

Management of Child Health in Ayurveda - A Review

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Submitted: 15-08-2022

Accepted: 23-08-2022

ABSTRACT: Ayurveda is the ancient literature of our Indian culture. Health is the most important part of our lives. Maintenance of health and prevention of disease is the main aim of Ayurveda. Out of eight branches, one branch of Ayurveda is exclusively dedicated to child care called Kaumarbhritya. Each child deserves a healthy life. Healthy child in each family today means a healthy society for tomorrow. Ayurvedic texts on child care deals with various ailments of children along with ways and importance of boosting the immunity power in children.

Children's are more prone to the various types of infections and developmental disorders due to the underdeveloped immune system. Therefore instead of treating the symptoms after the onset of a disease its important to prevent it. The holistic approach of Ayurveda emphasizes that a child should possess both physical and mental health. In Kaumarbhritya various sanskars were discussed and explained. Its parents responsibility to provide physiological as well psychological nourishment to child.

Keywords: Ayurveda, Balacikitsa, Newborn, Pediatric

INTRODUCTION:

Childhood is considered as the most important phase in life, which determines the quality of health, well being, learning and behaviour across the lifespan. This may be the reason for giving the foremost position for Balacikitsa among Ashtangas (8 branches) of Ayurveda. The regional growth of indigenous medicine gave significant contribution for the development of primary healthcare. Many new diseases which are not mentioned in classical textbooks have found their place in these books.

Definition of Ayurveda(1)

Ayurveda is defined along the path of good and bad matter

(Dravya), good or bad quality and the good or bad actions of a living being. Also, the length of life and its quality are described here. The concept of health is categorized into 4 parts:

- Good living (Hitayu)
- Unfavorable living (Ahitayu)
- Happy living (Sukhayu)
- Miserable living (Dukhayu)

"Hitaahitsukhdukhmayustasayhitahitam |
Maan Cha Tachyatrokta mayurvedasauchayte
||"

Definition of Pediatric Ayurveda

It is that part of Ayurveda, which deals with child-rearing, childhood illness, and treatment. Komar Bhritya = Komar + Bhritya.

Komar (Kumar) is a title by which a child is addressed. Bhritya denotes the parent, child caretaker, or guide.

Komar Bhritya involves care child-rearing and treating disease right from the time of conception up to the age of maturity (up to 16 years). It also involves maintaining and protecting the good health of the child. It is a scientific method of dealing with childhood disease symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment.

The following aspects of prevention and care are taken care of in Pediatric Ayurveda: -

- Infertility: its causes and its treatment.
- Proper development of fetus in the uterus.
- Care of maternal illness which may affect the fetus.
- Care of difficulties and problems during labor.

"Aapramsatvaye Komarbhritya Garbhamarman
iPrajnane Ch Viyatet |"

-Pr. 11.A.16/2

If considered along the lines of modern medical science, Pediatric Ayurveda can be divided

into 3 parts.

- Gynecology (StreeRogaVigyan).
- Obstetrics and Fetal medicine (PrasutiVigyan).
- Pediatrics (BalchikitsaVigyan)

Today's era is the era of specialization. As a result, newer research and developments are occurring faster leading to sub-specialization and super-specialization. A doctor specialized in one category is not able to attain complete knowledge of other specialties. As a result, one patient may have to go to several consultants in order to treat his disease. But one should not forget that a human being is a psychophysical organism (ManodehikTantra) and his functioning is interdependent on various organs simultaneously. Ayurveda not only treats the diseases symptoms but also takes care of the diseased personality and the person in totality.

Thus, this division of Ayurvedic branches has been done keeping the above in mind.

The subjects covered in Pediatric Ayurveda are thus overlapping with each other because all these subjects are somehow related to child health. Right from conception, fetal growth, and development (monthly), birth, neonatal development, infancy, toddler, pre-schooler, school-going child, adolescent - they are all related to child growth and development. Any subject related directly and indirectly to child health is included in Pediatric Ayurveda.

