

BREASTFEEDING AND AYURVEDA: A REVIEW STUDY¹*Vd. Babita B. Mandal and ²Vd. Vijaykumar U. Gawai¹P.G. Scholar, Department of Kaumarbhritya, Government Ayurved College, Nanded.²HOD, Professor, Department of Kaumarbhritya, Government Ayurved College, Nanded, Maharashtra, India.***Corresponding Author: Dr. Vd. Babita B. Mandal**

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Article Received on 10/06/2019

Article Revised on 01/07/2019

Article Accepted on 22/07/2019

ABSTRACT

Adequate nutrition is one of the fundamental needs of a New-born baby. As like other mammals' human baby is also born with a readymade food supply of its own and therefore breastmilk is an ideal natural and complete food for a Neonate. Breast milk is uniquely species specific as well as baby specific also. Biochemical composition of human milk is adopted as per the need of their offspring. It contains all the nutrients suited to serve the nutritional and biological need of the baby for their normal growth and development. The health and survival of the New-born depends upon the health status of the mother and her awareness, education and skills in Mothercraft. And breastfeeding is the best way to care for neonates. Besides all these advantages there are so many challenges in breast feeding practices which can be overcome by proper guidance and treatment. Importance of breastfeeding is described by both Ayurveda and modern science in detail. Acharyas has mentioned formation of *stanya* (breast milk), causes of *stanya pravritti* (milk ejection), properties of *stanya*, *stanya dushti lakshan* (properties of vitiated milk), *dhatri* (wet-nurse), *dhatri pariksha* (examination), *stanapan-vidhi* (breastfeeding), *stanasampat* (merits of breast), *stanya-nasha hetu* (causes of cessation of milk formation), *stanyavridhi dravyas* (galactagogues), *stanyapanay* (weaning), abnormalities of breast milk and its treatment in detail. This paper helps to explain the importance of breastfeeding with modern and ayurvedic aspects.

KEYWORDS: *Stanya*, Breastfeeding, *Stanya dusti*, *Dhatri*, *Stanasampat*, *Stanya nash*, *Stanyapanay*.**INTRODUCTION**

Along with the joys of motherhood, there comes the responsibility of nurturing the new-born. Ayurveda praised breastfeeding and enumerated many advantages of breastfeeding. For healthy growth and development of a new-born, proper nourishment is of utmost importance, which is provided by the *Stanya* (breastmilk). *Stanya* (human breastmilk) is considered as an ideal and complete source of nutrition for the baby as it is specific for the human baby and contains almost all the nutrients, Vitamins, minerals, immunoglobulins, water and other bioactive factors needed. Ideally a child lives exclusively on breastmilk for the first 6 months of life and continues to nurse for as long as possible or mutually desirable. Breastfeeding creates an emotional bond between baby and mother, necessary for future growth and development.

Acharya Charaka described human milk has *Jivanam* (beneficial for life), *Bruhanam* (nourishes), *Satmya* (wholesome) and *Snehanam* (oleating) properties. This explains the importance of breastmilk in proper growth and development of children.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The information is collected from various Ayurvedic Samhitas, different textbooks on Paediatrics, various

articles and published research papers, journals, medical websites etc.

***Stanya Nirmiti* (Milk Formation) and *Pravritti* (Ejection)**

According to Charaka and Kashyapa, the *Shadrasayukta ahara* taken by the mother during her pregnancy gets divided into three parts; one for fulfilling the nutritional needs of her own body, second for nourishment of the growing foetus and the third one is used up for the formation of '*Stanya*'. According to Sushruta, *Stanya* is the essence (*Rasa* or *Prasada bhaga*) of *Ahara Rasa* and is said to be the *Upadhatu* of *Rasa dhatu* as stated by some Acharayas. Acharya Kashyapa also stated that *Stanya* is produced from the *Rakta dhatu* during gestational period.

Acharya Sushruta has described the factors responsible for milk ejection as the thought, sight, touch or physical contact and especially the affection of mother for the baby. Modern science also explains the similar physiology of milk formation and ejection. The Prolactin hormone which is secreted from the anterior Pituitary gland stimulates the production of milk from the alveolar epithelial cells. This milk gets stored in the alveoli and lactiferous sinuses. Posterior Pituitary stimulates oxytocin

(the milk ejection hormone) on getting positive stimulus by the suckling of the baby or even a thought of him. It means that the milk is produced as a result of interaction of hormones and reflexes.

