AYURVEDIC APPROACH FOR CONCEIVING A HEALTHY PROGENY

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ABSTRACT

The medical world is really concerned about the increasing rate of congenital imperfections in the new born, which is posing confront to the aim of a healthy humanity. These congenital defects are seen as minor, major, anatomical, physiological, and even latent in nature. According to Ayurvedic principles, proper preparation of the parents is an essential prerequisite for a healthy progeny. Ayurveda has mentioned in detail, all the developments of the embryo in the womb and also the physical changes that mother undergoes at each stage of pregnancy. The general pregnancy is described in 'Pregnancy Vyakaran'. Similarly, the development of the fetus is mentioned in text Charak Samhita as a chapter named 'Garbhavakranti'. It is a great responsibility given by nature to us. Both, the father and the mother, should be aware of this responsibility and hence they should be prepared, physically and psychologically, to carry it. But, still, as the mother has to carry the baby in her womb, nourish it, and most importantly, give birth to the baby, more responsibility rests upon her shoulders. Ayurvedic theories recommend easily digestible and pure foods that provide nourishments to the tissues of the child and the mother.

Keywords: Garbhini Paricharya, Masanumasik Chikitsa, Pregnancy, Healthy baby, Progeny

INTRODUCTION

The medical world is really concerned about the increasing rate of congenital imperfections in the new born, which is posing confront to the aim of a healthy humanity. These inborn defects are seen as minor, major, anatomical, physiological, and even latent in nature.

Data reveals that 3 – 5% of all births result in congenital malformations, 20 – 30% of all infant deaths are due to genetic disorders, and 30 – 50% of post-neonatal deaths are due to congenital malformations; 11.1% of pediatric hospital admissions are for children with genetic disorders, 18.5% are children with other congenital malformations, 12% of adult hospital admissions are for genetic causes, and 50% of mental retardation has a genetic basis. Fifteen percent of all cancers have an inherited susceptibility.

According to Ayurvedic principles, proper preparation of the parents is an essential prerequisite for a healthy progeny. Charak Samhita, one of Ayurveda's prime texts, offers a comprehensive theory and practice of childcare, which is known as Kaumara Bhritya. This branch of medicine deals with health maintenance and treatment of ailments in children from birth to adolescence.¹ Kaumara Bhritya occupies the respected second position amongst eight specialty branches of Ayurveda.²

Motherhood is ultimate and cherished desire of every woman. When she achieves it, she feels completeness in her life. The "DESIRE" of woman for "CHILD" is sometimes stronger than self interest in beauty, figure and may be stronger than the claims of career. Planning for a baby is such a lovely experience for both mother & father. It is a part of the real fulfillment of married life. A woman has to prepare mentally and physically to have jovial pregnancy and less-complicated delivery.

Acharya Charak has already explained the method by which the man with unimpaired Shukra (Semen), the woman with unimpaired Artava (Ovum) and uterus desirous of an

excellent progeny can achieve their objective. This is the time when nature is doing a most remarkable job, and she must do her part to keep herself strong & healthy.

Garbhavastha is not something to be afraid of especially today. These nine months of waiting should be a joyful time and also an actual time of happy planning for the future of their baby.

Ayurveda believes that a women at the late stages of pregnancy should be considered as with one foot on the earth and the other one on the world of 'Yama'. This statement literally indicates the importance of extreme care during the final stages of pregnancy to save mother and her baby from death. A slight negligence may be fatal on the life of mother and baby. The first three months and the last three are most important stages of pregnancy and special care and medication is required during these months. In Ayurveda Pregnancy is divided into four stages. These stages are named Prajayini, Upasthita Prasava, Prajayi Syamana and Aparā Patana.³ Each stage has to follow its own lifestyle and medications for healthy pregnancy.

Factors Involved in Creating a Healthy Child

According to Ayurveda, preparing for conception can be easily compared to the process of farming. Just like the health of a crop depends on the quality of soil, seed, proper timing of sowing and water (containing nutrient matter) gets, the health of a baby depends on the health of its parents. For a pregnancy to be healthy and successful, a couple needs to take care of the following four essential factors⁴:

- Sperm / Ovum (Seeds)
- Uterus (Soil)
- Nourishment (Water)
- Time for Conception (Timing of Sowing)

Procreative Factors**Matruja Bhavas**

Kula or Gotra of parents, maternal age at the time of conception, health of the Reproductive organs of the female, Time of conception, Beeja of mother, Maternal Diet during pregnancy, drugs-medicines taken by a woman during her pregnancy, and any disease in the mother during her pregnancy, can affect the health and normalcy of a fetus⁵.