Importance of Pediatric Ayurveda

Pediatric Ayurveda lays the foundation of a good life. It gives importance to the physical, mental, and psychological growth of a child. If child-rearing, childcare, and treatment are carried out according to the rules of Pediatric Ayurveda, then definitely the child will turn into a happy and healthy adult.

At every stage of development of the child, there are special problems faced for e.g. during

teething (Dhantodbhav), it is natural for a child to have loss of emotions and fever. At every age of the child, the pattern of the disease changes for which the treatment also has to change accordingly. For e.g. secondary sex characteristics appear during the adolescent age at which the abnormal pubertal developments may also occur. Children in general, are more prone to infectious diseases as compared to the adult. Children are also more prone to accidents for

e.g. Foreign body aspirations.

Childhood diagnosis is different and difficult as compared to that in the adult. Children are scared to go to the doctor and are unable to communicate about their symptoms. They are not easily ready for a physical examination and have to be coaxed to do that. Thus, a physician has to be alert and careful while dealing with children.

Childhood treatment is also different as compared to the adult. The method of 5 elemental actions (panchakarma) used in adults is not recommended in children and if used, has to be used with utmost caution. Children do not tolerate bad tasting (Vish mishit, Tukshana, Katu, Tikta, Kasaya) medicine. They prefer sweet and tasty medicine. Thus treatment in children has its own importance.

CARE DURING PREGNANCY

Our ancient Ayurvedic literature deals elaborately with the emotional and nutritional needs of the pregnant mother. To ensure proper growth and development of the foetus, herbal decoctions, to be taken every month, are given to a pregnant mother. These are especially recommended to women who have a history of recurrent abortions or miscarriages.

Since the mind of the foetus starts being expressed in the fifth month of pregnancy and the intellect in the sixth month — from the fifth month onwards, a pregnant mother should adhere to a satvik diet which includes food that is grown, prepared and consumed in a natural form and also food which is less processed, easy to digest, warm and unctuous.

From the sixth month onwards, the diet should include nootropic herbs (medicinal herbs that stimulate the brain and nervous system) like brahmi, mandukparni, shankhapushpi, etc. It is advised that food which is hot, pungent and heavy to digest be avoided during pregnancy.

Strenuous and violent activities, squatting, suppression of natural urges, prolonged stay under the hot sun and peeping into pits or wells, and therapies like sudation (causing excessive sweating), oleation (application of oil), emesis (vomiting) and blood letting are prohibited during pregnancy. It is important that the expectant mother is helped to remain in a pleasant state of mind by listening to recitations from the scriptures and avoiding thoughts that breed anger, fear, jealousy or hatred.

BREASTFEEDING

According to Ayurveda, love and affection for the baby, a happy state of mind with adequate rest and sleep, and a good nutritious diet are essential for successful breastfeeding. Besides that, certain plants and foods like kheer of halim, methi, poppy seeds and dates, and medicinal products made up of shatavari, musali, jeevanti, etc. may help to improve the quality and quantity of breast milk.

CONCEPT OF DOSHAS

Health and disease in Ayurveda are discussed in terms of three 'doshas' (vata, pitta and kapha). In health, equilibrium of these three doshas is maintained. Disturbance in the equilibrium leads to disease. It can be said in brief that kaphadosha is associated with anabolic activity predominant in childhood, pitta dosha with bio transformation as seen in middle age, and vata dosha with catabolic activity as in old age. In other words, childhood is associated with growth and development, middle age with maintenance, and old age with degeneration. Hence, it is believed that the majority of childhood diseases are related to kaphadosha disturbance. For this reason, children are kept away from such foods and activities that would aggravate the kaphadosha. Hence children prone to frequent illnesses are advised to avoid too many sweets, ice-cold food and drinks, buffalo milk, playing in water and sleeping during the day (applicable to children older than 4 years).