***Stanya sampata* (Characteristics of normal Breast milk)**

Acharya Charaka has mentioned the characteristics of normal Breastmilk as the milk which is normal in colour, smell, taste, touch and dissolve evenly in water. Milk with such properties provides nourishment and good health to the child. According to Sushruta, normal milk is *Sheeta*, *Amalam* (free from impurities), *Tanu* (thin in consistency), *Shankhabh* (conch shell colour), sweet in taste and on mixing with water, it dissolves evenly, neither forming any froth, nor sediment or swims over it.

According to Acharya Kashyapa, as *Amrita* was produced during the *Samudra manthana* as an essence of all the *Aushadhas*, in the same way *Stanya* is formed as an essence or nectar of all the *Aushadhas* in the *Kukshi* of the mother, and comes out through the Breast. Therefore, *Stanya* is said to be *Jeevanam* i.e. life, as it provides complete nourishment, strength and increase *Ojas*.

***Stanapan vidhi* (Methods of Breastfeeding)**

In Ayurveda, there is a concept of the *Jatakarma Samskara*. According to Acharya Charaka, after following the *Navajata shishu paricharya* (basic resuscitative procedures), the *Jatakarma Samskara* is performed by allowing the baby to lick unequal amounts of sacredly enchanted *Madhu* (honey) and *ghrita*. Thereafter, the baby is allowed to feed milk from the right breast first. Hence, we can conclude that Charaka also believed that the breastfeeding should be started as soon as the baby is ready to suck and mother is well enough to be suckle.

Early feeding establishes emotional bonding between the mother and the baby, it prevents neonatal hypoglycaemia, provides warmth to baby by skin to skin contact and immunoglobulins which provide immunity against various infection and facilitate lactation.

Any Breastfeeding position is acceptable, provided mother is comfortable and baby is well attached to the breast. Proper position includes following signs:

1. Baby's head and body in same plane and supported well.
2. Baby's body should face mother with nose opposite to the nipple and body touching the mother's abdomen.

We should ensure proper attachment of the baby at the breast to ensure adequate intake by the baby. If baby is calm and relaxed with wide open mouth with everted lips which covers most part of the areola and full cheeks while Breastfeeding then it is sign of good attachment.

The baby must be fed every 2-3 hourly in general.

Duration of each feed should be decided by the baby. There is no fix rule or any strict time schedule for feeding as some baby feed repetitively in 1 hour and some in 2 or 3 hours therefore, the baby should be feed on their demand. Both over and inadequate feeding should be avoided.

After every feed, proper burping has to be done because baby swallows a lot of air during breastfeeding, and this air may cause abdominal discomfort, colic pain and regurgitation of feeds. Burping allows easy evacuation of the swallowed air.

***Dhatri* (Wet Nurse)**

Acharya Charaka and Vagbhata explained the concept of *Dhatri* in detail. *Dhatri* (wet nurse) are advised in case of absence of the mother, or if the mother is unable to feed the baby. Acharyas has described the qualities of *Dhatri* in their respective *Samhitas* as- she should be of *Samanvarna* (same caste), *Anatura* (free from diseases), *Avyanga* (no disability), *Avyasani* (non-addicted) etc.

Top feed should be strictly avoided. However, it can be indicated in cases of true lactation failure, unavailability of mother, some serious maternal illness or death. Ayurveda mentioned the substitute for breast milk in case of non-availability of mother milk or wet nurse. Charaka has advised cow milk in absence of mother milk while Vagbhata advised medicated cow or goat milk in absence of mother milk. Nowadays, many formula feeds are available in market which have nearly same composition as the breastmilk. But it must be used with proper dilution as prescribed by the manufacturer. Composition of cow milk is nearest to human milk except high protein so, it must be used with some dilution to prevent gastric upset of the baby.

Benefits of Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding provides unique and tremendous health benefits to the baby as well as to the mother.

Benefits to the baby

- Breast milk is a complete food; so, there is no need of any supplements up to the age of 6 months.
- It is easily digestible and maintains the healthy gut flora.
- It contains number of anti-infective substances, antibodies and friendly lacto-bacilli which protects the baby from many infections and provides immunological benefit to the baby throughout the lifetime.
- Breastfeeding enhance emotional security and make close bonding between mother and child.
- Breastfeeding babies are smarter and have more IQ level than top feeding babies, because it contains DHA which helps in brain development.
- There is no risk of adulteration, dilution, contamination and infection.

