

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Nurturing Infants Exploring Ayurveda's Holistic Approach to Care

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** *Ayurveda* encompasses that a wide range of practices within pediatric care especially plays a pivotal role in nurturing infants by offering safe and effective approaches not only for disease treatment but also for maintaining overall health in this span of age. *Acharyas* offered their insights on all aspects of newborn and infant care, spanning from birth until the newborn's complete stability.

**Methods:** This study was completed by gathering the knowledge from classical *Ayurvedic* literature, research articles, guidelines, and PubMed and MedLine databases.

**Results and Discussion:** This study investigates traditional *Ayurvedic* methods for infant care placing particular attention on evaluating the safety and effectiveness of these practices within the framework of neonatal and infant healthcare up to the age of 1 year.

**Conclusion:** *Kaumarbhritya* is seen as the first direct assistance provided by the science of Ayurveda to a newborn on his debut in this new world, directing him toward a healthy lifestyle in the future and bringing out the finest version of himself. This paper offers an overview of the literary contributions and historical traditional medical practices of healthcare in the domain of *Balachikitsa* mainly of neonatal and infancy period. The goal is to underscore the significance of research grounded in evidence and its integration into hidden principles concerning neonatal and infant issues described in *Ayurveda*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Ayurveda* offers a comprehensive and holistic approach to care for neonates and infants, emphasizing the importance of understanding their unique constitution, providing a nurturing environment, incorporating natural remedies and practices, and fostering emotional and spiritual well-being from the earliest stages of life. In infancy period *Ayurveda* includes various preventive aspects, diagnostic methods, *Bal-Panchakarma* (penta bio purification methods in children) specially for disabled children, therapeutic approaches, preventing and managing genetic disorders in form of pre-conception, antenatal, postnatal counseling, and management. *Ayurveda* strongly advocates for appropriate care of the mother during both the prenatal and postnatal phases, ensuring the well-

being of both the mother and the newborn from preconception to infancy. Recently, there has been an increasing interest in exploring holistic and traditional approaches to neonatal and infant care such as *Navjata Shishu Paricharya*, and *Raksha karma* (sterilization) and various kinds of *Samskaras* during neonatal and infancy period. These procedures aim to promote both the physiological and psychological development of neonates and infants enhancing their immunity and overall health. Recognizing the importance of investing in the early years of children is crucial for optimizing their future health and happiness.

During the neonatal and infancy period, the following practices can be regarded as optimal for fostering a joyful and fulfilling experience from birth to 1 year of age:

### 1.1. Preconceptional Care

The creation of the embryo is credited to the combination of sperm (*Shukra*) and ovum (*Shonita*). Several essential factors such as

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ovulation (*Ritukala*), the condition of the reproductive system (*Kshetra*), the quality of ovum and sperm (*Bija*), nourishing substances (*Ambu*), and the proper functioning of downward bodily air (*Apana Vayu*) are pivotal for a healthy conception. *Punsavana Samskara*,<sup>[1]</sup> an *Ayurvedic* practice similar to genetic engineering, is employed to ensure the birth of robust offspring. Typically performed between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> weeks of pregnancy, this distinctive procedure aims to enhance the health of the unborn child. *Simantonnayan Samskara*,<sup>[1]</sup> conducted in the 4<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy, addresses hormonal fluctuations and emotional imbalance experienced by women. To foster positive emotions and thoughts, a ritual called *Homa* is carried out during *Simantonnayan Samskara*, influencing the mental state of the unborn child to resonate with the mother's positive mindset during pregnancy.

## 1.2. New Born Care (*Navjata Shishu Paricharya*)

Immediate postnatal care, such as *Ulvaparimarjana*,<sup>[2]</sup> entails removing vernix caseosa right after birth. It's advised to apply a blend of *Ghee* and *Saindhava Ghrita* to the infant's skin as *Ghee*, being a poor conductor of heat, provides ample insulation against hypothermia. *Pranpratyagaman*<sup>[3]</sup> is the process of reviving a newborn by clearing the airway to ensure unimpeded breathing. Essentially, it stimulates the central nervous system akin to tactile stimulation. *Nabhinalkartan* (cutting of umbilical cord) pertains to the severing of the umbilical cord. *Acharya Vagbhat* recommended cutting the umbilical cord with a sharp instrument known as *Ardhadhaara Shastra* (single edged knife) and tying it at two points, spaced 4 *Anguli* (approx. 7 cm) apart, using silk threads called *Kshoumasutras* (silk thread). The remaining part of the cord should be looped around the neonate's neck to prevent blood loss. *Mukhvisodhana*,<sup>[3]</sup> similar to suctioning in neonatal resuscitation, involves the use of *Saindhava* and *Sarpi* to effectively clear secretions from the mouth. In general care, *Snana* (bathing) helps reduce the risk of hypothermia. This is accomplished by utilizing *Ushnodaka*, a blend of warm water infused with extracts from diverse aromatic plants or fragrance-emitting substances. These extracts are obtained by immersing heated metal bars of gold or silver, which also helps mitigate the usual odor associated with labor. *Ksheerivriksha* (special group of medicated plants) *Kashaya*, renowned for its potent antiseptic characteristics, efficiently protects the baby against infections.

