



EFFECT OF UPAVASA IN KAPHAJA SHIRASHOOLA - CONCEPT AND A SINGLE CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Headache (*Shirashoola*) is among the most commonly encountered complaints in clinical practice. *Ayurveda* classifies *Shirashoola* based on *Dosha* predominance, of which *Kaphaja Shirashoola* is characterised by heaviness in the head, dull ache, cold sensation, stiffness, and lethargy. Contemporary lifestyle habits, including sedentary behaviour and excessive food intake, often aggravate *Kapha Dosha*, predisposing individuals to this condition. *Upavasa* (therapeutic fasting), a classical concept advocated in *Ayurveda*, is indicated as an effective intervention for *Kapha*-related disorders. *Acharya Vagbhata* in *Ashtanga Hridaya* emphasises the significance of *Upavasa* in pacifying vitiated *Kapha*¹. This article presents a conceptual overview along with a single case study on a 35-year-old male patient presenting with classical symptoms of *Kaphaja Shirashoola*. Therapeutic fasting was implemented as the primary intervention based on *Ayurvedic* principles, along with dietary modifications. The outcome demonstrated notable relief in symptoms within five days. The study aims to explore the probable mechanism of action of *Upavasa* in reducing *Kapha Dosha* and its impact on *Kaphaja Shirashoola*. The findings support the classical *Ayurvedic* notion that *Langhana* (lightening therapies), including *Upavasa*, are crucial for managing *Kapha* disorders. This article also reviews classical references and related scientific literature to bridge

traditional knowledge with clinical relevance. The promising outcome suggests that *Upavasa*, if applied appropriately, can serve as a cost-effective and safe management approach for *Kaphaja Shirashoola*.

Keywords: *Kaphaja Shirashoola*, *Upavasa*, Case Study, Head

INTRODUCTION

Shirashoola, or headache, is a distressing condition frequently encountered in both *Ayurvedic* and modern clinical settings. In *Ayurveda*, headache is not merely a symptom but a disease entity classified based on the dominance of *Doshas Vataja*, *Pittaja*, and *Kaphaja Shirashoola*. Among these, *Kaphaja Shirashoola* is described with unique symptoms such as *Gurutwa* (heaviness), *Tandra* (drowsiness), *Alasya* (lethargy), *Manda Ruja* (dull ache), and *Sheetata* (coldness)². It predominantly occurs due to the vitiation of *Kapha Dosha*, particularly aggravated by excessive intake of heavy, oily, cold, sweet foods, and a sedentary lifestyle³.

The management of *Kapha* disorders in *Ayurveda* is primarily based on *Langhana Chikitsa* (lightening therapy), with *Upavasa* (therapeutic fasting) as one of its key interventions. *Upavasa* is a non-pharmacological approach that aims at reducing *Ama* (metabolic toxins) and pacifying *Kapha* by enhancing *Agni* (digestive fire)⁴. *Acharya Vagbhata* advocates *Upavasa* in the treatment of various *Kapha* disorders, asserting its capacity to cleanse the body and restore doshic equilibrium⁵.

Despite being a classical intervention, *Upavasa* remains underexplored in contemporary practice, particularly for chronic *Kapha*-induced headaches. Its relevance has increased with the rising burden of lifestyle-related disorders, where simple and effective interventions are crucial. Modern research also supports the physiological benefits of fasting in terms of metabolic resetting, inflammatory control, and neuromodulation < sup> 6 </sup>.

The objective of this article is to evaluate the effect of *Upavasa* in the management of *Kaphaja Shirashoola* through both conceptual analysis and clinical observation. A single case study is presented where therapeutic fasting was applied under classical guidelines. The outcome measures and patient response suggest

that *Upavasa* can be effectively used in the management of this condition. Further research and case series may help validate these findings and broaden the clinical application of traditional therapies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Upavasa – Classical Perspective

Upavasa, a form of *Langhana* therapy, is explained in various classical texts as a primary intervention for *Kapha* vitiation. According to *Ashtanga Hridaya Sutrasthana*, “*Langhanam param aushadham*”, meaning *Langhana* (including *Upavasa*) is the foremost line of treatment. *Acharya Charaka* defines *Upavasa* as “*Ahara nivritti*” or intentional restriction of food for a prescribed time⁸. *Upavasa* aims to reduce *Ama* and *Kapha*, stimulate *Agni*, and facilitate the removal of metabolic toxins⁹.

