



Review Article

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A REVIEW ON HEALTH ISSUES AMONG ADOLESCENT GIRLS: AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Adolescence is a vital stage for both boys and girls, but it is more important for girls due to menstrual complications. So, they need special care and considerations. Adolescence is a time for growth spurts and puberty changes. Therefore, adolescence is a stage which will breed great stress and strain among parents. According to Ayurveda these changes develop during this period is known as *rajo darshana* or menarche, which is the product of *Rasa*, flows out of the body in every month, after the age of twelve years and slowly reduces by the age of fifty years. Sexual and other physical maturation that happens during puberty occurs mainly due to hormonal changes. So, this article is an effort to throw light on the role of health issues and their Ayurvedic management among adolescent girls.

Keywords: Adolescent, *Artava*, *Avirbhava* and *Tirobhava*, *Rajaswala Charya*

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitional phase of growth and development between childhood and adulthood. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines an adolescent as any person between ages 10 and 19. This age range falls within WHO's definition of young people, which refers to individuals between ages 10 and 24.¹

Girls also experience puberty as a sequence of events, but their pubertal changes usually begin before boys of the same age. Each girl is different and may progress through these changes differently. The following are the average ages of puberty changes

- Beginning of puberty: 8 to 13 years
- First pubertal change: breast development
- Pubic hair development: shortly after breast development
- Hair under the arms: 12 years old
- Menstrual periods: 10 to 16.5 years old

Prevalence

The value of global investment in adolescent health cannot be overstated. Adolescents aged 10 to 19 years make up about a sixth of the world's population. It bears 6% of the global burden of disease and injury and die in excess of 1.2 million cases per year². The adult mortality rate shown in the World Development Indicators database and related products refers to the probability that those who have reached age 15 will die before reaching age 60 (shown per 1000 persons) While infant (first year of life) and childhood (1-9 years) mortality have decreased significantly in the last 50 years, adolescent mortality has remained relatively stable.

India has the highest teenage population (243 million), followed by China (207 million) and the United States (202 million).³ Girls are vulnerable group among adolescents, particularly in developing countries, where they are typically married at a young age and face a higher risk of reproductive morbidity and mortality.

Description of *Raja*, *Artava*, *Shonita*

Though the Ayurvedic percept says that the menstruation stage among girls is in between the age of 12 and 15, there are many cases of girls developing the phenomenon at the age of 9 itself. According to Acharya *Vagbhata*, as in immature or aged plants flower or fruits do not come up, as in bud and decaying flower or fruit the fragrance is not explicit, similarly in males *Sukra* before sixteen and after seventy years of age and in female *raja* and *Stanya* before twelve years and after fifty years of age are not visible⁴. According to *Acharya Kashyapa* as the fruit situated within the flower cannot be seen being very small and the fire located within the wood cannot be noticed without specific efforts, similarly *Shonita* and *sukra* require appropriate time just like fruit and specific efforts just like fire of wood for their gross appearance. According to *Vagbhata* these changes develop during this period is known as *rajo darshana* or menarche, flows out of the body in every month, after the age of twelve years and slowly reduces by the age of fifty years⁵. Twelve and fifty years are the age of menarche and menopause respectively. *Kashyapa* mentioned the age as sixteen years which is probably the description of appropriate age for conception. He further says that this age can be influenced by specific *Ahara*, *Arogya*.⁶ There may be slight variation in individual cases as menarche may come at eleven years similarly age of menopause may also delay.

Table 1: Restricted activities during menstruation

Restricted activities	Abnormalities in child
Day sleep	Over sleepy
Use of collyrium	Blindness
Weeping	Abnormality of vision
Bathing and anointing	Sadism
Oil massage	Leprosy and other skin diseases
Paring of nails	Deformity of nails
Fast racing	Wanton or fickle
Laughing	Black color of teeth, lips, and tongue
Over talking	Black color of teeth
Over hearing	Deafness
Combing	Baldness
Exposure to draughts and excretion	Insane
Scrapping or digging of earth	Falls during walking
Use of nasya	Menstrual abnormalities ⁷

The utility of all these restrictions is doubtful, however this reflects the social customs of that period, in which for earning livelihood hard work was needed, these restrictions might help in avoiding this hard labour at least for those three days when the lady is definitely physically and psychologically in some changed status. However, in today's changed social structure, it is not possible to observe these strictly.

Formation of Raja

From the *Rasa dhatu*, the *Artavarakta* named *raja* is formed. *Rakta* reaching uterus and coming out three days in every month is called *artava*.⁸ The *raja* is formed from essence part of *Rasa*. There appears some difference of opinion regarding formation of *raja*. *Charaka*, *Sushruta*, *Dalhana*, *Vagbhata* II and *Chakrapani* opine that it is formed from *Rasa*, while *Vagbhata* I says that blood accumulated in uterus, then discharged is *Artava*, the *raja* derived from essence portion of *Rasa*.⁹ Actually both these descriptions are identical, appears that *Sushruta* etc., have mentioned the earlier stage of *raja* formation while *Vagbhata* I mentions the later stage. The point has been clarified by *Chakrapani* that during the process of formation, the *Artava* is *Soumya* due to influence of *rasa*, while at the time of its excretion due to specific changes it assumes *agneya* character. The hormones of hypothalamus to pituitary then to ovary and ultimately to their target organ endometrium are carried through *Rasa*, the plasma, in this endometrium the blood is accumulated and then discharged during menstruation. This process has been explained by *Chakrapani* with the words *Avirbhava* and *Tirobhava*. Initially besides nourishment to endocrine glands as well as uterus and endometrium by *Rasa*, the transportation of hormones to target organs through *rasa* is essential then the blood accumulated in hair thin branches of *Artavavimochini Dhamani* is discharged during menstruation. According to classics in boys *sukra* (seminal ejaculate) appears after specific age, similarly in girls *rajo darshana* seen in specific age. Due to accumulation of *Raja*, there is gradual development of breasts, uterus and vagina along with vulva. The *yoni* (vulva) of young girls is *hina* (under developed) thus menstruation does not occur, with the natural maturity of *dhatu*s the menstruation starts.

