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Nutritional diet in *Balyavasta* - An Ayurvedic Perspective

Vijayalaxmi B. Benakatti

Associate Professor, Department of Kaumaryabrutya, BLDEA'S, AVS Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya, Vijayapur, Karnataka, India.

ABSTRACT

In *Ashtanga Ayurveda*, *Kaumarya Bhritya* has been considered as important specialty. *Kaumarya Bhritya* deals with the proper growth and development of the healthy child as well as treatment of the diseased child. Nutrition plays central role in growth and development of the child. Initial 6 months the baby is nourished with exclusive breast feeding, later periods only breast milk is not sufficient to provide the nutritional needs of growing baby. After 6 months, introduction of food supplements (semi-solid foods) along with breast feeding is necessary (to provide adequate and appropriate supplements) for proper growth and development and to prevent malnutrition. Introduce fruits and vegetables, which are rich source of macro and micro nutrients, hence help in growth and development of child, Prevent many diseases. After two years start normal diet. So Ayurveda gives importance on good nutrition at every stage of life, in order to maintain health. This article highlights Ayurvedic concepts of nutritional practice in *Balyavasta*.

Key words: Ayurveda, Nutrition, Kshirapa, Kshirannada, Annada.

INTRODUCTION

The three basic prerequisites to sustain life are *Vayu*, *Jala* and *Ahara*. First two are available in pure form. *Ahara* is the basic requisite for healthy life, hence our *Acharyas* counted it under *Trayopasthambha*, but is neglected, though it plays a prime importance since conception. *Acharya Kashyapa* told that there is no medicine like *Ahara* and *Ahara* alone can make people healthy, called it as *Mahabhaishajya*.^[1] This is responsible for enhancement of *Ojas*.^[2] Wholesome and unwholesome *Ahara* are responsible for happiness and misery respectively.^[3] *Ahara* is cause

for most of the diseases, so health is dependent on *Ahara*.^[4]

A healthy and brilliant child is a national wealth. So it is important, one should give babies a healthy start and healthy future.

The child nutrition begins before birth only. Poor nutrition during pregnancy may stunts fetal growth and leads poor brain development. Even after birth the child growth depends on mother diet, later period on own's diet. So right diet and lifestyle from early years, leave permanent impact on the child physical and mental well being.

In Ayurveda, age classification in children is mainly done on the basis of *Ahara*.^[5]

1. *Kshirapa* - the children upto 1 year of age, main diet milk
2. *Kshirannada* - the children upto 2 years of age and on both milk and semisolid *Ahara*.
3. *Annada* - the children who takes solid *Ahara*.

KSHIRAPA

For new born, *Stanya* is considered as *Amruta* and Ayurveda praise *Stanyapana*. Most of the *Acharyas* told exclusive *Stanyapana* from birth to 6 months.

Address for correspondence:

Dr. Vijayalaxmi B. Benakatti

Associate Professor, Department of Kaumaryabrutya, BLDEA'S, AVS Ayurveda Mahavidyalaya, Vijayapur, Karnataka, India.

E-mail: vbbenakatti1981@gmail.com

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The mother should start feeding the child from first day only.^[6] First 3 days there is secretion of *Piyush*, which is necessary for development of immunity in children. *Acharya Kashyapa* told that *Stanyapana* results in good growth, strength, longevity and good health of child as well as not causing any trouble or diseases to child.^[7] The benefits of *Stanyapana* are *Jeevaniya* (longevity), *Brhamaniya* (overall growth of child),^[8] *Balakaraka* (develop immunity), *Satmya* (congenial),^[9] *Sthairyakara* (stability), *Dehavridha*^[10] (aids digestion), *Dosha Shamana* (maintains *Dosha Samyata*), *Vrisha* (*Harsha*).

Upto 6 months *Stanya* is sufficient for growth and development of child as it contains all the nutrients. *Stanya* is not only good nutrition for child but also it is first immunisation for child.

KSHIRAANNADA

Phalaprashana - It is performed during 6th month^[11] and infants are supplemented with fruits which are rich in Vitamin C. Which is absent in mother's milk. Vit C is essential in the development of immune system and has antioxidant property. Fruit juices helps in supplementing extra nutrition along with *Agnivrudhi*, relieve constipation and keeps child hydrated.

Freshly prepared juices are always better than packaged juice, which are full of extra sugar, additives and may cause dental caries.

Annaprashana - *Annaprashana* (complimentary foods) start from 6 months.^[12] After 6 months child require concentrated energy dense foods are essential in order to maintain and adequate velocity of growth for infant, child teeth begin to erupt, a biting movements begins and tendency to push solids out of mouth decrease, digestive system is mature enough to digest food. Alone breast milk is no longer sufficient to meet nutrition as birth weight doubles.^[13]

When food is first time introduced, a small amount and soft food should be given and gradually increase in amount. *Acharya Kashyapa* mentioned food preparation as below.^[14]

- Prepare a *Payasa* by old, husk free and well washed rice mixed with ghee and salt. Powder of

wheat and barley also should be given according to congeniality.

