



IMPORTANCE OF BREAST FEEDING AS AYURVEDA VIEW

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Abstract

The birth of a child and maternal bonding of mother is a special, surprising and interesting phenomenon. Birth of a child demands future nutritional arrangement for the baby. So “mother’s milk” as a safe, readymade, uncontaminated, warm and nutritionally rich food to a new born baby. Mother’s milk is also called as breastmilk (*Nari stanya*) which is the best milk for the baby.⁽¹⁾ It is commonly known that breast feeding is good for the health of babies but it is equally beneficial for the mother as well. *Ayurveda* advocates breast feeding is a healthy for post pregnancy journey for the mother. It is widely recognized that breast feeding is the best nutrition for human infants and optimal food for new born. Breast milk provides numerous health benefits to both mother and baby. In *Ayurvedic* texts there is nice description of *stanya* means breastmilk like, formation of *stanya*(breast milk), cause of *stanya pravrutti* (milk ejection), *dhatri*(wet nurse), *stanapana vidhi*(breast feeding),*stanyavridhi dravyas*(drugs increasing quantity of milk), *stanya apanayankala*(weaning period), abnormalities of breast milk and its treatment etc. are discussed in detail.

Key words: Stanya, Breast milk, Stanyapan vidhi

Introduction

In *Ayurveda*, the procedure of breast feeding is described as a sanskara of child which should be started with enchanting of mantras. Qualities and types of breast milk according to dosas also have equal importance and quiet necessary for proper growth of child. This is an attempt to elucidate the concept of breastmilk and breast feeding in Ayurveda to the present world.

First and foremost breast milk is the optimal source of nutrition for infants and toddlers as it contains inimitable properties that help babies grow. The antibodies in breast milk protects infants from common childhood illnesses. Breast feeding lowers the risk of stomach problems, ear infection, respiratory infections, childhood asthma and diarrhoea. Colostrum, the thick, sticky substance produced immediately after birth, provides the proteins, minerals and antibodies. Breastmilk can be used to help treat cuts, soothe diaper rash, eye and ear infection⁽²⁾

The world health assembly (WHA)has set a target to increase global exclusive breastfeeding rate from 38% in 2012 to 50% in 2025 globally and in turn improve the health of the babies around the world. Currently in india only 55% of children are exclusively breastfed to contribute to the global goal india has to achieve a 65.7%. exclusive breastfeeding rate by 2025 as per the WHO tracking tool. To encourage breastfeeding the world celebrates breastfeeding week from august 1 to august 7 every year.⁽³⁾

Government also launched national breastfeeding promotion programme MAA (mother’s absolute affection) to ensure adequate awareness is generated among masses, especially mother’s on the benefits of breast feeding.⁽⁴⁾

Concept of breast feeding in Ayurveda

Whatever food is taken by the mother is converted into *rasa* after its digestion. This *rasa* circulating throughout the body also reaches the *stana* and is being called as *stanya*. So *stanya* is derived from *rasa* only *stanya* is also referred as *upa dhatu* of *rasa dhatu*.⁽⁵⁾ The first milk colostrum is rich in various nutrients, extremely needed for new born. So it is advisable that the mother should start feeding as soon as possible after birth of baby. It is said guru by *acharyas* as it contains more protein and less fat than mature milk.⁽⁶⁾ The total quantity of breastmilk is described as two *anjalis*.⁽⁷⁾ According to Acharya pure milk should be normal in colour, smell, cold, *madhura* in *ras*, without any contamination, yellowish white colour, it mixes well when put in water and devoid of froth, floats or any impurities. The milk provides nourishment (*pusttikar*) and good health (*arogyam*) to the child. There is description of *dhatris* (wet nurse) in case of absence or abnormalities of mother's milk.⁽⁸⁾

Causes of *stanya pravrtti* (milk ejection)

