



REVIEW ARTICLE

# Impact of non-communicable diseases on immunity and *Ojas* focussing on type 2 Diabetes Mellitus – A scoping review

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## Abstract

Non communicable diseases (NCDs) are recognised as a major challenge in sustainable development. Among different types of NCDs, diabetes is connected to a number of other serious health problems. The projected rapid increase in diabetes prevalence, incidence, morbidity and mortality shows the necessity of developing new treatment strategies to combat the problem. In addition, diabetic patients are more susceptible to infections like urinary tract infections, lower respiratory tract infections and skin and soft tissue infections. Various studies were conducted to define the diabetes-associated mechanisms that impair the host's defence against pathogens. These mechanisms mainly include defects in phagocytosis, suppression of cytokine production, failure to kill microbes, dysfunction of immune cells etc. Both innate and adaptive immunity are severely hampered in diabetes. The disease severity is associated with severe gut microbiota dysbiosis. In Ayurveda classics, *ojakshaya* is described in the pathogenesis of *madhumeha* and there is both qualitative and quantitative *kshaya* of *aparaojas*. This article discusses about different effects of T2DM on immune system which in turn promotes the different infections, gut microbiota dysbiosis and status of *ojakshaya* in *Prameha*.

## Introduction

Non communicable diseases (NCDs) were recognised as a major challenging issue in the 2030 agenda of sustainable development. As a part of this, heads of state and government were dedicated to develop ambitious national responses to reduce mortality by one third. NCDs are also known as chronic diseases as they have a tendency to be of long duration. They were developed as a result of combination of genetic, environmental, physiological and behavioural factors. Diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases and cancers are the four leading types of NCDs. These diseases create major social concern, especially in low- and middle-income countries. NCDs eradicate 41 million people each year which is equal to 74% of total deaths worldwide. Among the four leading types of NCDs, diabetes account for 2 million of NCD deaths including kidney disease deaths caused

by diabetes.<sup>1</sup> In India, NCDs contribute to 60% of total deaths. In this, 3% is due to diabetes.<sup>2</sup> Diabetes is also associated with number of other serious health issues including obesity, hypertension, stroke, cardiovascular diseases, diabetic complications etc. It also imposes large economic burden on disease affected people, their families, societies and national health care system. The projected rapid increase in diabetes prevalence, incidence, morbidity and mortality shows the necessity of developing new treatment strategies to combat the problem.<sup>3</sup> Immune system plays a central role in all these NCDs. Diabetes being a chronic condition deteriorates the immunity of the person in its long run. In Ayurveda the symptoms of diabetes can be seen in *Prameha* which is a *Vasthigata roga*. During the progression of *Prameha* it causes gradual depletion of *Ojas* and the person becomes susceptible to various infections. This article is aimed at presenting and discussing the impact of type 2 diabetes on immunity and *Ojas*.

## Methodology

For this scoping review, relevant articles were selected from PubMed using the advanced searching option using keywords Diabetes Mellitus and Immunity or *Ojas*. From these articles, 44 were selected applying the criteria of dealing with immune related changes, pathophysiological changes that directly or indirectly affect immunity as well as integrative approaches in dealing with *Ojas*, immunity and Diabetes Mellitus. Finally, these findings were compared with the classical concepts of *Ojas* and *Prameha*.

