



Review Article

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A REVIEW ON FACTORS AFFECTING MEDHA (INTELLIGENCE) IN CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Intelligence encompasses the capacity for critical thinking, learning from experiences, problem-solving, and adapting to new situations. The Intelligence Quotient (IQ) serves as a metric to gauge human intelligence derived from standardised tests or subtests designed for this purpose. In Ayurveda, this cognitive ability aligns with the concept of Medha (intelligence), involving a comprehensive understanding of existing knowledge, combining elements such as buddhi (intellective faculty), smriti (recollecting memory), and dhriti (grasping power). In contemporary scientific terms, these components collectively represent IQ. It is crucial to recognise that achieving a high IQ is influenced by various factors, including prenatal conditions (maternal nutrition and health), events during birth, postnatal circumstances, environment, and daily routines. Optimal IQ in children requires consistent attention to the mother's nutrition from the perinatal period up to early childhood, considering the prenatal, natal, and postnatal environments. Proper monitoring, coupled with adequate food and healthcare for the mother, can contribute to achieving optimal IQ in the child. Nutrition plays a vital role in cognitive development during early childhood, influencing brain growth and intellect. Unfortunately, parents often overlook this critical factor. Certain elements, such as nimitta (cause and effect knowledge), rupa grahanat (form recognition), sadrishyat (similarity understanding), saviparyaat (contrast comprehension), sattvaanubhandha (mind concentration), abhyasat (practice), gyanayogaat (metaphysical knowledge attainment), and punah srutaat (sequential partial communication), contribute to good memory. The impairment of indriya (sensory organs) can lead to a deficiency in knowledge. Therefore, a holistic approach that considers prenatal, natal, and postnatal factors, coupled with proper nutrition and healthcare, is crucial for fostering optimal intelligence and cognitive development in children.

Keywords: Medha, Intelligence, Buddhi, Smriti, Dhriti

INTRODUCTION

Human intelligence is a mental quality that consists of the ability to learn from experience, adapt to new situations, understand and handle abstract concepts and use knowledge to manipulate one's environment.¹ Intelligence Quotient (IQ) is a way to measure human intelligence; it is a total score derived from a set of standardised tests or subtests designed to assess human intelligence.² It is considered an important part of any child's intellectual development. Intelligence in Ayurveda can be understood as Medha, a combination of buddhi, smriti and dhriti. In contemporary science, these three together are referred to as IQ. The term Medha is used in two ways: grahan sakti (grasping power) and dhaaran sakti (retention power).³

Dalhan defines it as the intellectual ability to retain a large amount of knowledge for a long time.⁴ Buddhi is the discriminative psychological faculty for reasoning and logic. It has been used in many contexts as the advanced stage or the process leading to true knowledge. It is considered a decisive power to discriminate between good and bad and act accordingly. Smriti is the recollection of drishta (seen), shruta (heard) and anubhootha (experienced), which is used in the sense of recall.⁵

Intelligence depends on factors like prenatal environment (maternal nutrition and mother's health status), natal events (term of delivery, birth weight, etc.), postnatal events, environment and daily routine. To achieve an optimum IQ in a child, one has to

take care of the proper nutrition of the mother from her perinatal period to post-natal events and during early childhood. If the prenatal, natal and postnatal environment is adequately monitored and the mother is given proper nutrition and health care, then optimum IQ can be achieved in the child. Maternal intake of very long-chain-3 PUFAs (polyunsaturated fatty acids) during pregnancy and lactation is favourable for the later mental development of the child.⁶ Nutrition plays a vital role in cognitive development during the early years of childhood.⁷ For optimum brain function and a child's cognitive development, nutrients like essential fatty acids, Zinc, Iron, Iodine, Vitamin B₁₂ and Vitamin D play a vital role.⁸ Nutritional deficiency of these essential micronutrients during pregnancy and childhood may cause detrimental health effects in children.

Breastfeeding is another crucial aspect that promotes brain development, particularly the growth of white matter.⁹ Factors responsible for good memory are nimitta (knowledge of cause and effect), rupa grahanat (knowledge of form), sadrishyat (knowledge of similarity), saviparyaat (knowledge of contrast), sattvaanubhandha (concentration of the mind), abhyasat (practice), gyanayogaat (attainment of metaphysical knowledge), punah srutaat (subsequent partial communication).¹⁰ Impaired indriya (sensory organs) are responsible for the lack of knowledge. For example, loss/partial impairment of hearing and loss/partial impairment of vision will interfere with the process of cognition and intellect.¹¹

DISCUSSION

Role of Ahar (food) and Agni (digestive power)

Agni (digestive power) works on ingested ahara (food) and converts it into ahara rasa (enzymes), which is the nutrient of the whole body. Ayu (longevity), upachaya (anabolic activities), varna (complexion), bala (strength), swasthya (health), utsaha (enthusiasm), Tejas (spirit), prabha (splendour), ojas (vitality), all these factors depend on Agni.¹² Pachaka Pitta is said to be the seat of Agni. It controls the rest of the Pitta to perform their action. Sadhaka Pitta, which promotes Buddhi and Medha, also gets nourishment.¹³

