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## Prevention and Treatment of Diseases during Maternal and Child Health Care in Ayurveda

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### Review Article

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#### ABSTRACT

Safe motherhood begins before conception with good nutrition and a healthy lifestyle. It continues with appropriate prenatal care and preventing problems if they arise. The ideal result is a full-term pregnancy without unnecessary interventions, the delivery of a healthy baby, and a healthy postpartum period in a positive environment that supports the physical and emotional needs of the mother, baby, and family. Pregnancy and childbirth have a huge impact on the physical, mental, emotional, and socioeconomic health of women and their families. Maternal and child health care in Ayurveda aims to provide good health for the expectant mother and the infant, ensuring prevention of diseases through wholesome diet and regimen which vary depending upon the season and surrounding environment as well as the digestive powers of the expectant mother. The treatment of common diseases of mother and young children has been elaborately described in Ayurvedic texts like Charak Samhita & Susruta Samhita. For proper ante-natal care of expectant mother, balance of Doshas through proper food (*Aahara*) and lifestyle (*Vihaara*) in different stages of pregnancy in consonance with the digestive power & the development of fetus has been emphasized. The specific regimen to be followed just after birth using various oils and herbs has been laid down giving reasons for various procedures. Breast milk being wholesome, vitalizing and appetizing in nature has been mandated as the most complete and wholesome diet for the infant. It contains the essence of herbs and cereals present in the food of the mother. Hence, Ayurveda lays down treatment of lactating mothers having deficient breast milk using specific food items and herbs. Similarly, remedies for prevention and treatment of the common diseases of mother and infant which have been used since ancient times based on severity of disease, body constitution, digestive power and body strength of the person have been based upon either a single drug or a combination of medicinal plants.

Child health welfare is an important national issue. It is a well-known fact that the future of a nation depends on the state of its children. The healthier the children, the brighter are the prospects of a nation. If the children are weak and unhealthy, instead of being useful members of the society, they will be a burden on the socio-economic progress of a country. Hence, proper health care of mother and children should be an important goal of every society<sup>[1]</sup>.

The main aim and objective of maternal and child health care in the Ayurvedic system of medicine is to ensure good health for the expectant mother, ensuring prevention and treatment of pregnancy related diseases, avoiding any obstetric complication and ensuring smooth delivery of a healthy child. The various ancient Ayurvedic texts provide detailed descriptions for ensuring the development of healthy uterus, conception of healthy ova and sperm in the uterus followed by normal development of fetus. These ideal situations are linked to wholesome diet and regimen which vary depending upon the season and surrounding environment as well as the digestive powers & mental condition of the expectant mother.

Maternal and Child health care has been elaborately described in many Ayurvedic texts like Charak Samhita, Susruta Samhita, Kashyap Samhita, etc. In fact, its importance can be gauged by the fact that Mother and Child Health Care (*KaumarBhritya*) has been listed as one of eight main sub-divisions of Ayurveda by Charak in Charak Samhita<sup>[2,3]</sup>.

Maternal and Child health care can be broadly divided into the following aspects:

- Ante-natal care of mother
- Nursing and healthy upbringing of infants
- Importance of breast feeding
- Treatment of lactating mothers having vitiated or less breast milk
- Treatment of common diseases of infants and children

### Ante-Natal Care of Mother

The care of mother during pregnancy period depends upon the many factors for supplying the nutritious food to the fetus and preventing and curative care of the mother by following the mentioned diet and regime accordingly to the development of the fetus. The physical and mental well-being of the mother and fetus depend on the equilibrium of the three metabolic factors (*doshas*) in the body, namely the *Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*. These metabolic factors or doshas can be manifested in the form of physical attributes as well as psychological characteristics. Thus, while action of *Vata* can be gauged from the nervous activities, *Pitta dosha* is related to metabolic activities & digestion and *Kapha* is linked to immunity & stability. In order to prevent and cure the vitiation of these *doshas*, proper food (*Aahara*) and lifestyle (*Vihaara*) for the mother have been emphasized in many ways. For example, it has been recommended that the expectant mother should remain in happy spirits, wear clean clothes and live with devotion towards the gods and elders. She should avoid stale and dirty food, fasting, physical exercise, psychological strain, sexual intercourse, painful and agitating sounds and visits to cremation grounds [1,4].

