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## AYURVEDIC AND HERBAL APPROACHES TO WEIGHT LOSS

Weight loss has always been a hot topic in medicine with various everchanging holistic and prescription approaches. In the episode of Terry Talks Nutrition, “Build a Smarter Gut for Spontaneous Weight Loss” by Dr. Kulreet Chaudhary, an ayurvedic and holistic approach to weight loss is discussed.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Chaudhary came upon this program when treating her neurology patients when they started shedding pounds unintentionally. She addresses the body's environmental and biochemical states impact on the ability to lose weight and explains how simple herbs and teas can impact the ability to lose weight. This critical review aims to evaluate the scientific biases and strength of the information presented about the brain's connection to the gut and how herbal treatments work to influence it in a positive manner.

Dr. Chaudhary is an integrative neurologist whose story started on a personal level. After years of struggling with migraines and general fatigue from putting her health on the backburner due to the huge commitment of medical school, she was treated by an ayurvedic practitioner. After a few months of treatment, her migraines disappeared, her overall energy was up, her brain fog was gone,

and she had unintentionally lost some weight. She took this treatment approach back to her patients and did a deep dive into the brain's connection to the biochemical makeup of the gut, and how weight loss can be heavily influenced by your body's readiness to lose weight. Through her studies and evaluating her patients' struggle to lose weight despite their desire too, she discovered four obstacles, toxin overload, food addictions, dumb gut, and leaky brain which will be evaluated in the coming paragraphs in correspondence to the herbal products she uses to treat them.

Toxin overload is exactly what it sounds like, an overload and backup of toxins in your body that starts from birth.<sup>1</sup> The buildup of toxins is a result of the chemicals in our food, our environment and what seems like essentially anything and everything in this modern day and age. Toxin build up happens when there is an imbalance in biotransformation, converting and eliminating toxic byproducts, and bioaccumulation, toxin load exceeds the body's ability to convert.<sup>1</sup>

Build up of toxins leads to damage of many things in your body. Toxins leak into the blood causing some sort of autoimmune reaction, leak into the brain causing a “leaky brain” and also do damage to the gut directly by damaging the enteric nervous system. This has made the need for detoxification even more prevalent, and unlike typical ayurvedic approaches of fixing diet first then doing detoxification, she does detoxification upfront with her patients. In this Terry Talks segment, Dr. Chaudhary mentions the use of triphala for a leaky gut/dumb gut. Leaky gut is explained as gut membrane permeability broken down which allows particles into the bloodstream which aren't supposed to be there. This leads to damage of the enteric nervous system and a gut that is not functioning properly.

Triphala attempts at restoring the guts ability and works as a laxative but also repair the guts



ability to do peristalsis.<sup>2</sup> Triphala is a medicinal herb product made from the combination of three berries, Amalaki (*Emblica officinalis*), Bibhitaki (*Terminalia bellirica*), and Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*). A randomized control trial evaluating the use of triphala in obese patients in reducing BMI and weight loss compared to placebo found that triphala had positive effects on weight loss. The group utilizing triphala had weight loss, decreased waist circumference, decreased hip circumference, and importantly had no significant adverse effects of changes in liver or kidney function in the triphala group compared to placebo. This study was carried out for 12 weeks indicating safer short-term use with this herbal product.<sup>3</sup> They discuss more about these results which have meaningful connections to what Dr. Chaudhary has proposed about Triphala in her book. The triphala group reported improved bowel regularity and digestive comfort, indicating enhanced gastrointestinal motility, which is similar to the way Dr. Chaudhary intended to use the triphala, as a laxative and to restore gastrointestinal motility. Additionally, participants reported decreased bloating and constipation which is indirect evidence of improved peristaltic efficiency. Another study looking at key components of triphala, *Terminalia chebula* and *Terminalia bellirica*, evaluated its biochemical and pharmacological properties on PPAR $\alpha$ / $\gamma$  pathways and found that they increased PPAR $\alpha$  and PPAR $\gamma$  expression in hepatocytes and myocytes, enhancing fatty acid oxidation and glucose uptake without causing inducing adipogenesis.<sup>4</sup> This indicates that there is safe metabolic modulation without any irritation to the gut lining. They evaluated these drugs in correspondence to treating type II diabetes, but it falls in line with the idea of using for weight loss because by not inducing adipogenesis, there is no fat cell formation.