## 1.3. Variuos Samskaras

*Samskaras*<sup>[4]</sup> are rituals conducted with the aim of instilling positive qualities in an individual. They encompass *Jatakarma*<sup>[5]</sup> (birth rituals), *Namkarana*<sup>[6]</sup> (naming ceremony) during the neonatal period, and *Nishkramana*<sup>[7]</sup> (first exposure of child to the external environment), *Phalaprashana*<sup>[7]</sup> (first exposure of fruit juices to child), *Anprashana*<sup>[7]</sup> (first exposure of food to child), and *Karnavedhana*<sup>[8]</sup> (piercing of ear lobes) during infancy. *Jatakarma* initiates the first *Prashanam* (licking of medication), where the baby ingests a mixture of honey and *Ghee* processed with mantras, followed by *Stanapanam*, or breastfeeding. The initial feeding with *Madhu* and *Ghritha* provides ample stimulation to the gastrointestinal intrinsic nerve plexus, facilitating the early passage of meconium and indicating rooting, sucking, and swallowing reflexes. *Namkarana Samskara*, or the naming ceremony, as described by *Acharya Charaka*, occurs on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of life, signifying the beginning of the late neonatal period. The father of the child should assign two names, one reflecting the constellation under which the baby is born (*Nakshatra*), and the other carrying intended meaning (*Abhiprayika*). The *Nishkramana Samskara* typically occurs between the 12<sup>th</sup> day and the 4<sup>th</sup> month after birth, providing an opportune

moment to check for any deformities when the child reaches 4 months of age. Both *Phalaprashana* and *Annaprashana Samskara* play significant roles in the child's life.<sup>[7]</sup> Before these ceremonies, the child exclusively receives milk. According to *Kashaypa*, the 6<sup>th</sup> month is designated for *Phalaprashana*, while the 10<sup>th</sup> month is for *Annaprashana*.<sup>[7]</sup> By the age of 6 months, breast milk alone may not suffice to meet the growing child's nutritional needs. Hence, it is the appropriate time to introduce supplementary feeding, beginning with *Phalaprashana* and then *Annaprashana*. These *samskaras* help mitigate deficiencies in essential vitamins. *Karnavedhana Samskara*, or the piercing of the ear lobe, is typically performed when the child is between 6 and 8 months old. *Acharya Sushruta* pierces a child's ear with the dual purpose of *Rakshanimit* (disease protection) and *Abhushanartha* (ornamentation). This practice seems to enhance the strengthening of the immune system by inducing injury to the ear lobules, which initiates antigen-antibody reactions during early life, leading to secondary immunization against various infections.

## 1.4. Breastfeeding (Concept of *Dhatri*)<sup>[9]</sup>

The practice of exclusive breastfeeding for a minimum of 6 months provides numerous advantages for both the infant and the mother. Foremost among these is the enhancement of immunity against gastrointestinal infections. If the mother is unable to produce a sufficient quantity of milk, *Ayurveda* suggests considering the benefits of *Dhatri* (wet nurse) for the child.<sup>[10]</sup> According to *Acharya Charaka*,<sup>[11]</sup> a wet nurse should possess specific desirable qualities such as having a healthy complexion (*Samana Varna*), already having a living child (*Jivitvatsha*), and having a sufficient quantity of breast milk. In addition, the wet nurse should use one of the *Prajasthapana* (drugs which stabilize new born care) drugs such as *Aindri* and *Brahmi*, as recommended. *Acharya Vagbhata*<sup>[12]</sup> recommended either arranging for two wet nurses or providing the child with goat or cow's milk after treating it with a decoction of *Laghu Panchmoola* (group of plants whose roots are used) mixed with sugar. Artificially produced milk should not be substituted for breast milk or any other form of milk unless absolutely necessary.

