

A STEP TOWARDS NUTRITIONAL HEALTH OF CHILDREN WITH AN AYURVEDIC VISION

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ABSTRACT

Nutrition and especially infant and childhood nutrition is one of the most highlighted and discussed matter in pediatrics, because childhood is the formative period which lays the foundation of adult life. Thus the wellbeing of these children, on the threshold of physical and mental maturity is vital for development of nation. The health of children is directly related with the important aspect of childhood i.e. growth and development, as they are the parameters of health and diseases. The dramatic growth of infants during the first year of life imposes unique nutritional needs so, mother's breast milk is ideal for a newborn. The World Health Organization recommends that children in developing countries should be exclusively breastfed up to 6 months of age after that weaning is to be started gradually but breast feed should continue to be the main food of the baby even when weaning is started. Milk amongst the *Ahara dravyas* is referred as *jivaniya*. Hence, it is the only primary source of nutrition and diet to the infant due to *Satmyatva*. Classical texts of *Ayurveda*, advises the intake of *Stanya* from the day of birth continued until the age of two years. After 6 months of age introduction of fruit and fruit juices recommended as *phalaprashana samskara* because mother's milk is deficient in vitamin C, D & iron. Fruits & fruit juices help in supplementing this extra nutrition along with the *agnideepaka* property (increases the digestive capacity) and relieve constipation. Thereby the growing infant requires adequate amounts of milk as it the only factor for causing *deha pushti*, *dhatu vardhana* and *bala vardhana*. In *Ayurveda*, *phalaprashana* & *Annaprashana Samsakar* advised as weaning. As children develop, they require the same foods as required in adults i.e. whole grains, a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, calcium for growing bones, healthy proteins, healthy fats (MUFA, PUFA) are needed to support the growing body of a child. *Ayurveda* gives lot of importance on good nutrition at every season; daily routine and every stage of a life (i.e. since fetal life to old age) in order to preserve health of a person.

KEYWORDS: Nutrition, *Stanyapan*, Weaning, *Phalaprashana Samskara*, *Annaprashana samskara*.

INTRODUCTION

Children constitute largest portion of our population and their status of health indicates the health of nation. Childhood is the formative period which lays the foundation of adult life. Moreover, the quality of our future human resource is going to be determined largely by these children. Thus the wellbeing of these children, on the threshold of physical and mental maturity is vital for development of nation. Now-a-days lifestyle is so busy that people can't follow *Pathyapathya* or they don't know about their food quality and quantity, their routine work. So, in between this tenseful life, nobody has time & in fast life, fast food is more preferable food to eat, cold-drinks are more favorable to drink. So, according to *Ayurveda*, *Agnidushti* occurs and *Bhutagni* followed by

Dhatvagni affected & all the *Dhatus* do not get proper nourishment. In present era, nutritional deficiencies constitute a major public health problem in India & other countries. In India around $\frac{3}{4}$ th of our pediatric population is suffering from one or other nutritional deficiencies. Lots of attempts have been made to minimize this at National level. For this the immunization plans and milk distribution or mid day meal to school going children alone will not be sufficient. Therefore Indigenous system of medicine especially *Ayurveda* can play major role in providing good health to children with a combinations of *aahar* (food), *vihar* (action), *vichar* (emotions/thoughts) and *aushadh* (medications) which is essential to improve nutrition.

Nutritional Health Care Of Child

Ayurveda gives lot of importance on good nutrition at every stage of life in order to preserve the health of a human body. A wholesome diet, based on locally available foods and herbs, compatible to ones' own body constitution, body requirements and seasons is essential to maintain the good health as well as the normal growth and development of child.

Nutritional Care at Fetal Stage of Life

The nutritional status of child depends upon the nutritional status of mother during antenatal period. Whatever the food a pregnant lady consumes is divided into three parts, one part nourishes mother's own nutritional needs, the second part supply the nutrition for synthesis of breast milk which nourishes the child after birth and third part fulfil the nutritional need of fetus growing inside the mother¹ (kashyapa). To maintain the health of mother and child during pregnancy *our classical texts* suggested a comprehensive and holistic regimen i.e. *garbhini paricharya*. The regimen corresponds to the growth and development of the fetus and comprises of measures related to *aahar* (diet), *vihar* (activity) and *vichar* (thoughts/emotions). Some of the specific measures as suggested in *garbhini paricharya* include: a liquid and sweet diet in the first three months since the fetus is in a fluid state, fulfillment of all the desires of the women, particularly during the fourth month corresponding to the fetal heart, a sweet, liquid and heavy diet focusing on intake of cereals in the next three months for optimal fetal growth, measures like abdominal oleation and a liquid and solid diet rich in fats and proteins (according to modern nutrition) during the last three months is suggested. Emphasis is laid on a happy emotional-mental state of the woman indicating the active role of families during pregnancy. This monthly regime as advised by all ancient scholars like Caraka,^[2] Susruta,^[3] etc. is important for maintaining health, strength, nutrition and complexion of both mother as well as the fetus. This regime promotes the growth and development of the fetus and prevents fetal malnutrition as described in *Ayurveda* like *Upvishtaka*⁴, *Nagodara*,^[4] etc.