Acharya sushruta clearly enumerated factors which results for milk ejection as thought, sight or touch as well as physical contact of the child but affection for the child is mainly responsible.⁽⁹⁾ The more the baby sucks at the breast, the greater is the stimulus for milk production on 3rd or 4th day after delivery milk ejection start.⁽¹⁰⁾ Role of psychological factors like love, affection and concerns for the baby has been highlighted in Ayurveda. Coordination of hormonal, neuronal and psychological factors for completion of hypothalamic-pituitary mammary axis is well appreciated in modern science. In modern 2 hormones are most important like prolactin and oxytocin. Prolactin is responsible for milk secretion and oxytocin is responsible for ejection of the milk.⁽¹¹⁾

Stanpan vidhi (method of breast feeding)

In *ayurvedic* texts, breast feeding discussed in detail. According to *Acharya charaka*, mother after taking bath and wearing clean garments and tie *prajasthapan* drugs like *aindri*, *brahmi*, *satavari* on head, start breast feeding specially offer her right breast first to the child.⁽¹²⁾ *Acharya sushruta* described as after proper bathing of child and washing of breast as well as expressing out small quantity of milk and chanting the given mantra and breast feeding start.⁽¹³⁾

In present era, after normal delivery as soon as possible breast feeding will be start. The mother can assume any position that is comfortable to her and the baby. She can sit or lie down. Make sure that baby's whole body is supported not just neck or shoulders. The baby's mouth is wide open. The baby's chin touches the breast.⁽¹⁴⁾

Benefits of breast feeding:

For baby

- Breast milk contains all the nutrients a baby needs for normal growth and development in an optimum proportion.
- Breast milk contains a number of protective factors like IgA, lymphocytes, lysozyme.
- Breast milk is a complete diet for baby.
- Breast feeding is most convenient and time saving.⁽¹⁵⁾
- In Ayurveda breast milk is use for *navan* (*nasya*), *aschotan* (eye drops)⁽¹⁶⁾

For mother

- breast feeding can reduce a women's risk of postpartum depression, due to release of oxytocin hormones.
- The longer a woman breast feeds, the better the lifetime benefits for reducing breast cancer, ovarian cancer, heart disease and diabetes risk.
- The hormones released while breast feeding help to shrink the uterus back to its pre pregnancy size.
- The brain releases oxytocin and prolactin hormones during breastfeeding, encouraging mothers to bond with their babies and easing stress and anxiety.

Concept of Tridosha in breast milk:

In *Ayurveda*, there is nice description about *Vata*, *Pitta*, *Kapha* doshas quality of milk, which is affected by mother's diet and cause health problems in the children.⁽¹⁷⁾

Properties of milk	<i>Vata</i>	<i>Pitta</i>	<i>Kapha</i>	Ideal
Colour	Dark redish	Yellowish, bluish, blackish	White	White(shankhavabhasa)
Taste	Astringent Bitter	Sour, pungent Salt	Sweet Salt	Natural and sweet
Smell	No smell	Smell like blood or foul smell	Smell of ghee, oil and fat	Natural
Temperature	Normal Slightly cool	Warm	Cool	Warm
Drops of milk put slowly over surface of water in a glass by a dropper	Floats	Produces yellow streaks in water	Sink	Mixes easily
Disease	<i>Vataj</i>	<i>Pittaj</i>	<i>Kaphaj</i>	Ideal growth and development , absence of disease
Viscosity	Less	Intermediate	High	Viscid

Table 1

Composition of breast milk⁽¹⁸⁾

Nutrient	Human milk (%)	Cow's milk(%)
Water	88	87.5
Energy	65	67
Protein	1.1	3.2
Carbohydrate	7.4	4.4
Calcium	28	12
Vitamin c	3	2

Table 2

Conclusion:

Overall, breast feeding has been found to promote a healthier lifestyle for the child and mother. Breast milk is best food for babies. Breast milk is complete meal for baby and in *Ayurveda*, *kasyapa samhita* says that diet is a *Mahabhaishajya*.⁽¹⁹⁾ Breast milk is an ideal food for neonates. It is the best gift that a mother can give to her baby. It contains all the nutrients for normal growth and development of a baby from the time of birth to the first six months of life.

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