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Vidya Ballal

Associate Professor,
Department of Prasuti Tantra and
Stree Roga, Sri Dharmasthala
Manjunatheshwara College of
Ayurveda & Hospital, Kuthpady,
Udupi, Karnataka, India

Mamatha KV

Professor, H.O.D and Guide,
Department of Prasuti Tantra and
Stree Roga, Sri Dharmasthala
Manjunatheshwara College of
Ayurveda & Hospital, Kuthpady,
Udupi, Karnataka, India

An ayurvedic approach to reproductive women health care

Vidya Ballal and Mamatha KV

Abstract

Pregnancy, a state of unbound but fulfilled joy to a woman, although being a physiological phenomenon, still may be at risk and face many complications at any stages due to the altered anatomical and physiological functions of the body of a pregnant female. Preconception care is one such preventive measure to get *shreyasi praja*, it helps in early identification of high risk factors & prevent the adverse effect of that. To assure a safe motherhood as well as a healthy progeny in her womb, special care of a pregnant woman is required which is elucidated as antenatal care or as *garbhini paricharya* as told by Acharyas. All of these regimens are aimed at ensuring normal pregnancy and uncomplicated labor with delivery of a healthy baby from a healthy mother.

Keywords: pre natal, ante natal, *garbhini paricharya*

Introduction

Maternal health is always devoted, in helping pregnant conditions, to fetuses in ranges of calamity and compelling destitution. This is focused on the maternal and new born child deaths rates by making sound, feasible all-encompassing birthing focuses utilizing the model of consideration with socially proper training for the wellbeing and strengthening of women. Herein, the concept of preconception, antenatal & postnatal care, as is well told by our Acharya's plays a strong role in our daily practice of protecting the female fraternity. Care of the girl child should start from the neonate unto disease free mother. It should include proper nourishment of the girl child through adolescence therein the reproductive organs are properly formed with inclusion of menstrual care thus preparing the reproductive organs for fertility, pregnancy, childbirth and a disease free society for the development of the nation.

Fertility is a natural capability to produce offspring. Women's fertility peaks high in the early 20s and drops considerably after the age of 35. Fertility reduction is a trauma swaying overall characteristic of women of reproductive age. It is not clear whether the reduction in fertility is due to changing socioeconomic and demographic characteristics over time or stems from the shifts in reproductive behaviour of women. Infertility is also one of leading factor of concern in most developing countries

Infertility reasons great distress to many couples, causing growing numbers of them to seek expert fertility care. As per WHO, an estimate 2, 76,000 babies die within 4 weeks of birth every year, worldwide, from congenital anomalies. In this modern era, there is good challenge with the number of congenital, chromosomal & genetic issues in the newborns. The purification & other methodology adopted in the Preconception care in Ayurveda seems to be a great contribution in be getting the healthy progeny. "Pregnancy should be by choice, not by chance"- this statement holds good for having healthy progeny and safe pregnancy. The regime followed during the pre-pregnancy period to achieve conception is called "*Garbha Dhaana Vidhi*".

Garbhadhaana is the first of 16 *samskaras* in *Vedic* literature. The main objective of this *samsara* i.e. *Garbhadhaana vidhi* is to purify *atma* and *deha* of the couple to improve their health before they start trying for a progeny. Here, immensely significant preparation of both partners prior to conception takes place which is as similar as the process of farming. As like the health of the crop depends upon the quality of soil, seed, proper time of sowing and water, similarly healthy baby depends upon the health of its parents. Panchakarma procedures, not only ensures a total cleaning of the body and reproductive organs, but also rejuvenates and improves the vitality of a person (*beau*).¹

According to ayurvedic principles, in order to have a physically, mentally, spiritually healthy progeny, both the partners male as well as female, need to have proper preconception

Correspondence

Vidya Ballal

Associate Professor,
Department of Prasuti Tantra and
Stree Roga, Sri Dharmasthala
Manjunatheshwara College of
Ayurveda & Hospital, Kuthpady,
Udupi, Karnataka, India

counselling and care. Out of the three phases of life of a woman, Rajaswala period is most important as it is the platform of preparation of the female for the future fertility changes of the bodily system. If this phase is healthy then it will give better physiological reproductive benefits. In this modern era, women with their demanding lifestyles of managing household chores and careers, have made it very difficult to pay attention to their own health leading to disturbed menstrual cycle with serious disorders related to it. The incidence of adolescent menstrual abnormalities like PCOS, etc. can also be attributed to not following age old customs especially related to diet and exercises.