Pitruja Bhavas

Ayurvedic scholars, who centuries ago, without the aid of instruments, had detailed the importance of male and female Beeja (Shukra/sperm and Shonit/Ovum, respectively) in conception. Acharya Kashyapa, in the Shareerasthan section of the text, has clearly mentioned the entry of male beeja (sperm) into the female beeja (ovum) for fertilization. If a Beeja (Sperm) coming from a male is afflicted, a progeny may have congenital or genetic anomalies. Abnormalities of Shukra and Vayu, as well as vitiated Vayu located in the Shukra are also believed to produce congenital anomalies. Acharya Bhavamishra has also mentioned the abnormality of Shukra as a cause of congenital blindness, and so on⁵.

Atmaja Bhavas

The soul undergoes a series of births and deaths depending upon his own good or bad actions. The effects of the actions of the previous life are carried by the soul to his next life, which are the results of good or bad actions. He has to get rid of these afflictions by following a proper code of conduct in his given life; otherwise he goes into the cycle of births and deaths. This life and death cycle is achieved instantaneously at the time of the union of Shukra — male reproductive element vis-a-vis the spermatozoon contained in the semen and the Artava — female reproductive element, vis-a-vis the ovum produced by the ovary. Lingashareera is the carrier of these deeds⁵.

Why do the same initial pathological features produce different diseases in different people; why do they manifest quickly in some, whereas in others there is a long latent period required before the disease manifests itself. Such unexplained or idiopathic factors are due to the Atmaja bhava⁵.

Satmyaja Bhavas

Satmya (habituation, a customization) is the use of such things which do not cause harm to the body even though they are opposite of / different from (qualities of) one's own constitution, habitat, time, caste (family), season, disease, exercise (physical activities), water (foods and drinks), day sleep, tastes (substances of different tastes), and the like⁵.

Rasaja Bhavas

Rasa is the substance that flows continuously and is tasted by the tongue, nourishes the body, and gives pleasure to the mind. In this context, Rasa refers to balanced Ahara rasa (diet). The balanced Ahara rasa that is taken by the pregnant woman helps in the formation of Sapta Dhatus, in the required amount, in the fetus. Ancient scholars have described specific month-wise dietetic regimens for a pregnant woman, to compensate the requirements of a mother as well as the growing fetus at the particular time period of intrauterine life⁵.

A great amount of emphasis has been given by the Ayurvedists on the diet of the pregnant women, to avoid any untoward effects on the growing fetus⁵.

If the couple consumes ruksha (dry) and vata vitiating diet during ritukala and suppresses the natural urges, then the aggravated vayu vitiates Rakta dhatu and the other dhatus of the fetus and produces hoarse or nasal voice, deafness, and other disorders of vata. Also, vata produces baldness, premature graying of hair, absence of hair on face, tawny color of skin, nail, and hair and other abnormalities of vata⁵.

When a pregnant woman continuously consumes a diet capable of aggravating Kapha, it produces Kustha (leprosy), Kilasa (a type of skin disorder), and congenital presence of teeth. Switra (Leucoderma) and Pandu (anemia) arise due to consumption of a diet capable of vitiating Kapha.

Due to consumption of diet capable of vitiating all the three Doshas the aggravated Tridoshas produce abnormalities described under all the three Doshas. The mother has been advised to follow the dietetics of the people of the region of type which she is desirous of having a child. Whatever diet and regimen the pregnant woman adopts, the child will develop the same qualities⁵.

Sattvaja Bhavas

Human birth is a very rare privilege, for only man has the possibility of living a conscious, wide-awake, controlled life. Human being possess instinct and intelligence. All these things may not happen without the presence of Manasa (psyche). The factors that determine the different psychological endowments of children (in other words the state of the mental faculty of the child) are⁵

- The mental faculty/ psychosomatic temperaments of the parents — the various traits of the parents. Milieu in which the pregnant woman lives and the impressions received by the pregnant woman during pregnancy.
- The influence of one's own previous birth actions / deeds.
- Frequent desires for a particular type of mental faculty by the progeny in his previous life — special mental habits / psychological health in the previous life.