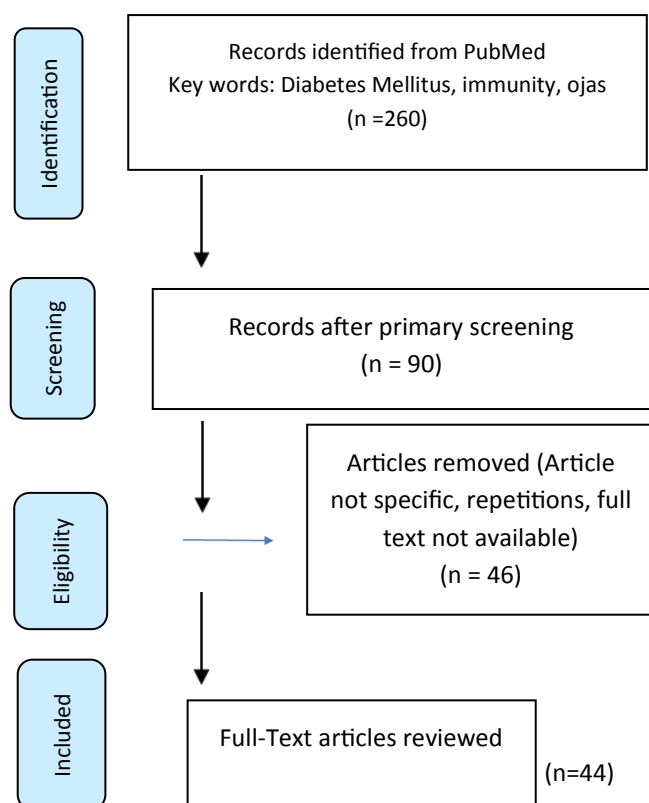


Figure 1 – Flow chart showing the review process

## Impact of T2DM on immunity

Generally, immunity is of two types, innate immunity and adaptive immunity. Innate immunity is the first line of defence against invading pathogens. Adaptive immunity is mediated by both B cells and T cells. B cells produce antibodies and T cells are classified into helper T cells and cytotoxic T cells. Unusual immune cell activation and consequent inflammatory environment plays an important role in the progression of T2DM. The host's immune response is disrupted in diabetes. There is damage of natural barrier and cellular immunity. As per American Diabetes Association, the chief issue in diabetes is development of infections due to a defective immune system. Already many studies were done to define diabetes-related mechanisms that damage the host's defence. The main mechanisms which play a crucial role in defective host's defence are mainly dysfunction of immune cells, suppression of cytokine production, defects in phagocytosis, failure to kill microbes etc.<sup>4</sup>

Complement system, dendritic cells, macrophages, neutrophils, natural killer (NK) cells, natural killer T (NKT) cells, innate lymphoid cells (ILCs) etc are the central constituents of innate immunity. Complement system acts through classical, alternative and lectin pathways. Dendritic cells are specific antigen presenting cells (APCs) which play as a connecting link between innate and adaptive immune system. Macrophages have a critical role in T2DM related atherosclerosis. Diabetes patients become pro-inflammatory due to the modification of lipoproteins in arterial wall. Due to this monocytes are recruited to the site and become differentiated into macrophages and further internalise the accumulated lipoproteins to generate cholesterol-laden foam cells. It further promotes progression of disease through the synthesis of chemokines, cytokines, matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs) and reactive oxygen species (ROS). Foam cells die by apoptosis and produce necrotic core within atherosclerotic plaque. Macrophages also play an important role in tissue repair. Initially they are pro-inflammatory to clear debris and pathogens, but later they stimulate tissue repair. Neutrophils are predominant leukocytes and they reach infection sites by chemotaxis. Activated neutrophils phagocytose and kill pathogens. NK cells sense and directly destroy tumour cells and virus-infected cells. NKT cells express markers of both NK cells and T cells. They produce many cytokines. ILCs yield pro-inflammatory and regulatory cytokines to encourage immunity, inflammation and tissue repair.<sup>4</sup>

