

BREASTFEEDING - AYURVEDIC & MODERN PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda one of the world's oldest medicine system has described various aspects & numerous benefits of breastfeeding. Modern science as well through various researches has proven importance & benefits of breastfeeding. Breast milk is the best gift a mother can give to her child as it plays as a primary source of nutrition and hydration.

KEYWORDS: *Breastfeeding, Breastmilk, Colostrum, Stanapaan, Stanya*

INTRODUCTION

We recently observed **World breastfeeding week** (1st to 8th August) with the theme “**A shared responsibility**” and **National Nutrition Week** (1st to 7th September) with the theme “**Feeding right from the start**”, both of them highlighting the importance of child nutrition right from the beginning. Thus being a part of this society it's our responsibility to understand the depth of this breastfeeding, to promote & to educate as many as possible regarding the same.

Stanya & Its Ejection

The diet consumed by a mother is digested to form ahar rasa, the essence of this ahar rasa is collected in stana region after the process of filtration is called as stanya. This stanya is considered as updhatu of rasa dhatu. Physiology of ejection of stanya is almost similar to that of ejaculation. It is secreted in response from the breasts by thought, sight, touch and any sort of physical contact with the baby.

Physiology of Lactation

Prolactin hormone, responsible for growth & development of breasts, production & secretion of milk is secreted from anterior pituitary gland. This secretion is initiated on stimulating nipples caused by the sucking action of infant. Hence, breastfeeding practices are to be promoted as soon as possible after the birth. Oxytocin hormone is secreted from posterior pituitary gland in response to stimulation by thoughts, sight, sucking, touching or merely by the sound of the baby. This oxytocin is responsible for contraction of uterus and the myo-epithelium around the alveoli resulting in the ejection milk.

Normal Amount

Matra- Two Anjali per day (According to Ashtang Sangrahaakar) Quantity- 600- 800ml (According to K. E. Elizabeth 2006)

Stana-Sampat

It is a concept described by Ayurveda which states ideal health and the normal anatomy of the breasts of a lady who is supposed to breastfeed the infant. The references state that the breast should be devoid of any of the defects such as too large, too short, should neither be elongated nor elevated. Nipples should be well developed.

Stanya-Sampat

Ideal stanya should be able to completely dissolve in water in a way to form homogenous mixture, should provide nourishment in a way that the infant is disease free. It must have all the normal properties including taste, odor, color and touch. Haritsamhita has further added that the ideal milk adds good psyche (satwa) and also gives beauty.

Stanya-Guna

The properties described by Ayurveda state that the Stanya is light (laghu), cool (shita), appetizing, subsides tiredness, Rasayana and one which pacifies Vala-Pitta dos has. It is also useful for the procedure of tarpana, ashchotana & nasya in hemorrhagic and ophthalmic disorders.

BENEFITS OF BREAST FEEDING

When a female is in the breast feeding phase, her ovulation is delayed, it helps in post-partum bone re-mineralization, helps in involution of uterus, increases oxytocin levels thus reducing postpartum blood loss, preventive against peri-menopausal breast cancer, reduces risk of ovarian cancer & helps in loss of pregnancy associated adipose tissue. It helps in maternal infant emotional attachment, promotes brain growth of baby & results in better intelligence. It provides immunological protection & thus less hospitalization in first 6 months.

Composition of Breast Milk

The composition varies during lactation

- Colostrum which is secreted in initial 3 days & less in quantity, yellow in color and is of thick consistency. It contains large amount of vitamins A, D, E, K, antibodies & immune-competent cells.
- Transitional milk. It is followed by colostrum and continues up-to 2 weeks. The protein & immunoglobulin content decreases which are instead replaced by fat and sugar content.
- Mature milk is more thin & watery but with all essential nutrients.
- Preterm milk contains more calories, proteins, immunoglobulins,
- Sodium & iron as required for the baby.
- Fore milk contains more water is rich in protein, sugar, vitamins & minerals is secreted at the start of a feed in a way that it quenches baby's thirst.
- Hind milk is rich in fat content so that it gives satiety, comes towards the end of feed.

Signs of Effective Breastfeeding

Infant shows average daily weight gain of 15-30gms. Infant regains birth weight by day 10 of life. It takes frequent feedings about more than 8 times a day. On nursing audible swallows with rhythmic sucking should be heard, infant urinates 6-8 times per day and may have bowel movements about 3-4 times a day. After first 3 days the stools should be off and yellow, more than or equal to one tablespoon.