The ideal diet of mother during this period has been prescribed in Ayurveda according to her digestive power and physical strength. At the same time, the use of certain food items has been recommended for the expectant mother in different stages of pregnancy in consonance with the development of fetus. As per Ayurveda, during the first month, the fetus attains the shape resembling the *slesma* (mucoïd character) in which all the body parts though present are not conspicuous and during the second month, the embryo becomes a solid mass. In the third month, all the sense organs and minor body parts become apparent, five buds one for head and four for upper and lower extremities develop. Accordingly, during the first and second month use of pure milk, honey, sweet and cold diet has been suggested, while during the third month milk with honey, rice and butter (*ghee*) has been recommended for the expectant mother. During the fourth month, the various body parts become more conspicuous and the fetus gains stability while over the next 1 month, more flesh and blood accumulates and auditory reflexes and peripheral sensory reflexes develop to a certain extent. The development of scalp hair, body hair, nails, bones and tendons is more prominent during the sixth month. As per the Ayurvedic system of medicine, milk and curd or rice and curd are the most suitable food for the fourth, fifth and sixth months of pregnancy. The body features such as muscles, bones and blood as well as minor body parts develop substantially during the seventh month and the fetal development gradually becomes more pronounced and refined during the eighth and ninth months. Hence, medicated milk, rice gruel and butter along with sweet cold potency diet and drugs are prescribed for the mother during the seventh, eighth and ninth months of pregnancy. Susruta has recommended administering mild medicated enema (*Basti karma*) using decoction of *Bala* (*Sida cordifolia*), *Atibala* (*Abutilon indicum*), *Shatapushpa* (*Foeniculum vulgare*) and oil during the eighth and ninth months for evacuation of undigested food [2,4,5,6,7].

### Nursing and Healthy Upbringing of Infants

As soon as the infant is born, two pieces of stone should be rubbed near its ear to make it cry. A mixture of rock salt (*Saindhav lavan*) and butter (*ghrit*) should be given to the newborn baby to make it vomit the *Kapha* and amniotic fluid. After bathing with hot or cold water, medicated oil called *Baladi tailam* mainly containing *Sida cordifolia* should be applied on its body to remove the stickiness. *Kushthadi Tailam*, another medicated oil mainly containing *Saussurea lappa* should be applied on the umbilical cord to make it dry.

The newborn should be fed *ghee*, honey and pulverized *Anantmula* (*Hemidesmus indicus*) on the first day, *ghee* prepared with *Lakshamana* (*Ipomea sepiaria*) roots on the second and third day, and only honey and *ghee* on the fourth day before it is given breast milk. The mother should simultaneously offer the breast to the child for suckling. The juice of *Brahmi* (*Bacopa monerie*) and *Sankhapushpi* (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*) with honey should be given to improve the growth, memory, strength and intellect of the infant.

After six months, the child should be given boiled wholesome rice with milk and other light foods to supplement the breast milk [4,6].

### Importance of Breast Feeding

The breast milk in the newly parturient women sets in three or four days after childbirth. Breast milk is the sweet essence of the oily lymph (*Ras*) manufactured from digested food. It is a white fluid containing the essence of herbs and cereals present in the food of the mother. It is wholesome, light, vitalizing and appetizing in nature. It is the most complete and wholesome diet for the infant. If sufficient quantity of mother's milk is not available, a wet nurse (*Dhaatri*) of good conduct and habit should be utilized. Otherwise, the infant should be given either cow's milk or goat's milk after boiling [6,7].

### Treatment of Lactating Mothers Having Vitiating Breast Milk

The loss or suppression of the milk in the breast is usually due to the absence of natural affection towards the child, anger, grief, taking light diet, excessive physical exercise, food devoid of oily substances and excessive sexual indulgence.