**Table no 1:** Effect of T2DM on immunity

Total leukocytes	Leukocytes number increases. <sup>5</sup> They become large, more granular and express less level of antioxidant
<b>Innate immunity</b>	
Complement system	Decreased attachment of C- type lectin to mannose residues <sup>7</sup> , impaired lectin pathway, reduced CD59 activity, increased deposition of membrane attack complex (MAC) in vascular walls. <sup>8</sup>
Dendritic cells	Both the number and activity of DCs are reduced. <sup>9,10</sup>
Macrophages	Decreased cholesterol efflux and dysfunctional generation of foam cells. <sup>11</sup>
Neutrophils	Neutrophil become activated and release neutrophil extracellular traps (NETs) <sup>12,13</sup> , production of high levels of myeloperoxidase (MPO) <sup>14</sup> , ROS <sup>15</sup> , and calprotectin (S100A8/A9). <sup>16</sup> They become susceptible to apoptosis. There will be impairment in their migration, phagocytosis and microbial killing.
NK cells	Increase in number of NK cells, but they are dysfunctional. Expression of high levels of GLUT4 (glucose transporter type 4). <sup>17,18</sup> Decreased levels of NKG2D, NKp46 and degranulation capacity. They become
NKT cells	Increase in number of NKT cells, produce high levels of IFN- $\gamma$ , IL-4, IL-17 <sup>20</sup> , NKp39, NKG2D (natural killer group 2d) and NKp44 and low levels of NKG2A and 158b. <sup>21</sup>
Innate lymphoid cells	Increase in ILCs. <sup>22,23</sup> Production of high levels of IFN- $\gamma$ . <sup>23</sup>
<b>Adaptive immunity</b>	
Humoral immunity	Reduced germinal centres <sup>24</sup> , antibody (Ab) production. Defective isotype switching. Antibodies become glycosylated and fail to activate complement. <sup>25-27</sup>
Cellular immunity	Decreased number of pathogen specific Th17 helper cells. <sup>29</sup> Elevated number of Th1 cells, but decreased expression of granzyme B (GrB), perforin and CD107a. <sup>28,29</sup>

### Effect of T2DM on susceptibility to infections

T2DM has an elevated risk of infections like urinary tract infections, pyelonephritis, balanitis, vulvo- vaginal infections etc with a complicated course. Defects in the innate immune responses are responsible for this.

#### Bacteria

Cutaneous microbiome is altered in T2DM patients. Staphylococcus epidermidis become dominant and increases the incidence of skin and soft tissue infections. Defective neutrophil causes increased infections with Staphylococcus aureus, Klebsiella pneumonia etc. The basal phenotype of macrophages is altered and they have a diminished capacity to control Mycobacterium tuberculosis. Both the severity and risk of progression to active form increased in diabetes. There is an increase in serum levels of inflammatory cytokines like IFN- $\gamma$ , TNF- $\alpha$ , IL-1 $\beta$ , IL-17A, IL-2, IL-6 and IL-18, but decreased levels of IL-22. This contributes to poor control of TB infection. Both inflammatory microenvironment and dysfunctional immune responses increases the complications in diabetic TB. Wounds of diabetic patients are more prevalent in infections caused by Staphylococcus aureus, Enterococcus faecalis etc. T2DM patients are vulnerable to UTIs due to antibiotic resistant Escherichia coli, Klebsiella spp, Enterococci and Helicobacter pylori infections.

#### Viruses

There is a positive correlation with viral load and antibody

titres with blood glucose levels. Infections with severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), SARS corona virus2, hepatitis C virus (HCV) are increased in T2DM. Diabetic patients have elevated levels of adipose tissue derived adipokines, interferon, TNF- $\alpha$ , impaired viral clearance and impaired T cell function. Elevated levels of IL-6, IL-7, IL-8, IL-10, IFN- $\gamma$ , fibrinogen, plasminogen, C-reactive protein and D-dimer have been seen in COVID-19 patients. COVID-19 patients also have lymphopenia, decreased Tcells, B cells and NK cells. Surviving T cells are of an exhausted phenotype. There is a higher prevalence of HBV infection. Influenza virus can induce severe form of disease in diabetic patients. Prevalence of cytomegalovirus, Herpes simplex virus and Varicella zoster are also increased.

#### Parasites

T2DM patients have an increased risk of infection with Plasmodium Falciparum, Ascaris lumbricoides and Giardia lamblia etc.

#### Fungi

There is higher prevalence of fungal wound infections in diabetic patients and it is correlated with levels of HbA1c. Candida albicans, Candida parapsilosis, Candida tropicalis, Aspergillus species are the widely observed fungal isolates. They are resistant to antifungal medications. Diabetic patients are also susceptible to UTIs caused by Candida albicans.<sup>30</sup>