Ayurveda Celebrates Uniqueness

Ayurveda is a unique system of medicine in that it does not profess one-size-fits-all solutions, but rather honors and celebrates each individual. One of the core tenets of Ayurveda is that each of us is born with a distinct constitution—a particular combination of vata, pitta, and kapha—that is completely unique to each of us.

If the doshas are new to you, here is a brief orientation. Vata is the energy of air and ether, movement and impulse, creativity and connection; it governs breathing, the pulsation of the heart, muscle movement in general, nerve impulses, sensory perception, communication, and our capacity to experience flexibility, joy, and expansive consciousness.

Pitta is the energy of fire and water, digestion and transformation; it governs appetite, digestion, absorption, assimilation, intelligence,

charisma, courage, and ambition.

And kapha is the energy of water and earth, structure and cohesiveness, grounding and stability; it governs nourishment, growth, lubrication, regeneration, fluid balance, fat regulation, strength, stamina, memory, and our ability to feel compassion and contentment. Every child's body has all three doshas. We all do. But different individuals have different proportions of each one, and most of us are predominant in one or two of them.

According to Ayurveda, one's constitution (prakriti, in Sanskrit) is established at conception, cemented at birth, and it remains constant over the course of a lifetime. It represents each individual's natural state of equilibrium and provides a personal blueprint for optimal health. Our constitutions influence our physiology and physique, our likes and dislikes, our tendencies and habits, as well as our mental and emotional character.

Vata in Children

Vata manifests in children as a lighter, leaner build with an irregular appetite. Vata is present in children who tend to get cold fairly easily or who have a tendency toward dry skin. Vata hair is thin and may be tightly curled, while vata skin tends to be thinner and often leans toward darker tones. Vata also lends itself to quickness in the mind and body, as well as high levels of creativity.

As far as challenges go, excess vata is usually behind tendencies toward worry or anxiety, mental and physical restlessness, finicky eating habits, difficulty sleeping deeply or soundly, and can be blamed for any struggles with constipation as well.

Pitta in Children

Pitta is present in children with a moderate physical build, who have a rather sharp appetite. These children will need to eat regularly because they do not tolerate skipping meals. Pitta will cause children to be averse to hot weather because of their tendency to overheat.

Pitta hair is fine and straight, while pitta eyes are piercing and sharp. Pitta is attributed to reddish hues in the hair and skin, and also the presence of freckles and moles. When children have a sharp and capable intellect, articulate speech, and especially innovative minds, you can

rest assured that pitta is at work.

The challenges associated with excess pitta include tendencies toward diarrhea, inflammation, sensitive or easily irritated skin, and a notable presence of sharp emotions like anger and frustration.

Kapha in Children

Kapha shows up in children as a solid and sturdy physique, with notable strength and endurance. These children will typically have a rather mild appetite and slower digestion but will likely also genuinely appreciate food and enjoy eating. Kapha skin is thick, oily, and very smooth, while kapha eyes are exceptionally large and captivating. Kapha hair is thick, abundant, and often wavy.

The kapha mind is very steady and compassionate, not easily ruffled, and can sustain an impressive level of focus for prolonged periods of time. Kapha sleep is quite sound and may be prolonged as well.

As for the challenges of excess kapha, these include sluggish digestion, chronic congestion, lethargy, excessive sleep, depression, and excess weight.

Division of Pediatrics Into Different Stages According to the Age of Child In Pediatric Ayurveda, ages from 1-16 years are considered as part of childhood. They are divided into 3 parts:-

- Chirab:- From birth to 1 year.
- Chiranath: From 2 - 3 years.
- Annad: from 4 to 16 years.

(Note: Kaashyap Sahita has divided the active life of man into 6 stages of which 3 stages are part of the pediatric age.

- Garbhavasta - From conception to birth.
- Balyavasta - From birth to 1 year.
- Komaravasta - From 1 year to 16 years.)

Chirab:-

The stage during which the infant is dependent on mother's milk is called Chirab. This stage is from birth to approximately 1 year of age.

Chiranath:-

The stage in which the child eats other food apart

from the mother's milk is called Chiranath. This is usually 2 - 3 years of age.