Nutritional Care at Neonatal and Infanthood age

After birth of baby, all *Acaryas* have explained *JAATAKARMA*⁵ i.e. first feeding of the baby with *madhu* and *ghrita* before establishing breast feeding. After birth, the baby continues to receive all its nutrients from the mother through breast milk. Breast milk is the ideal and the most natural food for the human baby. Its composition is ideal for infants of all constitutions and it is the source of all the essential nutrients. Breast milk promotes growth and development and acts as a tonic with all nutrients. *Acarya Kasyapa* has explained the features of pure breast milk as that with which the baby thrives well i.e. achieves sufficient growth & development and both the mother and baby remain disease free i.e. healthy and happy or comfortable.^[6] In fact breast feeding is a good diet for children, however

with increasing the age, nutritional requirement also increases and only milk cannot fulfill the requirement. Therefore, it becomes essential to introduce other food articles to them. As per our classical text, the child should be taken away from the breast feeding gradually to fed with other solid and nutrient food when his or her tooth eruptions starts,^[7] but this does not mean that the baby should be totally devoid of breast milk from the age of 8 months (age of teeth eruption) because *Ayurveda* advices breast feeding up to 2 years of age as termed *Ksheerannada*. *Susruta*,^[8] and *Vagbhata*,^[9] have advised that weaning should be started from 6th month of age while *Kasyapa* has advised that at the age of 6 month, the infant should be offered fruit juices and semi-solid food from the age of 10th month.^[10] Introduction of fruit and fruit juices recommended as *Phalaprashana samskara*,^[10] at the age of six months as this helps the baby to adjust with *rasas* through *madhura*, *amla rasas* of fruits and fruits are also the best sources of vitamin C & fibrous material. All *Acaryas* have advised to start giving food (along with breast milk) i.e. *Annaprashana Samskara*.^[8,9] at the age of 6 months that similarize the current concept of gradual introduction of solid food at 6 months age which is strictly on the basis of nutritional requirement of the infant.

Nutritional Care at Childhood Age

As children develop, they require the same foods as adult's i.e. whole grains, a wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, calcium for growing bones, healthy proteins, healthy fats are needed to support the growing body of a child. Since in this period, the rate of growth & development is very high, so to tone up the process of growth & development, and to provide supplementary nutrition, texts of ancient period have mentioned several preparations or tonics for children, as by *Susruta*,^[11] - *Vaca*, *jatamansi*, *apamarga*, *brahmi*, *pippali*, *haridra* etc. with honey for breast fed babies i.e. *Kshirada*, *ghrita* medicated with *vaca*, *madhuyashti*, *pippali*, *citraka*, *triphal* for breast fed & top fed babies i.e. *Kshirannada* (1-2 years children) and *ghrita* medicated with *dasamula*, *tagar*, *madhuyashti*, *draksha*, *brahmi* etc. for *Annada* (>2 years) child. *Acarya Kasyapa* has explained that tonics as *LEHA* and the process named as *LEHANA KARMA* e.g. - *Abhaya Ghrita*, *Suvarna Prasana*, *Samvardhana Ghrita*. Food (*Ahara*) has an important role in health care as *Kasyapa* explained its importance that there is no any medicine like *Ahara* and so he said *Ahara* as *MAHABHAISAJAYA*.^[12] To prevent nutritional deficiencies, daily food should comprise of cereals (carbohydrates), pulses (proteins), salt (minerals), vitamins, enough water, fats and if necessary meat. Diet in children needs equal emphasis on both quality and quantity e.g. preschool children need special attention to vitamins and minerals while toddler needs more than half the portion of food that mother eats.^[13]

DISCUSSION

Adequate nutrition is of superior importance during childhood but it is crucial, especially in the first five

years of life, when growth is most rapid and the child is totally dependent on his parents. Inadequate nutrition leads to inadequate growth in addition to undernutrition and poor weight gain i.e. balanced nutrition is needed for adequate growth of child. Indian Academy of Pediatrics stress that for proper growth and development, infants should be exclusively breastfed with no other food or drink – not even water in first 6 months of life.^[14] This must be followed by sequential addition of nutritionally adequate, preferably homemade semisolid and solid foods to complement (not to replace) breast milk, till the child is gradually able to eat normal family food after one year while breastfeeding is continued up to 24 months of age or beyond.^[14] Adequate nutrition for adolescent girls and pregnant and lactating mother is also important for child nutrition.^[14] According to current guidelines, a higher energy dense diet (less complex carbohydrates and large quantity of fat) is needed to get optimal growth in first three years and during adolescence.^[15] The importance of food for normal growth & development of a child has been recognized in today's era scientist is already explained by our ancient scholar several thousand years ago. *Ayurveda* has a detailed regimen based on various phases in a day, the changing season, the physical properties of foods and herbs. To prevent nutritional deficiencies, daily food should comprise of cereals (carbohydrates), pulses (proteins), salt (minerals), vitamins, enough water, fats the six constituents of food, which form the human body in the following way: water 63%, proteins 17%, fats 12%, carbohydrates 1%, vitamins & minerals 7%.

CONCLUSION

“The provision has been made for infants to be fed upon their mother's milk. They find their food and their mother at the same time. It is complete nourishment for them, body and soul”- said by Rabindranath Tagore. In present era, nutritional concepts of *Ayurveda* are applicable at all stages of life for proper growth & development of child and also to preserve the good health of a human body. *Ayurveda* lays great emphasis on ensuring holistic nutrition. There is need to resurge this in the scientific light for better community involvement as “child is the father of men” and the better future of any society and nation exist in the better development of child.

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