Benefits to the mother

- Oxytocin released during breastfeeding promotes involution of uterus, thus reduces risk of PPH and anaemia.
- Breastfeeding delays the ovulation and onset of menstruation which provides natural spacing. (Lactational amenorrhoea)
- Breastfeeding is convenient, readily available all the time at desired temperature. There is no need of bottle sterilisation and preparing the feed.
- Mothers who breastfeed the babies have less risk of ovarian and breast cancer.
- Breastfeeding helps in regaining the pre-pregnancy body weight faster because the energy stores laid down during the pregnancy are consumed faster during lactation.

Challenges for Breastfeeding

Besides all the above advantages of breastfeeding there are still some conditions which leads to challenges in breastfeeding. These problems can be divided in following categories.

1. Nipple and Breast problems

- Flat or inverted nipples: do not project easily, prevent proper attachment of the baby to the breast. This can be managed by nipple stretching exercise and breast pump.
- Sore nipples: are the painful, tender nipples with or without cracks or bleed which cause discomfort to mother during feeding and leads to withdrawal of breast from babies' mouth. This can be managed by ensuring proper attachment of baby, application of hindmilk (as an emollient), use of local anti-fungal ointment.
- Breast engorgement: hard, painful and swollen breast due to inadequate ejection/expression despite adequate production of milk. This can be managed by frequent demand feeding, frequent expression of the milk manually and local hot water compress to relieve the pain.

It can be correlated with *Stanyavridhi lakshana* stated in ayurvedic literatures. Acharyas also mentioned causes and treatment of *Stanyavridhi* as application of *lepas* and expression of breastmilk.

- Breast abscess: may developed due to infection of engorged breast. It can be treated with frequent expression of breast milk, antibiotic and surgical drainage, symptomatic therapy.

2. Lactational failure

It can be defined as low milk production insufficient to meet baby's requirement. It can be managed by proper guidance, counselling and reassuring the mother. By eliminating the causative factors, boosting milk production by galactagogues, or by starting top feeding or arrangement of wet-nurse.

Ayurveda also mentioned the symptoms, causes and treatment of *Stanyanasha* and *Stanyakshaya*. They

described *Avatsalyam* (absence of emotional bonding), anger, depression, low nutritional value diet or fasting leads to low milk production. Due to inadequate milk intake child became irritable, lean and weak. For the treatment of *Stanyakshaya* ayurvedic scholars mentioned so many galactagogues like *Shatavari*, *Madya*, *Lashun*, *Vankarpas*, *Vidari* etc.

3. Situations contraindicated for Breastfeeding are maternal infection (HIV, HBV), during maternal medication which excreted in breast milk and produce unwanted effects on baby, serious physical and mental illness of mother.

Stanyapnayana (Weaning)

Weaning or complementary feeding may define as the gradual introduction of semi- solid and solid diet along with breastfeeding to meet the growing nutritional demand of the baby. Usually weaning is started at the age of 6 months.

Weaning is also explained in Ayurveda, Vagbhata told that gradual weaning should be started after tooth eruption and child should be provided with cow's or goat's milk with *Laghu* and *Bruhan* diet.

DISCUSSION

As we have discussed the composition, formation and ejection of breast milk, importance of breastmilk, methods of breastfeeding, treatment of lactation failure, concept of wet-nurse, weaning by both modern science and ayurvedic aspect; all these reveals that there are no major differences in the views of modern and ayurvedic scholars. According to both the sciences breastmilk is a complete and an ideal food for the new born and it should be practiced properly for healthy growth and development of the baby.

CONCLUSION

With the help of all the above information we can conclude that breastmilk is the only natural and complete source of nutrition for the baby up to the age of 6 months and continuation of breastfeeding as long as mutually possible is beneficial for the healthy growth and development of the baby. So, we should promote breastfeeding practices by educating the mothers and to treat the causes which prevent breastfeeding. For a better future of children, we should take care of them in the infancy, as it is the period of rapid physical and mental growth and for this a healthy nutrition and immunological support is utmost, and all these can be provided by the human breast milk.

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