

CONCEPT OF BREASTFEEDING IN AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Adequate nutrition is one of the fundamental needs of a New-born baby. Breast milk is the optimal food for almost all infants in the first year of life. The breast milk provides numerous health benefits to both mother and baby. Breastfeeding should begin soon after birth. As like other mammals human baby is also born with a readymade food supply of its own and therefore breast milk is an ideal natural and complete food for a Neonate. Breast milk contains many antibodies that improve immunity in infants and provide power to fight off viruses and bacteria. It contains all the nutrients suited to serve the nutritional and biological need of the baby for their normal growth and development. Importance of breastfeeding is described by both *Ayurveda* and modern science in detail. According to ancient texts duration of breastfeeding should last until the eruption of teeth, for at least six

months. In *Sushruta Samhita* clearly indicated about solid foods at the age of six months, when teething starts. Early weaning and late weaning both are dangerous in infants. *Acharyas* has mentioned about 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 ncessation of milk formation), *Stanyavridhhi dravyas* (galactagogues), *Stanyapanay* (weaning), abnormalities of breast milk and its treatment in detail.

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

INTRODUCTION

Breast milk is best gift from mother to baby. *Stanya* is produced by *Madhura Ahara rasa*, which is formed by well digested food & accumulated from all over the body, enters in breast, which are essence of *Rasa dhatu*. The breast milk which has *Varna, Gandha, Rasa, Rupa, and Sparsha* in Prakritik condition and which mix in water completely, such milk is beneficial for baby. Human milk is the most appropriate of available other milk for infants. The *Sushruta samhita* also recommended that breastfeeding continued until the mother became pregnant again. *Acharya Charaka, Sushruta* and *Vagbhata* have described the *Stanya* as *Madhur rasa* (sweet), *Kashaya anurasa, Sheet, Laghu, Pathyakar, Jeevaniya, Bruhaniya* (anabolic), *Deepaniya* (digestive), and *Satmya* (favourable/wholesome). According to *Acharya Sushruta* and *Vagbhata*, 3rd or 4th day after delivery milk secrets through it. According to *Acharya Kashyapa*, the love and affection about a child is one of the causes responsible for *Stanyapravartan*. According to *Acharya Sushruta*, the touch and affection causes ejection of milk. *Stanya* is *Vatahar, Pittahar* and *Raktadoshar, Abhighatjanya* and gives instant relief in eye disorders. It is used for *Nasya* in *Raktapitta* and *Aaschotan* in *Netraroga*. According to *Brihatrayi* and *Laghutrayi* *Stanya* is said to be a complete food for babies and is *Satmya* for all. Breast feeding creates a strong emotional bond between a mother and her newborn. The amino acid tryptophan present in milk helps the baby to acquire a sound sleep during night time.

Formation of *Stanya* (Breast Milk)

According to *Charaka* when pregnant lady take *Ahara* then *Ahara rasa* is equally divided in three parts.

- 1st part for nourishment of pregnant lady self
- 2nd part for breast milk
- 3rd part for development of fetus.

Stanya is formed from *Rasa (Rasa-prasad bhag* or bodily fluids) as stated by *Acharyas*. *Acharya Kashyapa* also mentions formation of *Stanya* from *Rakta* (means blood/ red blood cells and also involves blood vessels, liver and spleen) during pregnancy period. Milk is produced as a result of interaction of hormones and reflexes (prolactin, oxytocin, rooting and sucking reflexes). During pregnancy and lactation the glandular tissue is stimulated to produce milk due to various hormonal influences. The suckling stimulus on the nipple of the breast causes signals to be transmitted through sensory nerves to the hypothalamus, which

causes release of prolactin and oxytocin from the pituitary gland. These hormones are then carried by the blood to the breasts, where it promotes secretion of milk and contraction of myoepithelial cells of the mammary glands leading to ejection of the milk from the glands. In less than a minute after the beginning of suckling, milk begins to flow.