The next topic that the video discussed was food addiction. This aligns with phase two of Dr. Chaudhary's book, crushing cravings. Food products nowadays are packed with sugars, fats, additives and preservatives that will lead your brain to become addicted, and the junk food we eat can actually cause a dopamine spike resulting in heightened pleasure and addiction.<sup>1</sup> When viewing a PET scan, you can see overlap and similarities in the areas that are triggered in a patient with a cocaine addiction and an obese patient when they eat sugar. This can be another large obstacle for losing weight, given that this food addiction is seen to be physiologically similar to a substance use addiction. Ashwagandha and brahmi are utilized by Dr. Chaudhary to tackle these food addictions due to our modern diet. These herbs are not used to impact gut health directly, but to address the addiction and neurological process. A review of the evidence surrounding the use of Brahmi (*Bacopa monniera*) for the treatment of many neurological disorders supports this idea that dopamine is heightened and addiction pathways are activated. *Bacopa monnieri* extract influences dopamine and serotonin neurotransmission, particularly within the striatum and frontal cortex.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the studies reviewed mostly all found positive effects of using brahmi on neurological disorders in many different patient populations, but also many other organ systems in the body. This made me inquire whether there were any significant interactions or side effects seen with brahmi, and after reviewing the monograph on Natural Medicines, there are many things to be on the lookout for but brahmi was listed as possibly safe and generally well tolerated when being taken short term 300-600 mg for 12 weeks.<sup>6</sup>

Now that the triphala with combination of other herbal products has prepared the body for a detoxification, guggul can be taken as the powerful detoxifier.<sup>2</sup> In Dr. Chaudhary's book



*The Prime*, she provides in depth information about the phases and steps to her treatment regimen. Phase 1 activates a biochemical shift (psyllium, triphala, and prime tea that includes cumin, coriander, and fennel), phase 2 crushing cravings with continued habits from phase 1 (adding ashwagandha and brahmi), and phase 3 where we are now to ignite energy and fat which utilizes guggul to remove toxins and boost the liver to metabolize those toxins. One study evaluated the use of Z-guggulsterone as a hypolipidemic agent and how it impacts metabolism via induction of carboxylesterase and bile salt export pump.<sup>7</sup> The specific isolated Z isomer of guggul was seen to inhibit FXR, Farnesoid X Receptor, which frees bile acid synthesis and export pathways in improves overall bile flow and therefore toxin elimination. Additionally, there is a strong upregulation of CES1, carboxylesterase induction, which is an enzyme responsible for facilitating hepatic clearance of lipid-soluble toxins and drugs and promoting the breakdown of esterified lipids. Also, induction of the bile salt export pump (BSEP) was seen. This enhances bile mediated excretion and supports hepatic detoxification. One thing this study did mention though is that the guggul product is metabolized by CYP450 which poses high risk of interaction with other medications. This would be an important consideration if patients are taking any inducers or inhibitors.

Another concern that came across while researching guggul was a dermatologic hypersensitivity reaction rash that some patients acquired in a randomized control trial. This trial evaluated the short-term safety and efficacy of using three times daily doses of standard-dose guggulipid (1000 mg) or high-dose guggulipid (2000 mg), compared to placebo as a hyperlipidemic agent. The results were that guggulipid did not appear to improve cholesterol levels and it appeared to cause a

dermatologic hypersensitivity rash in some patients.<sup>8</sup> This would warrant physician guided dosing and supervision to consider interactions and side effects.

While doing this powerful detoxification, Dr. Chaudhary also gave her patients bone broth as nutritional support with added benefits of direct gut healing. An article reviewing bone broth benefits supports this use. Bone broth is rich in amino acids such as glutamine, glycine, proline, histidine, and arginine, which support the mucosal lining of the gut. These amino acids are shown to tighten intestinal junctions, reduce leaky gut, and promote epithelial cell repair. Bone broth is also shown to have anti-inflammatory effects, mineral support (calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, and zinc), and help enhance nutritional absorption.<sup>9</sup>

The last major obstacle Dr. Chaudhary mentions in this Terry Talks segment is the leaky brain which she explains as an inflammatory condition of the gut leading to breakdown of the blood brain barrier. LPS, lipopolysaccharide, is a toxin released by bacteria/parasites when they break down. This LPS can damage the blood brain barrier and then eventually the brain. The blood brain barrier exists to protect your brain from toxins, but when it's broken down and there are toxins circulating the blood, brain, and body, the patient has what is called chronic endotoxemia. This issue in the brain is related directly to infection and imbalance of normal flora in the gut.

The outcomes seen with use of all of these herbs and this large regimen was people changing their diet spontaneously by overcoming biochemical obstacles and avoiding the emotional tug of war that happens when struggling to lose weight. Her patients also began to see improvements in their neurological disorders as well. There is scientific evidence



out there that supports the use of these herbal products of various indications, and if done under supervision of a physician can be beneficial and safe. The combination of herbal products is harder to predict as there is lacking evidence for specific combinations, but these herbs have been studied a lot on their own. I would support the use of this regimen for myself or future patients. It provides evidence and reason as to why weight loss can be so tricky, and the fact that the environment of your body can impact the ability to lose weight but also gain it and keep it on. It is impossible to review all articles surrounding these herbal products, but there is evidence that each product recommended has some scientific backing to its mechanism. The link between gut and brain has been made very clear and each herbal product in her recommended regimen has its place and purpose either impacting the gut directly, or the neurological processes linked to the gut.

## References

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