For establishing an easy flow of breast milk and for improving its quantity and quality, the equanimity of the three *doshas* should be first restored. Towards this purpose, a diet consisting of Sali-rice, barley, jaggery, wheat, milk, meat soup, wine, garlic (*Allium sativum*), lotus stalk, satavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), virdari-kanda (*Pueraria tuberosa*), madhuka pushp (*Mimusops elengi*), Pippali (*Piper longum*), etc, should be given. The mother should also take adequate rest and try to avoid anger, fear, grief and exercise.

In case of excessive production of breast milk, the mother should be given purgatives and emesis and restricted diet [3,7].

### Treatment of Common Diseases of Infants And Children

Infants and children are prone to diseases like adults, but in a milder degree. They also suffer from the same derangements of vitiating factors causing these diseases. Therefore, the signs, symptoms and treatment of their diseases are similar to those of adults. The following remedies for the prevention and treatment of some of the common diseases have been used since ancient times in the form of either a single drug or a combination of medicinal plants. The dose for oral administration of the drug is decided on the basis of severity of disease, constitution of the patient, his digestive power and body strength [3,7].

1. The decoction of parpata (*Fumaria officinalis*), cheraita (*Sweritia cheriata*), neem (*Azadirachta indica*), guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), chandan (*Santalum indicum*) and usheer (*Vetiveria zizanioides*) with honey is beneficial in the treatment of fever.
2. For treating cough and cold, vasak (*Adhatoda vasica*), pippali (*Piper longum*), Ela (*Elletaria cardamomum*), mustak (*Cyperus rotundus*), kantakari (*Solanum xanthocarpum*), lavang (*Syzygium aromaticum*) and ginger (*Zingiber officinalis*) with honey are recommended in the form of decoction and as expressed juice of fresh plant.
3. Bael (*Aegle marmelos*), and kutaj (*Holarrhena antidysenterica*) are useful in treating diarrhea, while dhatuki (*Woodfordia racemosa*), mocharas (*salamalia malabarica*) and ativisha (*Aconitum heterophyllum*) are beneficial in case of blood diarrhea.
4. Peepali (*Piper longum*), ajwain (*Trachyspermum ammi*), haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*), dhanya (*Coraiandrum sativum*), ginger (*Zingiber officinalis*), chitrak (*Plumbago zeylanica*), heeng (*Foetida narthex*) and mustak (*Cyperus rotundus*) are prescribed for the treatment of indigestion, colic pain & distension of abdomen in the form of powder and cold infusion and sometimes hot infusion.
5. Vidanga (*Embelica ribes*), mustak (*Cyperus rotundus*), palash (*Butea monosperma*), darim (*Punica granatum*) and kampillak (*Mallotus philippinensis*) are recommended for treatment of worm infestation.
6. Kalmegh (*Andrographis paniculata*), ghritakumari (*aloe vera*), shankha pushpa (*Tephrosia purpurea*) and bhumi amlaki (*Phyllanthus emblica*) are used in the treatment of jaundice and liver & spleen diseases.
7. Amalaki (*Embelica officinalis*), yasthimadhu (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), bala (*Sida cordifolia*) and guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*) are beneficial for curing general weakness and for immunity.
8. Rasna (*Vanda roxburghiana*), bala (*Sida cordifolia*), nirgundi (*Vitex negundo*), erand (*Ricinus communis*) and lahsun (*Allium sativum*) in the form of powder and as part of medicated oil can cure nervous diseases.
9. Ghritakumari (*Aloe vera*), bakuchi (*Psoralea corylifolia*), haridra (*Curcuma longa*) and coconut oil are recommended in case of any skin disease.

### CONCLUSION

Ayurveda provides a number of preventive and curative measures for ensuring the safety and good health of both the expectant mother as well as the new born baby. The recommendations made in respect of food habits and lifestyle combined with the judicious use of specific medicinal herbs in case of illnesses can substantially contribute towards the good health of both mother as well as infant. These remedies also possess the advantage of being locally available & cheap and do not cause any adverse side-effects.

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