**Table no 2:** Effect of T2DM on susceptibility to infections

Infective agent	
<b>Innate immunity dysfunction</b>	
Complement system	<i>Streptococcus pneumonia, Candida albicans, Candida tropicalis, Candida lusitanae, Candida lipolytica, Candida krusei, Escherichia coli and Borrelia burgdorferi</i> <sup>31-34</sup>
NK cells	<i>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</i> <sup>29,35</sup>
Neutrophil	<i>Klebsiella pneumonia, Staphylococcus aureus and Burkholderia pseudomallei</i> <sup>36-40</sup>
Macrophage	<i>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</i> <sup>41</sup>
ILC3	<i>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</i> <sup>42</sup>
<b>Adaptive immunity dysfunction</b>	
B cells	<i>Streptococcus pneumonia, Staphylococcus aureus</i> <sup>43,44</sup>
T cells	<i>Mycobacterium tuberculosis</i> <sup>29,35</sup>

### Human microbiome

Human microbiome includes diverse types of microbes and the utmost studied ones are gut microbiome. Gut microbiome carries a complex community of over 100 trillion bacteria, viruses, yeasts and parasites. It influences the host physiology, gut barrier permeability, metabolism, immune functions and brain functions. Gut microbiome plays crucial role in NCDs as it actively involves in gut homeostasis. This vision can lead to new advances in gut microbiome modulation which in turn can produce good results in management and avoidance of NCDs. Suitable therapeutic immunomodulatory nutritional interventions have the potential to re-establish homeostasis in NCDs.

Alterations in gut microbiome have been perceived in preclinical animal models and T2DM patients. T2DM patients have an increase in multiple pathogenic bacteria such as *Escherichia coli*, *Clostridium hathewayi*, *Clostridium symbiosum*. The disease severity is associated with severity of gut microbiome dysbiosis. Administration of probiotics in animal models and humans showed improvement in disease progression.<sup>45</sup> Additional research is still necessary to find out the missing links between altered physiological and immunological mechanisms and amplified proneness to infections in T2DM.

### Diabetes in Ayurveda- Prameha and Madhumeha

Ayurveda explains *Prameha* as a group of disorders characterized by increase in frequency of micturition, increase in volume and turbidity of urine. *Acharya* include *Prameha* in the eight major incurable diseases. The disease was considered one among the *vasthigatarogas* and has twenty types. Among twenty types, ten are caused by *kapha*, six by *pitta* and four by *vata*. *Madhumeha* or *kshaudrameha* is explained as one type of *vatameha*. This term *Madhumeha* is used synonymously to Diabetes mellitus by many people. The three *doshik* types *kapha*, *pitta* and *vata* can be considered as three stages of one disease. *Kaphajaprameha* is the early stage and

*vatajaprameha* is the final stage. *Sahaja pramehi* has the *vata* predominant stage of disease in the very beginning. So, *Madhumeha* is a *vatapradhanatridoshajavyadhi* which occurs either independently as in *sahajapramehi* or as a final stage due to inadequate treatment.<sup>46</sup>

### Status of Ojas in Prameha

In Ayurveda, *Ojas* is considered as the essence of seven *dhatu*s. It represents biological strength or *bala*. It is the purest product of digestion, absorption and metabolism. *Charaka* explains *Ojas* in *dasapranayatana*. *Vyadhikshamatva* is the main task done by *Ojas*. *Vyadhikshamatva* is the capability of the body to battle against developed disease and resists new disease production. It is the resistance to decay and degeneration. It can be equated to immunity.<sup>47</sup>

As per *Ayurveda* classics, the vitiation of *Ojas* is broadly classified as *ojovisramsa*, *ojovyapat* and *ojakshaya*. This *ojakshaya* is in turn described in the pathogenesis of *Madhumeha*.<sup>48</sup> *Oja kshaya* is also seen in *sannipatajwara*, *pandu*, *grahani*, *kshatsheen*, *rajyakshma* etc. According to *Charaka*, the etiopathogenesis of *Prameha* begin as *kaphaja*; vitiates 10 *dushyas meda*, *mamsa*, *kleda* etc., and gradually it undergoes *pittaja* stage and finally it attains *vataja* nature. During the progression through each stage, *Prameha* manifest with its various systemic effects and attain the name *Madhumeha*. The *Madhumeha* becomes very difficult to cure due to its progression to the deeper *dhatu*s. During the progression of *Prameha*, it affects all the *dhatuvahasrotas* and cause *dhatukshaya* and finally results in *kshaya* of *Ojas*. Hence it can be called as *Ojomeha*.<sup>49</sup> Gradual depletion of *Ojas* makes the person susceptible to opportunistic infections and compromises the quality of life.