Madhura rasa ahara (sweet taste food) is important to maintain nourishment of the brain and body (shadendriya prasadanam)¹⁴ and katu rasa ahara (pungent taste food) has the quality to remove the avarana (obstacle) of buddhi. Amla rasa ahara (acidic taste food) has the property of hridya (cardioprotective)¹⁵ and has no direct relation with Medha. But if all types of food are taken in the proper quantity and with appropriate digestive power, it can help to improve the intellect. Other research also shows that children who are breastfed and eat healthy foods (irrespective of any specific rasa) during childhood experience better physical development and IQ than children who eat poor diets.¹⁶ Poor diet associated with high fat, sugar and processed food content like biscuits, chocolate, sweets, soda, and crisps in early childhood may be associated with small reductions in IQ in later childhood, while a healthy diet associated with high intakes of nutrient-rich foods may be associated with small increases in IQ.¹⁷

Role of Nidra (sleep)

Sound and adequate sleep help in the proper function of cognition. Sukha (happiness), dukkha (misery), pushti (corpulence), karshya (leanness), bala (strength), abala (weakness), vrishata (potency), klibata (impotence), gyana (intellect), agyan (non-intellect) are dependent upon the sleep.¹⁸ In the early stages of life, sufficient sleep is vital for developing cognitive functions. Augmented night sleep rates in children are linked to improved cognitive performance. Moreover, sleep contributes to children's learning, assisting not just in retaining information but also in efficiently organising memories through the process of memory consolidation during sleep.¹⁹ Proper and adequate sleep has cognitive and developmental benefits. It significantly contributes to brain maturation, aiding crucial cognitive functions like memory consolidation and learning. Studies on cognition have shown its importance in the development of memory, language, and executive functions.²⁰ It has been shown that disturbed sleep is associated with significant reductions in exertion in the corticothalamic network, which mediates alertness, attention and higher-order cognitive processes. Performing higher-order cognitive tasks, such as decision-making, may rely on prefrontal brain areas, which suggests either the reclamation of a focused attentional strategy, cortical compensation for sleep deprivation, or both.²¹

Role of Prakriti (body constitution)

Prakriti is formed when shukra (sperm) and shonita (ovum) fuse. The predominance of dosha in shukra and shonita decides the prakriti of an individual.²² Prakriti is one's constitution and attitude. It is an expression of the functions of the human body in the form of physiology, external characters, and individual behaviour. Vata Prakriti individuals are adhriti (less grasping power) and avyavasthit mati (mind unsteady), chaldadriti (less grasping power), chalasmriti (less memory),²³ Pitta prakriti individuals are medhavi (intelligent), nipurnamati (clever),²⁴

Kapha prakriti individuals are budhiman (intelligent), smritiman (mindful)²⁵ and dhritiman (fortitude).²⁶

Association of Dosha (biological humour) with Medha (intelligence)

Vata is responsible for overseeing all bodily activities. The term Vata is derived from 'Va gati Gandhanayoh', indicating its influence on motor and sensory functions.²⁷ In the realm of the five Vata types, Prana, Udana, and Vyana Vata contribute to the functioning of Medha. Prana Vata explicitly supports the operations of the intellect, sensory organs, heart, and mind.²⁸ Udana Vata oversees the processes of speech, effort, enthusiasm, and the initiation of actions like grasping.²⁹ Additionally, Udana Vata encompasses functions such as dheer, dhriti, smriti, and manobodhana (self-awareness), while Vyana Vata serves as the regulator for a wide range of actions occurring throughout the body.³⁰ The role of unvitiated Vata is 'Niyantapraneta cha manasaha' (control mind), 'sarvendriyan mudojakaha' (employs all sense organs in their activity) 'sarvendriyaarthanamabhivoda' (carries all sense object). It is the root of auditory and tactile sense organs.³¹ Medha, Dhee, and Pitta are interconnected; Medha is the function of Sadhaka Pitta. The effective operation of Sadhaka Pitta plays a crucial role in achieving personal aspirations, especially those linked to perception and memory. Therefore, Sadhaka Pitta stands out as the primary dosha responsible for processing and retaining knowledge and influencing the fulfilment of cognitive goals.³² Kapha is accountable for sturdiness, knowledge, intelligence, ignorance, etc. It is responsible for the retention of the previously experienced object. Further, good Medha (intellect) is responsible for analysing and remembering any related subject.³³ Among the five types of Kapha, Tarpak Kapha has a significant role. It nourishes the sensory organs and helps in perception.³⁴ Atma (soul) is the substratum of knowledge.³⁵ The mind is the organ that is the instrument in obtaining the knowledge of pleasure, grief, etc. When Rajas and Tamas dosha cover atma, the recollection of the knowledge of reality is impaired; it is known as smritibhramas (derangement of memory).³⁶ Mana (mind) and indriya (sense organs) are also involved in the process of jnanotpatti (origin of life). Mana is considered a sensory and motor entity. The impaired function of mana leads to false or no knowledge.³⁷ Impaired indriya is also responsible for the lack of knowledge, which can be explained by impaired sensory organs interfering with cognition.³⁸ Mana controls all sense organs; manovibhrama (mental agitation) is responsible for such lack of sensory knowledge. There is chronological deterioration of cognitive function with age. Medha deteriorates after the fourth decade of life, and further, smriti and buddhi deteriorate in successive years.³⁹

