

Short Communication

Role of Breastfeeding in Ayurveda

Mother's Milk Is a Gift to Child That Protects Us Lifetime in Disguise

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda, the science of life, bestows upon prevention of disease and maintenance of healthy life. Breast feeding is a pivotal part of child care which needs enormous importance. In Ayurveda, the procedure of breast feeding is described as a *sanskara* of child which should be started with enchanting of mantras. Apart from this, specific description on *dhatri* (nursing mother) is an exceptional quotation in Ayurveda. Qualities and types of Breast milk according to *dosas* (vitiating factors) also have equal importance and quiet necessary for proper growth of child. This is an attempt to elucidate the concept of breast milk and breast feeding in Ayurveda to the present world.

Keywords: Breastfeeding, breast milk, Ayurveda.

INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding is the nature's wonderful creation to protect the new-borns all around soon after the birth in terms of love, affection, nutrition etc. According to the universal epidemiology on breastfeeding, it prevent 8,23,000 annual death in children younger than 5 year and 20000 annual death of mother from breast carcinoma. ^[1] Government of India has launched National Breastfeeding Promotion Programme - MAA (mothers' absolute affection) to ensure adequate awareness is generated among masses, especially mothers, on the benefits of breastfeeding. Despite breastfeeding being one of the most important interventions for child survival, a dismal 64.9% children are exclusively breastfed for the first six months in India. Around 20% new-borns deaths and 13% under-five deaths can be prevented by early initiation of breastfeeding. Since the eras,

Acharyas has given enormous importance on breastfeeding in accordance with its proper formation, secretion, method of feeding along with its abnormalities and management.

Concept of breastfeeding in Ayurveda

The *ahara rasa*, essence of digestion, form *stanya* in breast. Hence *stanya* is termed as the *upadhatu* of *rasa*. ^[2,3] The ejection of breastmilk is mainly due to suckling reflex of baby. ^[4] The first milk, colostrum is rich in various nutrients, extremely needed for new-born. So it is advisable that the mother should start feeding as soon as possible after birth of baby. It is said *guru* by *acharyas* ^[5] as it contains more protein and less fat than mature milk.

The total quantity of breastmilk is described as two *anjalis*. ^[6,7] However it varies according individual to individual

primarily depends on mother's nutritional status and hormonal balance. The pure milk should be cold, clean, whitish yellow just like the conch shell, *madhura in rasa*, it mixes well when put in water and devoid of froth, floats or any impurities. [12-14] There is description of *dhatri*s [8,9] (wet nurse) in case of absence or abnormality of mother's milk. *Acharyas* has advised that the commencement of breastfeeding should be on an auspicious date with a proper cleanliness and hygiene. The mother should

face to east direction and start feeding from right breast to the child with enchanting the mantras [10, 11]

"O fortunate women! All the four seas should produce constant flow of milk from your breast for increased strength of the child. O beautiful women! As the deities obtained longevity by consuming nectar, similarly the child should also get longevity by consuming your milk which is also nectar."

Compositions; (Table -1)

MACRONUTRIENT (PER 100ML)	COLOSTRUM	MATURE MILK
Energy	58 Kcal	58-72 Kcal
Total Protein	2.3 g	0.9 g
IgA	364 mg	142 mg
Casein	140 mg	187 mg
Lactoferrin	330 mg	167 mg
Lactalbumin	218 mg	161 mg
Total Fat	2.9 g	4.2 g
Lactose	5.3 g	7.0 g
Cholesterol	27 mg	16 mg

Benefits

Breastfeeding plays a pivotal role for growth and development of body and remain a homeostasis of happy, healthy child free from ailments. [15]

- It is naturally sterile and breast feeding protects baby from many infections and diseases by making him/her immune to basic health hazards.
- Breast milk always stays at right temperature that is suitable for the child.
- Breast milk protects the child against a variety of bacteria and many diseases.
- The milk available through breast feeding has got many digestive suitable for the newly developed digestive mechanism of the baby.

Concept of Tridosha in breastfeeding (Table -2)

Ayurveda describes *Vata-Pitta-Kapha dosha* qualities on the milk which is completely affected by mother's diet and may create any health problems in the child.

Contraindications for Breast Feeding

The woman who is grief, angry, pregnant, emaciated, obese, suffering from fever, consumed incompatible diet should not breast fed the child. Other causes are-

- Excessive dieting, fasting and physical exercise and resulting fatigue.
- Consumption of excessive dry food substances - without fat or oils.
- Excessive sexual intercourse.

Table 2: Properties of Breast Milk

Properties of Milk	VATA	PITTA	KAPHA	IDEAL
COLOR	Darkish or reddish	Bluish, yellowish, or reddish tinge	Dense and white	White
TASTE	Sweet w/slightly astringent or bitter taste or tasteless	Sweet with slightly bitter, sour or pungent taste	More sweet with slightly salty taste	Natural and sweet
SMELL	No smell	Foul smell, smelling like blood	Smell of ghee, oil, animal fat	Natural
TEMPERATURE	Normal, slightly cool	Warm	Cool	Warm
CONSISTANCY	Thin	Intermediate	Thick, sticky, fibrous	Mixes easily with water
FOAM	Present	Absent	Absent	Absent
VISCIDITY (AT CONTENT)	Less	Intermediate	High	Viscid
LIGHT OR HEAVY	Light	Intermediate	Heavy	Medium
HEAVY SATIETY	Absent	Absent	Present	Present
Drops of milk put slowly over surface of water in a glass by a dropper	Floats	remains at any level, produces yellow streaks in water	Sinks	Mixes easily
Effect on the body temp	Slightly cooling	Heating	Cooling	Soothing, cooling
Effect on constitution and types of diseases	Likely to get vataja diseases	Likely to get pittaja diseases	Likely to get kaphaja diseases	Well balanced constitution, ideal growth and development happy and contented. Absence of diseases
General health	Thin, lean	Thin	Heavy	Ideal
Voice	Weak, hoarse	clear	hard	Natural
Stools	Constipation, or hunger, diarrhoea	Not well mixed, diarrhoea	Constipation	Normal
Urine	Dysuria, retention of urine	-	Retention of urine	Normal
Gases in abdomen	Does not pass freely, distention	-	Gases may form	

CONCLUSION

Breastfeeding is a beautiful connection of mother's pleasure and infant's privilege. *Stana* (Breast) is also termed as *pranayatana* (where *prana* resides) by *Acharya Bhela*, as it is the store of nectar for baby. Nature has designed the breast nearer to heart at the site of *anaahat chakra* which connects the mother and baby emotionally. World Breastfeeding Week 2010 has been observing during 1-7 August since 2010. So the slogan has aroused- ***Breastfeeding is not an option, it's a responsibility.***

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