Signs of Pregnancy

Various Authors of ancient texts explained the Signs and Symptoms that are indicative of pregnancy such as ^{6,7,8}

- Artavadarsanam (Stoppage of menstruation cycle)
- Asyasansravaṇam (Excessive salivation)
- Anannabhilasha (Loss of appetite)
- Chardi (Vomiting)
- Arocaka (Loss of appetite)
- Amlakamata (Liking for taking sour things)
- Gurugatratvama (Heaviness of the body)
- Chakshu glani (Feeling of heaviness in the eyes)
- Stanayo Stanyam (Appearance of milk in breasts)
- Osthayo Stanamandalayo Karsnnama (Appearance of excessive darkness in the lips and the areola of breasts)
- Pada shotha (Slight edema of feet)
- Lomarajyodgama (Appearance of small hairs)
- Yonyaschatalatvam (Dilation of vagina)

Ayurveda prescribes some set of rules which are very important for every pregnant woman. It contains various details related to ahara (nutrition), vihara (lifestyle) and vichara (thought process) which women have to follow at the different stages of pregnancy.

Food during pregnancy

- Apart from a balanced vegetarian diet, iron and calcium are most important for a pregnant woman. She should consume milk and fresh juices of sweet seasonal fruits
- Calcium can be ingested through dry dates, traditional dink (Gum acacia) and ladoos
- For iron and folic acid, eat black raisins, figs, saffron, spinach, pomegranate and apples.

Diet Schedule for Nine Months

Antenatal care is must during pregnancy that means expected mother should be cared properly during this period. According to Ayurveda it is called Masanumasiki Chikitsa. The meaning of word Masanumasiki is month-to-month treatment. As per Ayurveda different food habits and treatments are required every month for a normal delivery. According to Ayurveda there are nine varied groups of medicines and herbs for each month.

There are specific regimens prescribed for pregnant woman, especially during the bi-cardiac state which occurs during the third month of gestation. The mother should be given whatever she wants during this period except perhaps those that are harmful for the fetus^{9, 10, 11}

In Ayurveda, Acharyas has also described the measures to be adopted month- by -month diet for the fetus which grows without any morbidity. Special herbal regimens are also prescribed for each month for softening of placenta, for nutritional supplement and also to help normal expulsion of fetus during delivery they are as follows

I-Month

A pregnant woman should take milk in adequate quantity regularly. This milk should be Anupaskrta (need not be added any thing in it) and should be taken when it is cold (room temperature). She should take wholesome food morning and evening.

II-Month

Milk should be given boiled with drugs having sweet taste i.e. Vidari (*Pueraria tuberosa*), Sharkara (Cane juice), Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), Yasthimadhu (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) and Brahmi. These are life-supporting and helping maintain implantation. Honey and ghee are also recommended.

III-Month

During this month, Ayurveda recommends warm milk mixed with honey & ghee, should be given, i.e. Upasansrjya by Madhu (Honey) and Sarpi (Ghrita). Mix one teaspoon of ghee and ½ teaspoon of Madhu in a cup of room temperature milk. Drink every morning.

IV-Month

Milk should be given along with Navnita (homemade butter) in one Karsha (12 gm.) dose.

V-Month

Ingest six to seven teaspoons of Sarpi (Ghee) over the day. Oil application and gentle massage followed by a bath with lukewarm water is recommended. Continue this till delivery.

VI-Month

During this month, ghee taken out directly from milk and boiled with Madhuraushadhis should be given.

VII-Month

Same things should be given like sixth month. Ensure that your salt intake during this period is reduced to a minimum. Also, avoid drinking water immediately after a meal.