Activities contraindicated during rajaswala ^[2]

1. Avoid sleeping during day time. She should be sleep over bed made up of darbha (specific sacred leaf plant- spread over ground.)
2. Application of anjana, crying, massaging, laughing, talking too much and exercise should be avoided.
3. Use of Swedana karma, Vamana and Nasya karma are contraindicated.
4. Diet contraindicated: Avoid pungent (tikshna), spicy (katu) and salty food.
5. Coitus is contraindicated.

Indicated activities and diet

1. Always concentrate on thinking good and auspicious things.
2. Should eat havishya (meal made up of ghee, Sali rice and milk) and Yawaka (meal made up of barley and milk) in utensils made up of clay and leaves.

Specific age for marriage and conception is another contribution in Ayurveda for begetting a healthy progeny included in garbhdhana vidhi. In this modern era practical application of this is highly out of question but looking into the social status of that era, it is explainable. Implication of age, different gotra, not suffering from any contagious diseases, beautiful, modest, having complete body parts, delicate etc. are other characteristics of the girl of marriageable age ^[3].

Age factor plays a significant role in achieving a good progeny because biologically a couple is capable of producing a healthy child, only after attaining sexual maturity, which for a male is at the age of 16years, while *Sushruta* said that male at the age of 25 years and females at the age of 16years are completely mature and henceforth, may attempt for conception.

While going through a process of emotional growth in adolescence, teens frequently get involved in risky sexual behaviour that expose them to unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infection. Both the condition have shown an increase over the last few decades in many countries. Adolescent pregnancy is more likely to lead to risks like growth restricted infants, preterm labour, and higher infant mortality rate. Adolescent girls are more prone to be anaemic and since they are still growing, their caloric requirements may be high compared to older women. Considering the risk factor, intervention for reducing unintended adolescent pregnancy is necessary to ensure quality & efficacy. This can be achieved by pre conception counselling which addresses all risks factors pertinent to mother and foetus. Today, the marriageable age of the girl it is limited to 21yrs ^[4].

Panchakarma

The couple should firstly undergo *shodhan* therapy starting with *purvakarma snehan, swedan* then *vaman, virechan, asthapan and anuvasan basti*. Following all this pre-requisites one should do the *Putresthi Yagnya* (spiritual method to do the offerings to God) or any spiritual things like *homa, havan* etc. can be done ^[5].

Both the partners should observe celibacy (*brahmacharya*) for one month before attempting coitus.

The male should consume *Sail* rice with *grita* and milk. *Tila* and *Masha* should be consumed by the female ^[6].

a) Ghrita: It has *vata-pitta shamak* qualities and is *shita virya*. It is beneficial for *rasa, shukra and oja*. It also has the quality of *rasayana*. All these aids in the proper functioning of *shukra* and hence, helps to attain conception ^[7].

Asthanga Hridaya advocates ghee especially *Phalaghrita & mahakalyanak ghrita*. Acharya Kashyap explains *Lashuna kshir* (milk prepared by garlic) & ghee grossly diet should consist of *Rasayana* (rejuvenator) properties & are *garbhashthapak* (helps in implantation & stabilization of pregnancy) ^[8].