Annad:-

The stage in which the child is no longer dependent on mother's milk and can eat normal adult diet is called Annad. This stage is from 4 years to 16 years of age.

These stages do not have a clear cut demarcation line and they overlap with each other. But this classification has its own importance. Each stage denotes a special developmental aspect of the child's growth. This classification is useful to determine the cause of disease and also the right treatment in the right quantity.

Ayurvedic Diet for Kids

We can keep kapha in check by feeding kids a balanced diet focused on naturally light, heating, dry, and fibrous foods like fresh fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains. Ideally, we want these foods cooked, using generous amounts of warming, digestive spices such as garlic, ginger, cinnamon, and turmeric, and we want to serve them warm or hot.

Favor the pungent, bitter, and astringent tastes, and reduce kapha-provoking foods like wheat, dairy, and sugary sweets. If you'd like to know more, please see our resource on how to follow a Kapha-Pacifying Diet, as well as our list of Kapha-Pacifying Foods (which includes those best avoided).

Ayurvedic Oil Massage for Children

Abhyanga, the ancient practice of massaging the body with oil, calms the nervous system, lubricates and rejuvenates the tissues, and promotes healthy circulation throughout the body. It is no coincidence that the Sanskrit word for oil, sneha, also means love.

This practice can be incredibly calming and soothing to a child's nervous system and it benefits both the physical body and the more subtle realms of consciousness. The oil itself forms a protective sheath around the body that can help to buffer the nervous system and the mind against whatever happens to occur on a given day.

Before a child's bath, massage about 1/4 cup warm oil into the child's skin, hair, and scalp (Organic Sesame Oil, Sunflower Oil, Coconut Oil, and Ghee are traditional favorites). It is best to warm the oil by placing its container in a warm water bath until it is skin temperature or ever-so-

slightly warmer. Ideally, the bathroom should be warm as well so that the child doesn't get chilled during the massage.

You can remove excess oil from babies and small children before the bath with a special chickpea and milk pudding "soap."

Yoga and Pranayama for Children

Children can learn very early the value of being present with their bodies and with their breath. A kid-friendly way to teach Full Yogic Breathing is to have a child pick a favorite stuffed animal and place it on the belly as they lie on their backs. Have them practice making the stuffed animal rise and fall on the wave of their breath as they inhale and exhale.

There are many children's yoga classes available as well, and we ourselves can teach children simple asanas at any time. Kids often

especially love poses named for (and imitating) animals they are familiar with (cat, cow, puppy pose, downward dog, and lion pose).

Mindfulness and Meditation for Children

Similarly, very young children can be encouraged to observe their bodies and their minds in age-appropriate ways, as long as this is done in short stints that the children can manage.

They can sit and count their breaths, observe a candle as they sit peacefully (in a safely supervised way), close their eyes and invite serenity for a minute or two, or be encouraged to give their full attention to receiving nourishment at a family meal.

Children will also learn a great deal from observing the adults in their lives taking time to engage with mindfulness and meditation, so prioritizing these practices yourself will surely have a long-term impact as well.



Number of Samskaras is explained in the classics, which influence over the immunity enhancement and development of a child after birth.

Jatakarma Samskara(4)

This Samskara is advised to be performed immediately after birth. In this Samskara new born is given a preparation of Ghrita + Madhu which is expected to be acting as Medhya, Ayushkara and Pushtikara for the child. Ghee and honey in equal quantity may stimulate immune system of the child immediately after birth.¹⁵

Phalaprashana Samskara(5)

It is performed during 6th month and is a special contribution of Acharya Kashyapa. In this Samskara, baby is supplemented with fruits, which are rich in vitamin C (e.g. orange) which is absent in mother's milk. Vitamin C is an essential component in the development of immune system.

Karnavedhan Sanskara:

According to Sushruta the child's ears are pierced for the purpose of Raksha-nimit

(protection from diseases) and Bhushan-nimit(ornamentation)^[8]

Local inflammation, which occurs after Karnavedhanacreated by wound which, may act as a buffering mechanism for stimulation of the body immune system.