VIII-Month

The mother during this month gets burning sensation in the chest. Acharya Charak clarify that three doshas - Vata, Pitta and Kapha get into the chest because of the pressure of the foetus and this causes burning sensation there which leads to itching resulting in the formation of 'Kikkisa' (linea albicantes or white abdominal lines seen after pregnancy). For the management of such a condition the following therapies are prescribed¹²

- She should be made to drink regularly one karsha (12 gm.) of butter boiled with Madhuraushadhi along with the decoction of Kola.
- Her breasts and abdomen should be anointed with
 - The paste of Chandana (*Santalum album*), Mrinala and Kutajadi drugs.
 - Powder of Shirisha (*Albizia lebeck*), Dhataki (*Woodfordia fruticosa*), Sarsharpa (*Brassica campestris*) & Madhuka (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*).
 - Paste of Nimba (*Azadirachta indica*), Surasa (*Ocimum sanctum*) & Manjistha (*Rubia cordifolia*) etc.
- There should be gentle massage with the oil boiled with the leaves of Karavira
- Water boiled with Malti & Madhuka should be used for effusion. During eight months, she should regularly take Milk and Yavagu added with Ghee.

IX-Month

Apply oil on the abdomen and genital areas. She should be given Anuvāsana basti (unctuous enema) with the oil boiled with Mudhuraushadhi. Cotton swabs soaked in this oil should be kept in the Vagina for the oleation of the uterus & genital tract. Be particular about maintaining hygiene to avoid infection, which causes itchiness or swelling of the genital area.

General Advice

Here are some general guidelines for the wellbeing of the mother and fetus:

- Do not tie a tight knot over the abdomen.
- Do not use heavy blankets or place them over the abdomen.
- Do not change your sleeping position from left side to right side or vice-versa without getting up.
- Keep both thighs together while sitting.
- Sleep sideways instead of sleeping on the back.

Do's and don'ts for pregnant woman**As per Ayurveda**

- All things that used by pregnant lady in her diet, should not be Atiguru (heavy to digest), Atiushna (hot), Atitikshna (very sharp as spicy foods) use of pungent, sour, ahita and Viruddha (unwholesome).^{13, 14}
- She should be fed with diet relishing, mainly liquid and sweet, unctuous and processed with appetizers.
- Food taken should be warm, clean, fresh and easily digestible. Maintain regular meal timings.¹⁵
- Ayurveda advices milk as an ideal constituent in daily diet for pregnant women as it is a good source of calcium, protein, lactose and fat. Milk is a good laxative too.
- Food should be enriched with all six types of tastes (sweet, pungent, sour, bitter, spicy and astringent)
- Women those who have previous history of abortion better they must avoid brinjal, suran (*Amorphophallus*

campanulatus), papaya (*Caria papaya*), celery, onion, chili, garlic (*Allum sativum*), ginger, pepper, mustard, carom seeds, jaggery from diet.

- Those who suffer from constipation, gas, bloating must avoid peas and other heavy to digest cereals, potato. They must take green gram as it is easy to digest and gives protein.
- She should avoid abnormal asanas (position) in sexual intercourse, straining at abdomen, heavy exercises and weight loss programme.¹⁶
- Avoid traveling in a vehicle on rough roads, sitting on hard surfaces, sitting for long hours, lifting heavy weights and walking long distances¹⁷
- It is better to avoid negative feelings and thoughts such as sorrow, grief, anger, fear and doubt because these things hamper the mental and physical growth of the fetus. So, try to stay as happy as you can by exposing yourself to happy circumstances, people and things.
- She should avoid exposure to unhappy or violent events.
- She should avoid Speaking in a loud voice¹⁸
- She should avoid sleeping during the day time and staying up late at night¹⁹
- With a view to be saved of the God, Rakshasa (devils) and their followers, she should not use red apparel.²⁰
- She should not take intoxicant wines, meat and decomposed food.
- Swedan and Nasya karma are contraindicated.²¹
- She should not touch dirty, deformed and deficient body parts.
- Beholding natural urges unless in an emergency²²
- When the mother is not as happy or settled during pregnancy, the newborn child experiences more colic, more crying, more sleep problems.
- If the mother is not calm and rested, there could be discomfort as the baby grows, or the child could be overly active in the womb. Or other complications could develop, such as fluid retention, high blood pressure or spotting during pregnancy.
- She should be far away from things as are advised by experienced ladies, such as avoid going out to remote places, staying in vacant or abandoned house, under sacred tree, Leaning into a deep well etc.^{23,24}

As per Modern Science

- Lady should visit her doctor at least once each month for the next four or five months, and after that every two weeks until her baby comes.
- Doctor will check her height, weight, blood Pressure, Pulse, Blood group, wheather it is Rh positive or Rh negative, for this could affect the baby.
- Heart sounds, lungs sound & urine should be examined timely to be sure that she is in good condition.
- In pregnancy, foetus grows on the foods, she eat so she must therefore be wise and choose only those foods that well keep the baby well. Her diet should be rich in minerals and vitamins, for a poor diet may make things difficult for her during labour and may even have its effect in after years.
- Milk and other dairy products will help to keep her in good condition. These foods provide Calcium & Protein for the baby.
- Anemia is common during pregnancy. So she also needs adequate iron. Food rich in Iron are eggs, whole wheat,

barley, cereals, soyabeans, dried peas, potatoes green leafy vegetables, fish and chicken etc.