Ghee is rich in Vitamins A & E. It is rich in conjugated linoleic acid, has an anti-oxidant with Antiviral properties. It is rich in medium chain fatty acids which are absorbed directly into liver & burnt as energy. Butyric acid in it supports production of killer T cells in the gut thus helps in healthy immune system.

b) Milk is mainly explained by almost all Acharya's. When we see the contents of the milk, it is good source of calcium & adequate quantity of water content. Milk delivers many nutrients like Protein (contain 9 essential aminoacids), vitamins etc. These are essential for foetal development. It is important for foetal linear growth. Consumption of milk also increases blood concentration of insulin like growth factor (I GFI). It is major determinant of growth. Milk is rich in iodine because of which IQ can be boosted. Enhancing the maternal milk intake during pregnancy results in a rise in birth weight foetal growth parameters. Effects are related to macro & micronutrients along with minerals.

c) Sali (Rice): It alleviates *pitta dosha*. It is *madhura rasa, snigdha, balya, vrishya, brimhana* etc. which promotes the qualities of *shukra*. *Shastikashali* contains some amount of nitric oxide which increases the blood flow to the uterus.

d) Masha: It is *vatahara, snigdha, ushnavirya, madhura rasa*. It has the qualities of *balya* and *pumsatwa*.

e) Taila: It is effective in *Vataja* disorders and does not increase Kapha. It Promotes strength (*balya*) and helps in *yonivishodhana* (cleanses the *yonimarga*). *Tila taila* has a property of *Garbhashaya vishodhanam*. Hence, these qualities helps the female reproductive organs function properly leading to fertilization.

Chemically these all are constituted of proteins, carbohydrates, vitamin-B, magnesium, calcium, iron and folic acid which are very essential for conception and pregnancy. Calcium and magnesium play a good role in regulating estrogen level. The presence of folic acid in it helps in prevention of neural tube defects. All these qualities help to promote the qualities of *artava also*.

Month by Month Description

The aims and objectives of safe motherhood bestows upon the creation of healthy progeny devoid of any anomalies followed by an easy delivery and thereby safe guarding the health of

mother, which, in other words is termed as *garbhini paricharya*. It refers to the ante natal care including *ahara, vihara* for pregnant women for the benefit of both mother and foetus. The proper *garbhini charya* would result in the proper development of the foetus, its delivery, the health of the mother and thus her ability to withstand the strain of labour and have an eventless post-partum phase.

Many classics of Ayurveda have affirmed this developmental interpretation in month wise while observations of *Acharya Harita* to this concern was more accurate and distinct based on keenly observed changes transpired in couple of days or week in *Garbha* (embryo/foetus). To his opinion, the shape of *Garbha* (embryo/foetus) advances in chronological way like *budbud* (bubbles like); First day to *sonita* (resemblance of blood); tenth day then *Ghana* (solidified /compact); fifteenth day to *mamsapinda* (mass); twenty day etc, in order to provide proper nourishment and to fulfil the demands according to respective stages of *Garbha* (embryo/foetus)

The monthly regimen is broadly discussed under three headings:

- a. Masanumasika pathya (month wise dietary regimen)
- b. Garbhopaghathakara bhavas (Activities and substances which are harmful to fetus).
- c. Garbhasthapaka dravyas (Substances beneficial for maintenance of pregnancy).

The monthly regimen helps in

1. Softening of pelvis, waist, sides of the chest and back
2. "The apana vata is key to maintaining the pregnancy as well as birthing the baby at the time of labour. Downward movement of vata (*vata anulomana*) - this is needed for the normal positioning of the fetus in utero, normal expulsion of fetus during delivery.
3. Proper evacuation of urine and stool.
4. Promotion of strength and complexion
5. Delivery with ease of a healthy child endowed with excellent qualities in proper time.

The mother's food habits and nutritional status before conception as well as during pregnancy influences the outcome of pregnancy.

1st month: - frequent intake of plain milk as much as one can consume

2nd month: - milk medicated with *madhura* drugs

3rd month: - milk with honey & *ghrita*

4th month: - milk with *Navneeta*

5th month: - milk with *ghrita*

6th month: - *ghrita* medicated with *madhura* group,

7th month: - Same as 6 month,

8th month: - *ksheerayavagu* with *ghrita*

9th month: - *Anuvasanabasti* with oil prepared with *madhura* drugs & *yonipichu*.

Acharya Sushruta advised *Ghrita* or Rice Gruel medicated with *gokshura* in 6th month and *prithakaparnyadi Ghrita* in 7th month.

It is important to keep the fetus nourished throughout the pregnancy if not, the fetus is delivered with low birth weight which may be linked to diseases later in life.