Causes of *Stanya Pravriti* and *Apravriti* (Milk Ejection or Cessation)

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. The more the baby sucks at the breast, the greater is the stimulus for milk production. After delivery the *Dhamnis* or *Siras* of precordium get dilated and initiate milk ejection on the 3rd and 4th day. Amount of milk is two *Anjali* (per day). Approximately 600 to 800 ml of milk is secreted per day. It is especially interesting that fondling of the baby by the mother or hearing the baby crying often gives enough of an emotional signal to the hypothalamus to cause milk ejection. Many psychogenic factors can inhibit oxytocin secretion and consequently depress milk ejection. Prolactin “Milk secretion” reflex enhancing factors are sucking, expression of milk, emptying of breast, night feeds and hindering factors: incorrect position, painful breast, prelacteal feeds, top feeding. Oxytocin “Milk ejection” reflex enhancing factors are thinking lovingly of baby, sound of baby, sight of baby, mother is relaxed /comfortable/ confident and hindering factors are worry, stress, pain, doubt.

***Stanya Pariksha* (Examination of Breast milk)**

Normal or abnormal milk may be examined by three means.

- a) Examination by sense organs, Organoleptic Test or *Panch jyanendriya pariksha*
- b) Assessment by water test i.e. *Jala pariksha*
- c) Assessment by Effect of milk i.e. *Prabhava pariksha*

Examination by water test(*Jala Pariksha*)

Put the milk drop gently over the surface of water in a transparent glass or container such as beaker by a dropper and observe the changes occurs in milk drop such as color, direction of drop movement , total time taken to settle at base or its fibers on the bottom, mixing in the water etc.

- If drop floats over the water and spreads like an umbrella it suggests *Vataja* milk.
- If drop submerged and dispersed in yellowish streaks in water suggests *Pittaja* milk.
- If drop settles down suggests *Kaphaja* milk.

- If drop present all the above characteristics suggests *Sannipataja* milk.
- If drop mixed uniformly without aforesaid features suggests *Stanya sampata* or pure or ideal milk.

Concept of Dhatri

Acharya Vagbhata advised for arrangement of two wet nurses in conditions of inability for feeding the baby by the mother. Examination of wet-nurses (including physical, psychophysiological qualities) have been described in *Ayurvedic* literature, so that breast feeding result in proper growth and development in child. *Acharya Charaka* says that wet-nurse should be *Samman-varna* (similar in the caste), young, modest, non-addict, similar in *Desha*, affectionate to the child, free from diseases, *Jivitvatsa* (having alive child), having adequate amount of breast milk etc. Similarly description were given by other *Acharyas*.

Stana-Sampat (Merits of Breasts) and *Stana-Asampatjanya Prabhava* (Effect of Abnormal Breast of Mothers)

The breast which are comfortable for sucking are said to be the perfect one. *Acharya Charaka* describes *Stanasampat* as the breast which is not *Atiurdhawa*, *Ati lamba*, and *Ati krisha* and have appropriate nipple i.e neither be elongated nor elevated. But *Acharya Sushruta* also explained various abnormalities due to feeding with imperfect breasts. Actually breast size is not associated with breastfeeding success. If an infant is fed the breast milk with abnormally shaped and sized breast by the mother or wet nurse, it may cause onset of various complications. e.g. wet nurse with elevated breast can cause *Karala* (having a gaping mouth and projecting teeth), while the *Lamba-stani* (long sagging breast) may result in death of the infants by covering the mouth and nose orifices or due to *Ucchavasa-rodhat* (obstruction during inspiration). Child suckling on a very big breast of wet nurse may develop stiffness of neck. Breastfeeding is the normal way of providing young infants with the nutrients they need for healthy growth and development.

Stanya-Sampat (Characteristics of Normal Breast Milk)

According to *acharya Charaka*, the milk which is normal in colour, smell, taste and touch, dissolved absolutely in water because of its watery nature. This milk provides nourishment (*Pusttikar*) and good health (*Aarogyum*) to the child. *Acharya Sushruta* described that *sheet* (cold), clean, free from impurities, *Sankhabh*, sweet in taste, mixes evenly in water, not producing any froth or streaks when mixed in water. This type of milk provides good health, growth and development of body, strength to the body.

Stanapan-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*, *Amogha* etc.) on head, start breast feeding specially offer her right breast first to the child. *Acharya Sushruta* described as after proper bathing of child and washing of breasts as well as expressing out small quantity of milk and chanting the given *Mantra*, breast feeding starts. Similar description is given by *Vagbhata* and *Misra*. In *Ayurveda*, it is also clearly mentioned that breast feeding to child by many different woman result in various disorders in child.