Stanya Paanam

The stanyapaan principles and techniques have been narrated by Sushrutacharya in shareersthana. The baby is to be facing in the north direction when feeding and has to be bathed, dressed with new clothes initially. The mother has to face herself towards the east direction, and should waste some amount of milk before feeding the baby. Enchanting of mantras along with use of right breast initially has also been advised. Placement of a pot filled with water near this baby's head is instructed by charakacharya.

Breastfeeding Techniques

It should be initiated within 30 minutes in case of vaginal deliveries and as soon as possible in cesarean section. Pre-lactal feeds should be discouraged unless necessary. Both mother & child to kept in same room to which helps in the emotional bonding & stimulation as well. Positions which are comfortable to both mother and the baby and acceptable. Some of the positions that can be commonly applied are

- Indian position where the mother gets some back support & sits in a cross legged manner.
- Supine position where the baby is held onto her abdomen while lying down in supine position, helpful in cesarean deliveries.
- Cradle position
- Football hold / footy hold / underarm position / twin hold in which baby is held under the arm of mother with feet pointing back and body supported by arm.
- Side lying position.

Proper latching is ensured by proper techniques which ensures satiety of baby, proper flow & good supply of milk. Duration of feed required by each baby differs hence it should be decided by the baby's needs, both the breast should be offered subsequently Babies tend to swallow a lot of air owing to various factors including improper attachment which may lead to discomfort and regurgitation. Hence burping after every feed is mandatory while holding the baby in upright position on the shoulder & gently stroking the back for 5-10 minutes. Expression of milk manually or with the help of pump is advised in case of breast engorgement, contraindications or separation of mother and child. The expressed milk can be stored for up-to 8hours on room temperature and 3 months in breast milk banks.

Problems in Breast Feeding

Flat or inverted nipples which can be managed by syringe suction method, breast pumps & nipplesstretching exercises.

- Sore nipples which are mostly due to fungal infections, improper attachment or forceful separation of sucking baby can be managed by local application of anti-fungal, application of hind milk in the affected region.

- Breast engorgement can be managed by local hot compression, expression of excessive milk and frequent feedings.
- Breast abscess which can be managed by drainage, frequent expression and antibiotics.
- Lactation failure which could be due to multiple causes like psychological illness, stress, incorrect breastfeeding techniques, & physical causes which all need immediate attention & counselling in order to identify and eliminate the causative factors.

In Absence of Breast Milk

A) Ayurvedic Concept

Cow's milk or goat's milk can be boiled with laghupanchamul (Shalaparni, Prishniparni, Gokshur, Kantakari & Brihati) mixed along with sugar can be given to the baby.

In absence of breast milk of mother a Dhatri which is a wet nurse (lactating woman) should be appointed for caring and feeding the baby. Various aspects of dhatri like her diet, medications, her characteristics, her regimen have been mentioned by Acharya Kashyap.

B) Modern Concepts

Formula feeding: Formulas are great substitutes for mothers who have no affection, who are not able to or do not wish to breastfeed their children. These formulas are devoid of the distinct bioactive molecules responsible for protection against infections and contributing towards development & maturation of immunity.

A human breast milk bank offers services which includes collecting, screening, processing and dispensing by prescription, the human milk which was donated by lactating woman.

Contraindications of Breast Feeding

- Infants with serious illness in like galactosemia, phenylketonuria and extreme prematurity where oral feeding is impossible.
- Maternal infections which have the risk of transmission HIV, LMV, active tuberculosis, Herpes lesions on mother's breasts.
- Maternal medications which are excreted from breast milk like radioactive agents, lithium and cytotoxic chemotherapy.
- Serious psychiatric illness in mother which leads to unstable behavior in mothers.

Weaning

The frequency and volume both is reduced gradually for most of the infants during 6 to 12 months of age. Since milk is not a complete diet they should be gradually accustomed to solid foods. Mothers supply diminishes gradually with the decreasing demand. In cases where early weaning is required, small doses of estrogen, restriction in fluid intake and tight breast binders are helpful. Ayurveda advises weaning in three steps which includes introduction for fruits initially, followed by solids and the later on withdrawal of breast milk considering the agni (digestion ability) of a child. Weaning is a difficult process for the child hence should be handled with care and affection.

CONCLUSION

Breast milk is the key factor of immediate & long term health for both the mother & the child. Times have changed, so have the lifestyles which demand most of the women to step out of the house and earn. To facilitate easy & longer duration of breastfeeding, workplaces need to arrange for nursing booths and appropriate maternity leaves. All the barriers in breastfeeding should be dealt with appropriately. Each and every member of society should be aware of the importance of breastfeeding for an infant. All the mothers should be counseled to exclusively breastfeed the children for 6 months.

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