IMPORTANCE OF BREAST FEEDING AS AYURVEDA VIEW

Dr. Raina A. Khimsurya, MD in Ayurveda, Reader at MRIAS Gandhinagar

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. 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 pravruti (milk ejection), dhatri(wet nurse), stanapana vidhi(breast feeding), stanyavriddhi 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.

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.

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.
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 pravruti (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 3\(^{rd}\) or 4\(^{th}\) 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.\(^{(17)}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Properties of milk</th>
<th>Vata</th>
<th>Pitta</th>
<th>Kapha</th>
<th>Ideal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colour</td>
<td>Dark redish</td>
<td>Yellowish, bluish, blackish</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>White(shankhavabhasa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>Astringent Bitter</td>
<td>Sour, pungent Salt</td>
<td>Sweet Salt</td>
<td>Natural and sweet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>No smell</td>
<td>Smell like blood or foul smell</td>
<td>Smell of ghee, oil and fat</td>
<td>Natural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperature</td>
<td>Normal</td>
<td>Warm</td>
<td>Cool</td>
<td>Warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Slightly cool</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drops of milk put slowly over surface of water in a glass by a dropper</td>
<td>Floats</td>
<td>Produces yellow streaks in water</td>
<td>Sink</td>
<td>Mixes easily</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disease</th>
<th>Vataj</th>
<th>Pittaj</th>
<th>Kaphaj</th>
<th>Ideal growth and development, absence of disease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Viscidity</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Viscid</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition of breast milk(^{(18)})</th>
<th>Human milk (%)</th>
<th>Cow’s milk(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Water</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbohydrate</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin c</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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.
References:
2. www.littlebundle.com
5. Sushruta Samhita by P.V. Sharma, Chaukambha Visvabharti Oriental publishers and distributors, edition 2013
8. Charaka Samhita by Dr. Ram Karan sharma, chowkambha Sanskrit publication, reprint 2017
10. Sushruta Samhita by P.V. Sharma, Chaukambha Visvabharti Oriental publishers and distributors, edition 2013
12. Charaka Samhita by Dr. Ram Karan sharma, chowkambha Sanskrit publication, reprint 2017
15 Essential Pediatrics by O.P. Ghai, CBS publishers and distributors, reprint 2016
16. Charaka Samhita by Dr. Ram Karan sharma, chowkambha Sanskrit publication, reprint 2017
17. Charaka Samhita by Dr. Ram Karan sharma, chowkambha Sanskrit publication, reprint 2017
18. www.national institute of nutrition ICMR hyderabad