Table 2: The Principles of Rajaswala Paricharya and their implementation in today's lifestyle

Rajaswala Charya	Application
Take the food of <i>Kshaireya</i> , <i>yavaka</i> and Milk, holding it either in a leaf, earthen plate or the hands. Avoid <i>Tikshna</i> , <i>ushna</i> , <i>amla</i> , <i>lavana ahara</i>	Take the food in less quantity, light diet. Avoid Spicy, fatty diet, bakery diet in order to prevent the vitiation of <i>vata dosha</i> and purification of digestive system.
Avoid <i>divaswapna</i> , <i>anjana</i> , <i>ashrupata</i> , <i>snana</i> , <i>lepana</i> , <i>abyanga</i> , <i>nakhchedana</i> , <i>hasana</i> , <i>kathana</i> , <i>ati-shabdastavana</i> ¹¹	Avoid hard labor and exercise and take rest and restore energy.
Follow the <i>brahmacharya</i>	Keep your mind calm and relaxed, stop tension and anxiety as much as possible
<i>Darbhasamstarashayini</i>	If present, sleep on the <i>darbha</i> mat to get relief from backache and body ache ¹⁰

The consequence of changes in lifestyle

The reason documented for this transition can be the changes in life style during modern times and adaptations to fast food and related products. Girls should be helped to prepare themselves to face the physical changes that control over them due to this. An adolescent may grow some inches in several months followed by a period of very slow growth, then have another growth spurt. Changes with puberty (sexual maturation) may happen gradually or several signs may become visible at the same time. The main psychological problems affecting the girls during this stage are anxiety, stress, pain, sorrow and uncontrolled irritation. Along with these they are likely to face physical reactions like paleness, backpain, vomiting sensation and connected disorders.

Parenting tips about sexuality

- It is necessary for parents to train girls to resolve the menstrual crisis. Adolescents most often need privacy to understand the changes that are taking place in their bodies. They should be made aware that it is a natural biological phenomenon. They should ideally be permitted to have their own bedroom.

- It is not fair to tease an adolescent child about physical change. This can lead to self-consciousness and shame
- Parents need to remember that being interested in body changes and sexual topics is natural and normal.
- Before feeling comfortable with their own sexual identity, adolescents may experiment with a broad variety of sexual orientations or behaviors. "Parents must be careful not to call "wrong," "sick," or "immoral" new behaviors.
- During the adolescent years, the Oedipal complex (a child's attraction to the parent of the opposite sex) is common. Without crossing parent-child boundaries, parents can deal with this by recognizing the physical changes and attractiveness of the child. Parents can also take pride in the growth of young people to maturity

The food can be provided to a girl in adolescent stage

The health protections can be maintained during the stage of growth. Care should be imparted on nutritious food, intake of sufficient water and suggested exercise along with physical rest. Food should contain needed measures of Fe, Ca, Folic acid and Vitamin C. The government starts many attempts in this regard

by suppling, *Ragi, Sharkara*, Fe tablets, many nutrition seed and grocery through Anganvadi (Kinder garden school) for adolescent girls. Before the beginning of menstrual period, eggs, sesame oil and other such traditional diet will help them. Sesame and *Sharkara* are to be added along with the diet. Ayurveda suggest the food of *Kshaireya, yavaka* and Milk, holding it either in a leaf, earthen plate or the hands. Avoid *tikshna, ushna, amla, lavana ahara*. Avoid *divaswapna, anjana, ashрупata, snana, lepana, abyanga, Nakhachedana, hasana, kathana, Ati shabdasravana* Those girls should be practiced to have the digestive diet. Late food, less food, day sleep, late sleep and such habits decrease proper digestion and that should be avoid. Yoga, proper and suggested exercise should be practiced for better health. Sound sleep up to 8 hours is to be added in the routine. If we care the above-mentioned details, we can overcome the issues of health in adolescent girls and build a bright, healthy and strong future generation

CONCLUSION

There is an unparalleled potential for adolescent wellbeing today. Globally, there is a growing sense of urgency that to respond more effectively to the needs of youth, something different must be done. Bad health or risky habits in puberty may have long-term implications for adult health. Furthermore, childbearing in adolescence can have negative implications for future generations by raising the risk of low birth weight and poor growth, as well as perpetuating the intergenerational poverty cycle. As a result, the Global Strategy to Improve Women's, Children's, and Adolescents' Health was created. The rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial development and growth that occurs. Moreover, adolescents experience a large proportion of the disease and injury of the global population, the overall justification for investing in adolescent health is that adolescents, like all persons, have fundamental rights to live, growth, the highest achievable standards of health and access to health services. So Acharyas have advised to obey the right *Rajaswala Paricharya*, in order to prevent vitiation of *vata* and *Kapha*, and to restore energy. Thus, women should follow the *Rajaswala Paricharya* for preserving the equilibrium of doshas, *agni* and *bala*. These are endorsed by the Global Instruments of Human Rights, which between the ages of 10 and 19 affects a person for the rest of his or her life.

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