## 1.5. Preventive Approaches (*Dhupana*<sup>[13]</sup> and *Raksha Karma*,<sup>[14]</sup> Concept of *Kumaragara*,<sup>[15]</sup> *Kridnaka*,<sup>[16]</sup> *Kreedabhumi*,<sup>[17]</sup> and *Kumaradhara*)<sup>[18]</sup>

To uphold aseptic conditions, different sterilization techniques are employed, including *Dhupana* (medicated foaming) with *Rakshoghna* (antimicrobial drugs) *Dravyas* such as *Guggulu* (*Comiphora Mukkul*), which contains volatile oils extracted from its gum resin. Certain extracts demonstrated notable bacteria-inhibiting properties even when used in low concentrations.<sup>[19]</sup> *Acharya Kashyapa* has detailed the *Dhupa Kalpa*, a chapter focusing on various formulations for *Dhupana* of *Vastra* (cloths), *Kumaragara* (pediatric ward), and other items. Disinfecting the *Kumaragara*, or pediatric ward, aims to shield neonates from diverse compound infections. This process involves employing natural biocides and fumigants as recommended in classical texts.<sup>[20]</sup> *Kumaragara*, also known as the Neonatal Care Unit or Pediatric Ward, is a dedicated space or room designed specifically for neonates or infants. It is essential for the *Kumaragara* to possess desirable attributes such as being expertly constructed according to *Vastu Vidhya* (knowledge of dwelling), among other considerations. *Kridabhumi* or playground, is an integral part of the *Kumaragara* (Neonatal Care Unit/Pediatric Ward), designed as a separate room with a level surface for children to play on. The *Kridabhumi* should fulfill

various requirements, such as having designated areas for water and other spreadable substances, known as *Salila Ulookhala Sthana*. It is crucial to avoid prolonged sitting for children to prevent complications often associated with extended periods of sitting.<sup>[21]</sup> The *Kumaragara* should be well equipped with various sorts of *Kridnaka*. Toys for children, referred to as *Kridnaka*, should possess diverse qualities such as offering a wide range of attractive varieties (*Vichitrani*) and producing various types of melodious sounds (*Ghoshavantya*). *Kumaradhara* or guardian/babysitter, as described in *Ashtanga Sangraha*, is characterized by qualities such as *Bala Chittavata*, that is, indicating mastery in understanding the child's mentality.

### 1.6. Diagnostic Approaches (Concepts of *Vednaadhyaya*<sup>[22]</sup> and *Lakshnasdhyaya*<sup>[23]</sup>)

The wealth of experiences and numerous observations gathered by *Acharya Kashyapa* continue to be immensely valuable in today's clinical practice. His delineations of signs and symptoms of illnesses stand alongside those found in modern pediatrics. In the *Vednaadhyaya* of *Kashyapa Samhita*, a comprehensive symptomatology of numerous diseases is presented, which closely resembles contemporary symptomatology. In addition, the *Lakshanaadhyaya* provides an elaborate clinical examination protocol spanning from newborns to adolescence, including prognostic insights for the future. *Kashyapa* refers to neonates as *Balanam Avachasa*,<sup>[24]</sup> meaning those unable to articulate their suffering verbally. In *Vedana Adhyaya*, *Kashyapa* provides numerous helpful guidelines for diagnosing diseases in such non-verbal children. They must convey all their discomfort, pain, and needs through minimal symptoms. A study of *Vedanadhyaya* underscores the depth and simplicity of *Acharya Kashyap's* therapeutic insights. Furthermore, *Kashyapa* elaborates on *Lakshanadhyaya*, where examination begins from the feet and extends to the scalp hair of newborns through adolescence. He details physical features of nails and various body parts, along with future predictions, which provide insights into their health, wealth, and social and family circumstances. This aids in the early detection of potential clinical issues.

### 1.7. Therapeutic Contribution

Immunomodulation through *Lehana*<sup>[25]</sup> (medicated licking) and *Prakara Yogas* (group of medicines)<sup>[26]</sup> represents an appealing strategy using *Rasayana* drugs (immunomodulators) to enhance the immune response against pathogens by nonspecifically activating the immune system. *Lehana*, a potential prophylactic and therapeutic treatment, involves mixing drugs with honey or *Ghrita* and administering them from infancy to childhood. *Suvarnaprashana* (medicated drug licking along with gold), a unique health supplement, is considered a *Rasayana* due to its nutritional properties. Animal studies on *Suvarna Bhasma* have demonstrated its immune-stimulant, analgesic, and antidepressant effects. *Prakara Yoga* recipes serve as an effective measure for baby care starting from childbirth. *Prakara Yoga*, an indigenous approach, aims to boost body immunity, shielding children from diseases much like a fence protects a house from enemies from birth until they reach 12 years of age. The formulations primarily consist of ingredients with *Katu rasa* (bitter taste), *Katu Vipaka* (bitter ripening), and *Laghu guna* (light to assimilate) qualities, which help alleviate *Kapha* imbalance. *Prakara Yogas*, with their digestive, carminative, channel-clearing, and *Rasayana* properties, work to prevent illness during the neonatal and infancy stages. *Acharya Kashyapa* and various other scholars have made significant contributions to the field of pediatric medicine. They introduced various pediatric diseases and treatments, such as administering *Abhyanga* (massage) with coconut milk and bathing the