The greatest care is required during the first trimester and last trimester. During the first trimester, emphasis should be placed on nurturing the uterine bed by consuming foods that help the *rasa* and *rakta* i.e. Fruit juices, tender coconut water and milk. During the last trimester, there should be less fat, less salt and less water in the diet.

Effect of Basti and Pichu on Prasava

Basti is considered as the best treatment for vata disorders. In case of pregnant woman, basti is indicated to prevent the pathogenicity of vayu. Apanavayu plays an important role in act of contraction and relaxation of uterus, and in expulsion of fetus. During *prasavakala*, the *vyanavayu* stimulates the act of contraction and relaxation in the uterine muscles and due to it, *apanavayu* becomes active to expel the *Garbha* from *garbhashaya*.

Pichu taila or *ghrita* may destroy pathogenic bacteria of vaginal canal and prevent puerperal sepsis, and softens the birth canal which in turn minimizes the possibilities of tear of the canal.

Garbhopaghathakara bhavas (Activities and substances which are harmful to fetus)

Garbhopaghathakara bhavas are the *ahara* and *vihara* which are harmful to the *garbha* (fetus). These may cause some congenital defects in the child and are not conducive to the birth of a healthy child, with all the good qualities. These can be grouped under two different headings namely *ahara* (diet) and *vihara* (behavior).

Yoga Asanas

Walking, swimming and yoga asanas are the best exercises. All normal asanas can be practiced during the first trimester. The best asanas encourage pelvic and hip-opening; these can be done sitting or standing. Examples would include bound angle sitting pose (*baddha konasana*) and open legs forward bend (*upavista konasana*). Postures that promote flexibility and strength of the spine are also good.

Music therapy in pregnancy

Music can play a role in happiness. Several studies have shown that uplifting, soothing music helps increase the baby's intelligence. "The sound of the veena, flute and Samaveda mantras gives health to the pregnant woman and the child within.

Discussion

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (2005a) also has reinforced the importance of preconception and interpregnancy care. Maternal and fetal outcomes are dependent on the interaction of various maternal, fetal and environmental factors.....it is often difficult to ascribe salutary outcomes to specific intervention alone. Counselling about potential pregnancy risks and preventive strategies must be provided before conception.

Pre-pregnancy counselling of patients with HT, renal disease, asthma, thyroid disease or heart disease had significantly better outcomes than with their previous pregnancies. 80% of those counselled were delivered of normal infants.

Adherence to phenylalanine restricted diet before pregnancy improved fetal birth weight, head circumference and IQ scores. Similarly diseases like thalassemias, tay-sachs disease, cystic fibrosis, etc. has lead to pregnancy complications and abnormality.

Comparing in parlance to contemporary sciences wherein preconception counsel warns the couple of the upcoming problems in relation to infertility and how to cope up with certain remedies, couple with chronic diseases are either corrected or alternative methods like ART are advised.

To sum up ayurveda has its own approach towards reproduction with the inclusion of the soul as a factor

reflecting reproduction and with the concept of elevating the reproductive function from a mere biological process to socio-spiritual platform involving the soul and the body elements in its contribution. Inspite of recent advances in the field of reproductive and child health care, the incidences of morbidity and mortality rates of women continue to remain unsatisfactory. There is a still high incidence of MMR and infant mortality rate.

Garbhini paricharya / antenatal care is one such focused part of ayurveda which certainly can prevent the morbidity and mortality and end in safe delivery.

Conclusion

The shodhana procedure done to the couple when they decide on conception enhances their benefits of a healthy infant. It corrects their reproductive functioning and supports for a healthy beeja. The chronic disease seen in them which hinders from conceiving can be corrected leading to a healthy pregnancy. All in all, their benefits a healthy offspring in the form of a shreyasi praja, which can also be contributed to prevention of aggressive, demanding offsprings for a healthy today and tomorrow.

Antenatal care prevents the pregnant lady and the foetus from any complication directing for healthy outcome for mother and child. Proper growth and nourishment along with timely normal delivery is the best outcome of this garbhini paricharya.

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