Contraindication of Breastfeeding

In *Ayurvedic* texts, *Acharyas* enlisted various physical and psychologically disorders of woman in which mothers breast feeding unfit as the woman who is *Kshudhita* (hungry), *Shoka* (having grief), *Shranta* (get tired), *Dustadhatu*(vitiation of bodily tissues), *Garbhini* (pregnant), *Javerita* (suffering from fever), *Kshina* (emaciated), *Atisthula* (obese), and taking non-congenial diets etc., should not give breast feeds to the child. The child whose recently ingested medicine is not assimilated should also not be given the breastfeed etc.

Substitute of Breast Milk (During its Unavailability)

In *Ayurvedic* texts, there are descriptions about the substitute milk in case of non availability of milk of mother or wet nurse. *Acharya Sushruta* advised that when mother or wet-nurse is unable to feed due to any reasons, Goat or Cow's milk should be given in appropriate amount until the mother or wet-nurse does not regain sufficient milk or else till the child cannot thrive properly without milk. *Vagbhata* advised that goat or cow's milk should be given to the child after medicating it with decoction of laghu-panchmoola and mixed with sugar. In *Ayurvedic* classics, it is clear advised that if the child is given breast milk of different woman or lactating woman is frequently changed, then the child suffers from various diseases because this changed milk becomes *Asatmaya* (non congenial).

Stanya Apanayanakala (Weaning Period)

Acharya Vagbhata told that gradual weaning should be done after eruption of teeth and child should be given goat or cow's milk with light and *Brihana* diet. *Stanya apanayana-vidhi* (method of weaning) also discussed in detail in *Ayurvedic* texts. Weaning is a transition period in which solid and table foods replace the milk or formula. Between 6 and 12 month of age, after the baby become familiar to solid foods and liquids by bottle and/or cup, most

infants decrease the volume and frequency of breast feeding. Weaning begins at 6 month of age, in the beginning introduce one food at a time while milk should continue to 12 month and gradually formula or cow's milk is then substituted. While introducing solid feed encourage a cup rather than a bottle.

***Stanyakshaya-Stanyanasha*(Inadequate production and absence of breast milk)**

- Due to the following causes, women (mother or *Dhatri*) has loss of milk production or inadequate production.
- *Krodha*(anger), *Shoka*(grief), *Avatsalya* (lack of affection).
- *Langhana*(*Upavasa*).
- Overexertion.
- Use of *Ruksha* (dry-having lack of *Snigdha* substances in food or drink like fat etc.) foods and drinks.
- Aggravation of *Apana-Vayu*.
- Retention of natural urges for longer period.
- Reduction in *Shukra/ Shukla*, exposure to fire(Heat), nightawakening, intake of dry and hot food etc.

Treatment of *Stanyanasa* (Cessation of Breast Milk) and *Stanyakshya* (Loss of Milk)

Acharyas describe various treatment formulations in cases of *Stanyanasa* and *Stanyakshya* as cereals, meat, cow's milk, sugar, curd and use of desired things cure *Stanyakshya*. Happiness, absence of sorrow, anger, fear, and avoidance of excessive walking. Use of *Stanyajanan dravya* (drugs capable of increasing amount of milk) as decoction of roots of *Viran*, *Shalli*, *Shshthika*, *Ekshuvalika* (*Saccharum officinarum*), *Darbha* (*Imperata cylindrical*), *Kusha* (*Desmostachya bipinnata*), *Kasha* (*Saccharum spontaneum*), *Gundra*, *Itkata*, *Katrina*. Pestled *tila* (*Sesamum indicum*), *Lashuna* (*Allium sativum*), fish, *Sringataka* (*Trapa natans*), *Vidarikanda* (*Pueraria tuberosa*), *Madhuka*, *Alabu* also used to *Stanyajanan*, *Satavari* (*Asparagus racemosus*) pestled with milk.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, significant and long-term health benefits are associated with breastfeeding for the individual mother, baby and society. Breastfeeding is the ideal way to feed babies; Breast milk serves both as a source of nutrition and immunological support for the developing infant. *Ayurvedic* texts describe in detail about normal/abnormal breasts and their effect upon

the child, wet nurse, importance and formation of breast milk, method of breast feeding, conditions of woman unfit for breast feeding, abnormalities of breast milk, vitiation of breast milk, substitute milk, and general treatment of *Stanyanasa* etc.

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