Charaka mentions that *Langhana* is particularly useful in conditions involving *Mandagni*, *Srotorodha*, and *Kapha* accumulation⁸. *Sushruta* also acknowledges the importance of *Upavasa* in managing *Kapha*-associated diseases like *Shirogaata Vikaras*.

Disease Review: Kaphaja Shirashoola

Kaphaja Shirashoola is one of the *Shiroroga* types discussed in *Ayurvedic* literature. *Madhava Nidana* describes the symptoms of *Kaphaja Shirashoola* as *Gurutwa*, *Manda Ruja*, *Sheetata*, and *Kandu* in the head (10). The pathogenesis involves *Kapha Dosha* accumulation in the *Shiras* due to incompatible food, heavy meals, lack of exercise, or exposure to cold.

Modern correlations can be drawn with chronic sinus headache or tension-type headache with *Kapha* dominance. Clinically, patients complain of heaviness, dull headache, nasal congestion, and reduced alertness.

Probable Mode of Action of Upavasa in Kaphaja Shirashoola

Upavasa potentially acts on several physiological and doshic levels:

- *Doshaghnata*: Upavasa pacifies Kapha by enhancing Agni and removing Ama. Kapha, being Guru (heavy), Snigdha (unctuous), and Sheetala (cold), are antagonised by the lightning and drying effect of fasting.
- *Agni Deepana*: It strengthens Agni, improves digestion and metabolism, which in turn helps in clearing Srotas and reducing headache-related heaviness.
- *Ama Pachana*: Upavasa facilitates the digestion of accumulated toxins, restoring normal bodily functions.
- **Neuro-Hormonal Impact**: Modern studies suggest that intermittent fasting helps in neurochemical modulation, reducing neuro-inflammation, which could be responsible for lowering headache symptoms⁶.
- **Psychological Benefits**: Fasting also improves mental clarity, emotional control, and self-discipline, contributing to better symptom control.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A 35-year-old male patient presented with the following symptoms consistent with *Kaphaja Shirashoola*:

- Dull, non-throbbing pain in the frontal and temporal regions
- Heaviness of head, nasal congestion, and cold sensation
- Increased drowsiness and lack of enthusiasm
- History of consuming heavy meals and a sedentary routine

INTERVENTION:

- Therapeutic fasting (*Upavasa*) for 1 day followed by *Laghu Ahara* (light diet) for 3 days (*Mudga Yusha* and *Takra*)
- Nasal irrigation (*Nasya*) was withheld to assess the standalone effect of *Upavasa*
- Advised adequate rest, hydration with warm water, and mental calmness

ASSESSMENT:

- Symptom scoring (0–10 scale) before and after treatment
- Patient feedback and follow-up for 7 days

DISCUSSION

This case study highlights the practical efficacy of *Upavasa* in managing *Kaphaja Shirashoola*. The patient reported significant improvement in heaviness, dullness, and nasal congestion within 48 hours. Complete relief was achieved by the fifth day without pharmacological intervention. The observed results align with classical *Ayurvedic* teachings, wherein *Kapha* vitiation is addressed primarily through *Langhana* and *Upavasa*⁵.

Modern interpretations validate that therapeutic fasting reduces systemic inflammation, promotes autophagy, and improves neurochemical stability < sup> 6 </sup>. These findings further support the ancient view that metabolic cleansing and Agni enhancement are key to managing *Kapha* disorders.

The patient's history of dietary indulgence and inactivity confirms the etiological role of *Ahita Ahara* and lifestyle, reinforcing the need for preventive interventions. The simplicity, affordability, and safety of *Upavasa* make it a viable option in primary care for *Kapha*-predominant headaches.

More structured clinical studies and RCTs are warranted to explore its broader applications. This case exemplifies the potential of integrating classical knowledge with clinical pragmatism, offering holistic solutions in chronic headache management.

SUMMARY

A 35-year-old male with classical symptoms of *Kaphaja Shirashoola* responded effectively to therapeutic fasting (*Upavasa*) alone. The study supports *Ayurvedic* principles that emphasise *Langhana* in *Kapha* disorders and opens avenues for safe, cost-effective, non-pharmacological management of similar conditions.

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