Hridaya serves as the nexus of knowledge, cognitive and conative organs, vishaya (objects of special senses), the soul with its attributes, and the mind with its concepts.⁴⁰ In the progression of Unmaad (mental imbalance), Hridaya is acknowledged as the locus of buddhi, and it is noted that doshas disperse through the Manovaha srotas (channels of the mind),⁴¹ deficits in intellectual functioning can be termed as buddhimandyata (less intellectual capacity) or manasamandata (less state of mind). Numerous causative factors such as asatmyendriyarthasamyoga (improper use of sensory organs), beej dosha (congenital factors),⁴² dauhridakalina apacharata (non-fulfilment of desires of pregnant women), mithyahaaravihara (intake of incompatible and improper diet), emotional and behavioural factors of the mother during pregnancy, and gynaecological disorders are said to cause this condition.⁴³

Method of enhancing Medha (intellect)

Among all rasayana (rejuvenation), milk is considered the best rasayana, which increases bala (strength), enhances sensory powers, intellect, aayu (longevity) and (health). Adequate consumption of mother milk by child in early childhood improves the Medha.⁴⁴ Breastfeeding has a tremendous impact on children's brain development and intellect. Prolonged breastfeeding in children is associated with improvement in cognitive development.

Swarna Prashan

Swarna Prashana is a unique Ayurvedic Paediatric practice, which has a beneficial effect on Medha, apart from improving Agni and bala in children. Oral administration of processed Swarna in children is an ancient and unique practice that explains the use of Swarna (Gold) in children. It is medhavardhana (nootropic), agnivaridhana (enhance digestion), balavardhana (increase strength), ayushyam (ensure long life), mangalam (fortunate), punyam (moral), varnya (improves lustre), vrishya (productiveness), grahapaham (protect from infection). The specific benefits of Swarna Prashana according to the duration of administration have been mentioned. If administered for one month, the baby will become a param medhavi (highly intelligent) and will not be affected by any disease. If it is administered for six months, the baby will become srutadhara (will be able to remember the things which are just heard).⁴⁵

Acharya Vagbhata references Swarna Prashana in Jatakarma Samskara. According to this ritual, a baby is encouraged to consume a blend of madhu (honey) and ghrita (clarified butter) infused with Ananta (Swarna), accompanied by the recitation of mantras three times a day. This practice is believed to contribute to the development of Medha (intellect), ayu (long life), and bala (strength).⁴⁶ It should be administered as lehana in children. Acharya Sushruta suggests the administration of Swarna along with other herbal drugs like Brahmi (*Bacopa monnieri*), Shankhpushpi (*Convolvulus pluricaulis*), Kushtha (*Saussurea lappa*), Vacha (*Acorus calamus*), etc., with honey and ghee for one year.⁴⁷ The lehan karma also improves the growth and Medha in children. Administration of medicated ghrita like Bharmhi ghrita, Kalyanak ghrita, Astang ghrita, and Saraswat ghrita, which are mentioned in Lehan Adhyay of Kashyap Samhita are also helpful for increasing intellectual in children.⁴⁸

Medhya Rasayan

The concept of improving cognitive functions like intelligence and memory is relatively new to the current modern system of medicine. The first drug discovered to enhance cognitive functions, known as Nootropics, was a natural herbal drug with cognitive enhancing activity dating back thousands of centuries. 'Medhya Rasayana' is a group of four time-tested classical preparations for promoting mental health and well-being. Medhya Rasayanas like Mandukparni (*Centella asiatica*), Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia*), Yashtimadhu (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) and Sankhpushpi (*Convolvulus prostrates*) have a beneficial effect on the improvement of Medha.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

While complete alteration of cognition and intellect remains elusive, Ayurvedic texts offer insights into formulations that may enhance child Intelligence to a certain extent. According to Ayurveda, memory is influenced by Atma, Satva, and matrijadi shadbhavas, shaping the foetus's dhi, dhriti, and smriti. Memory impairment can result from an individual being dominated by

Rajas and Tamas. Many parents aspire to have children with high intelligence turn to supplements available on the market. However, Medha, or intellect, undergoes age-specific changes influenced by diverse factors such as environment and diet. Maintaining an appropriate diet aligned with one's location, time, and occupation proves beneficial in stabilising physical and physiological activities and enhancing intellect.

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