infant with water boiled with tender leaves of *Vata* (*Ficus benghalensis*) for a healthy baby.<sup>[27]</sup> *Acharya Kashyapa's* contributions to medical care and *Panchakarma* in infancy include detailing eight types of *Swedana Karma* (sudation), with certain modifications such as *Hashta Sweda* (sudation of hands) and *Pata Sweda* (sudation of thighs), which are particularly beneficial for neonates and infants, especially in cases of abdominal pain. *Basti* (medicated enema) is recommended for children and considered akin to nectar for the well-being of child.<sup>[28]</sup>

### 1.8. Socializing and Ideal Parenting

Socialization plays a crucial role in various aspects of a child's early development. As children mature, they gradually learn to recognize and understand their own thoughts and emotions. They also become adept at discerning the emotions of others, distinguishing between happiness and sadness, for instance. Moreover, they acquire skills to cope with stress, resolve conflicts, and integrate into their environment by engaging in communication and interaction with those around them. The family plays a huge role in a child's socialization.<sup>[29]</sup> The family's shared values, behaviors, and beliefs significantly shape a child's early experiences. According to *Ayurveda*, adherence to codes of conduct known as *Acharya Rasayan* (general routine of a person) helps prevent the imbalance of *Doshas*, thereby averting the onset of disease, as the imbalance of *Doshas* is considered the root cause of illness. Raising children involves more than just providing for their needs; it also entails practicing effective parenting techniques. There is not a single correct approach to good parenting, but guiding the child along the right path is a defining aspect of ideal parenting.<sup>[30]</sup>

## 2. DISCUSSION

The infancy period, spanning from birth to 12 months marks a critical stage in a newborn's life as they transition from the security of the mother's womb to the potential vulnerabilities of their new environment. It is imperative to establish a robust immune system during this phase to fortify the infant's body against various infections and diseases. *Ayurveda* proposes diverse methods to enhance immunity and strengthen the body, aiding the infant in adapting to their surroundings. *Suvarnaprashana*, an *Ayurvedic* immunization program utilizing a readily absorbable form of gold, represents an effective method to enhance immunity and deter recurring infections and allergic reactions. This regimen can be administered regularly from infancy to the age of 12, providing substantial health advantages. *Suvarnaprashanam* has shown notable anti-stress and analgesic characteristics, effectively lowering the levels of neurotransmitters such as 5-hydroxytryptamine, cortisone, nor-adrenaline, and dopamine.<sup>[31]</sup>

## 3. CONCLUSION

Motherhood is a remarkable period in a woman's life, and her understanding of *Ayurvedic* childcare practices can greatly enhance the physical and mental health of her child. The establishment of a well-equipped labor room like *Sutikagara* (labor room explained in *Ayurveda*), which ensures safe and comfortable childbirth, is truly commendable.

After the child's birth, thorough discussions on various aspects of care, including umbilical cord cutting, body cleansing, and resuscitation, are carried out in a systematic manner, emphasizing a scientific approach.

Furthermore, there is a focus on upholding complete aseptic conditions during the care of both the mother and the newborn, which includes

the utilization of prescribed medicated smokes and adorning the room with specific medicinal substances.

Intriguing instructions are offered concerning the timing of the child's physical and mental development, outlined across various *Samskaras*, along with the crucial characteristics of environments suitable for the child, bathing protocols, feeding routines, dressing procedures, and more, as delineated within the concept of *Kumaragara* (pediatric ward). *Kridnaka*, comprising an assortment of toys, must be attractive to children, taking into account their physical and mental immaturity.

However, it is vital that these items are safe for them to use. Ensuring proper immunity through suitable immunization is crucial for a child's healthy development and a life free from illness.

For instance, *Suvarnaprashana* entails the oral administration of gold powder and specific medications to enhance the child's strength (*Bala*), complexion (*Varna*), longevity (*Ayu*), and other desirable qualities, highlighting the priority placed on child safety and health.

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#### 9. DATA AVAILABILITY

This is an original manuscript, and all data are available for only review purposes from the principal investigators.

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