- Well balanced diet is very important during pregnancy, which will usually provide all the nutrition, she need.
- Tobacco chewing contains certain poisons such as nicotine.
- Alcohol should be avoided strictly.
- Cigarette smoking to be strictly avoided. It has been linked to a low birth weight, miscarriage and premature birth in many different studies. Second hand smoke poses the same dangers during pregnancy, and should be avoided at all costs.
- Dental decay is common during pregnancy particularly if her diet is lacking in Calcium.
- Never wear anything tight or uncomfortable during pregnancy - comfortable low - healed shoes are best.
- Avoid x-rays.

Danger Signals

Acharya Charak has beautifully explained a quotation regarding the care of pregnant lady, he said that -"A pregnant woman is to be treated very cautiously as if one is walking with a pot full of oil, in hand without letting a drop to fall."²⁵ You must be in touch with your own body and learn to monitor even minor changes. Though all signals may not mean trouble, there are some signs that require calling the doctor. Some of these warning signals are as following

- Vomiting is fairly common in early pregnancy, but rare during the later months
- Contractions or Cramps more than five in one hour
- Bright red blood from your vagina
- Swelling or puffiness of the face, hands or feet
- Pain during urination (possible urinary tract, bladder or kidney infection)
- Sharp or prolonged pain in your stomach (Pre-eclampsia signs)
- Acute or continuous vomiting (Pre-eclampsia signs)
- Sudden gush of clear, watery fluid from your vagina
- Intense pelvic pressure.
 - Dizziness & spots below her eyes

In Ayurvedic classics there is already described the line of treatment for a pregnant women, which is as follows

- A physician should treat her ailments by means of drugs, diet & other regimens which are mostly Mridu (soft), Madhura (sweet), and Sheeta (cold), pleasant and tender.^{26,27}
- She should not be administered Vaman (emesis), Virechana (purgative), Nasya and Rakta mokshana (blood letting) (therapy for the elimination of doshas from body).²⁸
- Unless the disease is exceedingly serious, she should never be administered Asthapana Basti (decoction based enema) & Anuvasana basti (oil based enema), Emesis etc. may however, be given to the pregnant woman after the eighth month of pregnancy, if there is any serious emergency. But these therapies having similar action should be of very mild nature.²⁹

Diet after Delivery

Khichadi, light soups, dal and rice, bhakri and chapatti. Ahleev (garden cress) kheer. Lightly prepared vegetables. No gravies. No oil and minimal spices until the child is being breastfed. Drink warm water instead of room temperature

water throughout the day. The mother regains her strength through an easily digestible and nutritious diet, and loses excess weight through basic yoga. The date powder, Shatavari kalpa and Dhatri Rasayan must be continued to help the production of good and adequate breast milk.

DISCUSSION

Pregnancy is the one of the most important event in the life of every women. Ayurveda advices a wholesome diet for each month for the healthy growth of the baby in the mother's womb. This is being practiced for thousands of years in India and it is very elaborately dealt with in Ayurveda for ensuring a natural delivery, free from various complications, for good maternal health, a healthy progeny with good immunity power and ultimately also results in good post delivery lactation which again helps in healthy growth of the baby. Ayurveda, or more specifically Bala Chikitsa, lays down guidelines for a trouble free pregnancy, by prescribing a detailed diet plan and daily regimen as well as the nutrition and conduct necessary for the mental, psychological and physical well being of the mother-to-be. Bala Chikitsa has the answers to any problems that appear during pregnancy and childbirth, for Ayurveda teaches us that perfect health is necessary for a mother to deliver a healthy baby. Pregnancy and childbirth have great significance in the life of a woman. During this period, a woman needs great care and attention from her family members.

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