*Chakrapani* while explaining *Ojas* states that it exists in 2 forms- *para ojas* and *apara ojas*. The “*para*” means superior and “*apara*” means inferior. Though they are mentioned so, each has its own significance. Both *para* and *apara ojas* are mutually dependent for maintaining the

health and life. The *para ojas* formed during the time of fertilization is responsible for the viability and growth and development of the zygote through different stages. The *para ojas* located in *hridaya* having 8 *bindupramana*. It's highly vital as even a fractional decrease of it may cause instantaneous death. The *para ojas* is essential for the existence of healthy life till death. In *Madhumeha*, there is qualitative and quantitative *kshaya* of *Apara ojas*. *Apara ojas* traverses all over the body through minute channels. The quantity of *apara ojas* is half *anjali* (*swaprasruta*) and varies between individuals.<sup>49</sup> *Apara ojas* is derived from the *poshaka dhatus*. The quantitative and qualitative *dhatu kshaya* ultimately causes *ojakshaya*. The defective *apara ojas* gradually deteriorate the quality of *para ojas*. The improper *Ojas* disrupt the homeostasis of various systems of the body. Ultimately the person becomes weak, prone to many systemic diseases and infections.

*Ojas* is also mentioned as one of the *dushyas* of *Prameha*. *Prameha* begins as *kaphapradhana tridoshadushti*. Increased *kapha* and *meda* along with *kleda* and *shithilamamsa* is dragged to *vasti* and expressed as *prabhootavila mutrata*.<sup>50</sup> *Prabhootamutrata* indicates both the quantity and frequency of urine. *Avilatwa* is the turbidity of urine due to excretion of *dosha* and *dushya*. In *Madhumeha*, *vata* by its *ruksha guna* changes the quality of *Ojas* from *madhura* into *kashaya* and transports it to *vasti*. So, the *Ojas* produced in *Madhumeha* is deficient in quality. The qualitatively deficient *Ojas* is also lost through urine.<sup>48</sup>

## Discussion

NCDs have direct impact on the immune system as well as there can be indirect influence through other factors like gut microbiome. There is decline in both innate and adaptive immune mechanisms in cases of type 2 Diabetes Mellitus. Although the direct mentioning of *Ojas* in *Prameha* is limited, as any other disease; *dosha*, *dushya*, *prakriti*, *aahara*, *agni*, *koshta*, *satvam*, *nidra* etc has its own role in development and progression of *ojakshaya*. *Ativyayama* (excessive exercise), *chinta* (excessive thought), *bhaya* (worry), *kshayam* (loss of tissues), *abhigata* (injury), *kopa* (anger), *soka* (grief) are the main factors responsible for reduction of *Ojas*. The nature of *Ojas* both in quality and quantity is different in every individual depending on *prakriti*, *agni*, *satva* etc. Even though *Prameha* develops in a person due to its specific *nidanas* the progression of the disease will depend on the inbuilt nature of these *prakriti*, *agni*, *satva* etc. For example, the rate of progression of the disease will be slow in *kaphasariraprakriti*, *satvikamanasa prakriti*, *samagni*, *madhyakoshta*, *pathyaaharaseolitha* individual. If these factors are also

favorable for the disease, the progression of disease will be faster.

## Conclusion

Diabetes is one of the important threats to the public health. For countries like India, burden of diabetes has been already increased significantly and will continue to increase in future. The current pandemic, COVID-19 has been exposed how the susceptible populations with high rates of NCDs including diabetes are to disease severity. This in turn advocates the need to recalibrate and reframe the diabetic management strategies once again. At present all the treatments target at the control of blood glucose level only. So after some time patient suffers from severe diabetic complications. But Ayurveda as a holistic medicine approaches a disease in a broad aspect. It addresses the root cause and tries to prevent or delay the complications that may happen in future. So conservation of immunity is an important factor to prevent the complications. So the treatment should be based on increasing the *Ojas* or immunity along with controlling disease. A better understanding of how immune dysfunctions occur in diabetes will help an *Ayurvedic* physician to manage the disease without further complications.

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