advises against these as their internal chemical balance is such that they can aggravate Pitta dosha on many levels despite supplying the typical **Kledan Prabhava** expected from salt.

The Carak Samhita mentions one kind of salt, a specific type mined in the North Western parts of India, and refers to it as

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the Queen of Salts – “lavano uttamam”, due to its low sodium content and benefits in higher other mineral content. Soma Salt™ is the Queen of all salts! Read more about Soma Salt™ by pasting this link in your browser:

<http://www.chandika.com/products/Soma-Salt.html>.

Our lab tests have confirmed that Soma Salt™ has least sodium content in comparison to other types of salts. In addition, it contains sodium and potassium that occur naturally in the rocks, not added artificially.

Vaidya Mishra recounts how over the years, many of his clients who had been using Soma Salt™ had to replace it with other types when chandika.com ran out of stock due to high demand. Phone calls flooded his Prana Center phone lines with complaints that after using alternative Himalayan or sea salts stiffness, aches and pain had come back. Along similar lines, clients consuming Soma Salt™ who had also been experiencing unexplained weight gain and water retention (not due to a medical condition) were able to address their problems by correcting their diet (eliminating canned food, fast food, MSG, any other salts, etc) and implementing the use of Soma Salt™.

How much Soma Salt™ to use?

Vaidya Mishra does not recommend using more than half a teaspoon of Soma Salt™ a day. Make sure you always cook the salt with your food or mix it with your spices.

Next week: Soma Salt™ lab analysis profile, recipes for water retention detox, plus a closer look at the ingredients in Soma Salt™ particularly: sodium, potassium, calcium, and magnesium.