LEHAN AND SWARNAPRASHAN:

Ayurveda has special attention towards child immunity thus a special formulation named as Lehana was made for the Ksheerapa (infant), Ksheerannada (2 years old) and Annada-awastha (till 16 years of age). They have semisolid consistency and are mixed along with honey. During the Ksheerannada stage, development of brain occurs at very fast rate so MedhyaRasayana is used to strengthen the central nervous system of the child. This therapy helps in promoting health and strength of the child. It enhances the growth and development as it helps in absorption of nutrition and also provides protection from various diseases. Similarly Swarnaprashan, Swarna (gold) is used as a BhasmaalongwithGhrit (ghee) and honey. Combination of Ghrit and honey becomes poison and when introduced in very small quantity for longer duration can trigger the immune response of the child.

Offering More Focused Support

As it is an essential part of childhood to get sick from time to time, it is helpful to have a few ideas on more specific ways to support a child's optimal health. Here are a few easily-accessible suggestions:

- **Chyavanprash.** One traditional Ayurvedic formula that is fabulous for children isChyavanprash, a nutrient-rich jam made of amalaki fruit and other supportive ingredients. Chyavanprash is a strong rejuvenative, which supports the physiology of childhood while bolstering theimmune system. Most children like the taste of it and will happily take a spoonful or two every day. You can also stir Chyavanprash into warm milk (or a milk substitute), warm water, or spread it on toast. For children,taking it plain on an empty stomach is often most effective, and you may find it especially helpful in the fall and winter months, during the cold season.
- **Spiced Honey.** Give 1/4 teaspoon of single- or mixed-herb combinations(black pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, manjistha, sitopaladi, turmeric, or trikatu), stirred into a

spoonful of raw honey, one to three times per day. The honey offers scraping and cleansing capacities while the herbs bolster digestive strength, support agni, and clear excesses in the doshas.

- **Ginger Honey.** Juice or press a large piece of fresh ginger and add a pinch of salt. Measure the juice and add twice as much raw honey.Mix well and keep refrigerated. Give to children one teaspoon at a time to stimulate agni, guard against stagnation, and promote warmth and clarity throughout thesystem.
- **Throat Soother.**Throat Soother sprayhelps to eliminate excess kapha from the throat while bolstering a healthy immune response. Most kids enjoy the taste and will happily take a spray or two several times each day.
- **Bronchial Support.**Bronchial Support syrupejuvenates and bolsters health in the mucous membranes throughout the respiratorytract.
- **Supportive Teas.** Warming, clarifying herbal teas such ginger tea and licorice tea can be served with a teaspoon of honey to support boththe respiratory tract and digestivestrength.
- **Garlic and Ginger.** These foods are wonderful for stimulating digestive strength, clearing excess kapha, and strengthening the immune system. Cook with generous amount of them whenever a child needs a little extrasupport.
- **Garlic Ear Drops.** Peel a clove of garlic, smash it with the flat side of a knife. Let sit in a small bowl for 10 minutes. Pour 2 ounces of boiling water over it and let stand another 10 minutes. Strain into a sterilized dropper bottle. Cool and drop into the ear canal as needed to support the immune response and promote clarity and balance there. You can even fill the ear canal and have the child lie still for a couple of minutes before draining. Use within one week and make a fresh batch as needed.
- **Ear Oil.** These drops are gentle enough for children and can feel calming and soothing. To support healthy ears, use one drop ofEar Oilin each ear daily, warmed to body temperature. Occasionally,more oil may feel comforting. Use several drops in each ear, and like with the garlic ear drops, have the child lie still for a couple minutes before draining. (Ear Oil is not recommended when there is an infection or a perforated ear drum.)
- **Hot Steam and Baths.** Hot steam and water help to liquefy and clear stagnant kapha and

can be very useful when children are experiencing an accumulation of kapha anywhere in their respiratory tract.

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