The one knowing *Desh*, *Agni*, *Bala*, observes the child as hungry, should be give food according to congeniality with gap of one or two periods.^[15]

Rice is considered to a very low allergen food and ideal for child. Rice is rich in carbohydrates and good source of Vit B complex, Easy to digest, rejuvenates body when used with milk. Wheat is good supply of carbohydrates for energy. Good sources of vitamins and minerals, act as a good natural laxative. Barley is a nutritious and has good amount of dietary fibre, strengthens bone.

Acharya Vagbhata mentioned some specific type of food preparations called *Modaka*. Mentioned *Modaka* preparations are as follows.^[16]

1. *Modaka* prepared by using powder of *Priyal*, *Yastimadhu*, *Madhu*, *Laja* and *Sita*. It is a combination of protein, carbohydrates and is mentioned in general for improving the infants nutritional status.
2. *Modaka* prepared by *Bilva*, *Ela*, *Sita*, *Laja*. This preparation is indicated in infants with weak digestive capacity.
3. Prepared by *Dhataki*, *Pushpa*, *Sharkara*, *Laja*. This preparation is indicated in indigestion and who repeatedly suffer from *Atisara*.

ANNADA

Annada starts from two years onwards.^[17] Young children below 5 years should be given bulky foods, rich in energy and proteins such as legumes, pulses, nuts, edible oil / ghee, sugar, milk and eggs. Vegetables including green leafy vegetables and locally available seasonal fruits should be part of their daily menu. Older children and adolescents should consume plenty of milk to fulfil the high calcium requirement, oil / ghee should be consumed.^[18] Food should be taken in proper place, without talking with full concentration. First take sweet to pacify aggravated *Vata* due to excess of hunger. Sour and

salt in middle, increases *Agni* so that digestion of food is easy. Bitter and astringent in the end, reduces *Pitta*.

Goodness of ghee

Incorporate ghee in child diet, ghee helps in improving memory, concentration, boosts digestion, relieves constipation, strengthens immunity, complexion, colour.^[19]

Dried fruits

Dry fruits are not just delicious but extremely rich source of proteins and minerals. Including fruits in the diet of children can help to aid their overall growth and development, rich in dietary fibre, aids digestion, prevent anaemia. So add atleast a handful of dry fruits in daily diet.

Fresh fruits

Fresh fruits are abundant in essential nutrients and vitamins which contribute to their health, growth as well as development and can help to reduce the risk of some diseases such as cancer and heart diseases. Pomegranate is good for heart, improves intelligence, immunity and body strength. Grapes are rich source of micronutrient minerals like copper, iron and manganese, Vit C, supports immune system. Bananas are rich source of carbohydrates, help power muscles. Apple boosts immunity and keeps bone and teeth strong and healthy.

Vegetables

Vegetables are a great source of essential nutrients that the child needs for development. Vegetables are low in calories and fat. Vegetables benefits child in many ways like improves nutrition, decreases obesity risk, helps the digestive system function properly, and prevents constipation.

Fruits and vegetables will further enhance nutritional quality of food providing minerals.

Foods to avoid

- Deep fried foods
- Frozen foods
- Flavoured foods

- Food made from refined food
- Bakery foods like pastries etc.

Abhyanga

Daily oil massage (*Abhyanga*) is best way of supporting the child health. Massage with warm medicated oil before bath every day is ideal.

Benefits of Abhyanga

It is nourishing, pacifies the *Doshas*, relieves fatigue, provides stamina and sound sleep, enhance complexion, lustre of the skin, promotes longevity and nourishes all parts of the body,^[20] increase blood circulation, helps in toning of the muscles and lubrication of joints.

Food preparation

Fermentation and germination are common Indian food practices, which definitely enhance digestibility and increase nutrients such as Vit C and B complex. Washing of food grains such as rice and pulses repeatedly will lead to loss of minerals and vitamins. Cutting vegetables into small pieces will uncover a greater surface area to the atmosphere, leading to loss of nutrients like vitamins due to oxidation. Cut vegetables should not be soaked for longer time in water as water soluble minerals and vitamins will get dissolved. Boiling being the most common method of cooking, will lead to loss of heat susceptible and water soluble vitamins. Vit B-complex and water should not be used in excess while cooking rice. Shallow frying consumes a smaller quantity of oil than deep frying. Avoid repeated use of oils. Repeated heated oil should not be mixed with fresh oil. Microwave does not cook uniformly and harmful bacteria can enter into the body, avoid large amount and big pieces in the microwave oven or else mix the food in between for uniform heating or cooking.^[21]

CONCLUSION

Healthy childhood is the foundation for healthy life. Nutrition is the basic need for healthy life. Any failure during this period may lead to physical and mental adverse effects. Provision of extra food and health care during pregnancy is necessary. Exclusive breast

feeding upto 6 months and encourage breast feeding till 2 years. After 6 months feed, homemade semisolid food to avoid malnutrition, provide plenty of fruits and vegetables. After two years start normal diet. Add fresh fruits and dry fruits, vegetables, ghee in their routine diet for proper growth and development.

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