Basic Concepts and Treatment Methods of Obesity in Oriental Medicine

Hyun-dae Shin, O.M.D.
Department of Rehabilitation
College of Oriental Medicine, Kyung Hee University, Seoul, Korea

Abstract

Nowadays, obesity and overweight constitutes serious health problems in a modern complex industrial society. They are either directly, or indirectly, associated with a wide variety of diseases that account for an ever-increasing annual mortality rate.

In Oriental Medicine, doctors treat problems of obesity in another way in comparison with Western Medicine. They consider the metabolic disorders of five organs, Wind (風), Phlegm (痰), Damp (溼), and Heat (熱) also give rise to obesity and overweight problems.

And also, the treatment of obesity in Oriental Medicine is very various and complex. Present forms of treatment include acupuncture, herb-medications and Qigong. In particular, starvation is carried out with manipulation, negative therapy, a contrast of bathing therapy, carbon therapy, behavior modification and counselling.

As stated above, the concepts and treatment methods of obesity in Oriental Medicine are unique and original.

Introduction

Invasion-Rate, which obesity occurs is greatly increasing and it is a cause of adult disease, such as hypertension, heart-disease, DM, etc., increasing the mobility of chronic disease, shortening the longevity of humans, etc. and occurring in severe health problems

Primarily, it has been known that obesity is not much, because a vegetable diet in living habits is first in the orient. Because of this cause, there are few recordings about obesity in the literature of ancient Oriental Medicine. But, the habit of a dietary life in the present day is being changed by the influence of western civilization, and the residing environment is being changed, and so, obesity is gradually increasing in the Oriental race (mongolid race). Because of this, recently, oriental investigation about obesity has been accomplished by an Oriental scholar who is concerned about obesity.

Even though the symptoms, which occur by obesity, are similar in Oriental and Western medicine, investigating methods of the causes and the methods of therapy are different.

A theory of obesity in the west is explained by the Genetic Theory, Fat Cell Theory and Set Point Theory, but in spite of many theories, the
mechanism of obesity has not been made clear\(^3\).

Comparing this point, the cause of obeseness in Oriental Medicine is that the Qi of the internal organs of Liver, Spleen, Lung, Kidney are in a deficient state, or that adding up to this point, the occurrence of obesity is caused by the abnormality of internal organs functions which are caused of Damps, Phlegm, Wind and Heat etc. and metabolizable abnormality\(^4\). This interpretation is explained of the abnormality of the digestive system, obstruction of metabolism, and abnormality of the endocrine system etc..

As the theories of obesity are various medically, in the West and the Orient, the therapy is various. In Western medicine, dietetic treatment, kinesiatrics, operative treatment, and pharmacotherapy, etc. are used as therapeutic measures of obesity. The other side, traditional drugs therapy, acupuncture and moxibustion therapy, Qigong therapy and the therapy of moderation in eating are carried out with manipulation, negative treatment, and physical and breathing exercise are used in the Oriental Medicine.

In this monograph, I will observe especially basic concepts and various treatment methods of obesity in Oriental Medicine, and I generalize the concepts of Oriental Medicine about obesity.

**Concepts of Obesity and Differentiation of Syndromes**

1. **Concept of the Obesity**

   In Korean Medicine, obesity is expressed as ‘Obese People’, ‘Soft Extricative People’, or ‘Fresh People’, and a definition or standard of obesity is not presented, but a term (which they call people of “plentiful skin and fresh\(^5\)”), is used. An investigating several literature about obesity in successive generations, we can see the first concept and cause of obesity in Su Wens - Tong Pyungs Essay, in which they value the deficiency and excessiveness> Huang Di Nei Jing; “If He is an obese noble man, he has possibly an ‘Extricative disease’. After that, Stagnation of Qi, Phlegm-turbidity, Dampness, and Stagnated blood which is caused by ‘fat-sweet, extricate meal overeat’, ‘laying oneself down for a long time’, ‘sitting for a long time’, ‘less work’, ‘affection due to exogenous pathogenic dampness’ and ‘internal injury-seven emotions’, result in obesity\(^6\).

   In investigating literature about obesity of the successive generations, Obesity exerts influences upon humans. They appear that ‘fat causes heat to hit the body, sweat taste causes the abdominal fullness, and so, Ki overflow, the development makes for diabetes’ (Su Wen, An Essay of Strange Disease\(^7\); ‘Obese People striae of the skin, muscle, etc are minute, that depresses and stagnates the Ki and blood, so it is difficult for Ki and blood to pass, and so, many people are stroded’ (Liu Wansu)\(^8\), ‘If he is obese, his Ki is enlarged necessarily and his lungs are prosperous, lung(metal) check the liver(wood), and so phlegm is dense’ (Li Zhongzi)\(^9\), ‘If a woman has an obese body, her body will have much phlegm and slobber, and fallen into an internal disease of the spleen(earth)’ (Fu Qingzhu)\(^10\), ‘Obese People have much phlegm’ (Chen Xiuyuan)\(^11\), ‘If his body is obese and has little meridian energy, phlegm will be coagulated and follow meridian energy’ (Yeh Tienshiah)\(^12\).