



Review Article

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ROLE OF AYURVEDA IN PRECONCEPTION CARE: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been an increased focus on preconception care to promote the health of prospective parents and their progenies. The fast-changing and modernized lifestyle have brought in a host of diseases which causes infertility, recurrent abortions, congenital anomalies etc. Ayurveda gives great importance to the preparation of both partners before conception, both physically and mentally. It also ensures in improvement and promotion of maternal and fetal outcomes, thereby reducing maternal and fetal morbidity and mortality rates. The study's rationale is to throw light on preconception care through Ayurveda and hence create awareness about the Ayurvedic way of life in preventing various lifestyle disorders and promoting reproductive health in both partners.

Keywords: Preconception care, Ayurveda, health, lifestyle disorders.

INTRODUCTION

Preconception care forms the foundation of a healthy pregnancy with a desirable outcome. The objective is to ensure that a woman enters pregnancy with an optimal state of health that would be safe for herself and the fetus.¹

Preconception care can be understood as a set of interventions that aim to identify and modify biomedical, behavioural and social risks to the woman's health or pregnancy outcome through prevention and management. It emphasizes all the health issues that require action before conception for maximal impact.

As per Ayurvedic principles, proper preparation of the parents is an essential prerequisite for a healthy progeny. Ayurveda has detailed all the developments of the embryo in the womb and the physical changes the mother undergoes at each stage of pregnancy.

Ayurvedic treatment principle in preconception care encourages the body's innate ability to cleanse, renew and heal itself. Panchakarma procedures not only ensure a total cleansing of the body and the reproductive organs but also rejuvenates and improve both partners' vitality, resulting in a smooth pregnancy with a quality outcome.

DESCRIPTION

Preconception care refers to identifying social, behavioural, environmental, and biomedical risks to a woman's fertility and pregnancy outcome and then reducing these risks through education, counselling and appropriate intervention before conception.

Shodasha Samskaras have been mentioned in the Vedic literature. Of these 16 samskaras, Vivaha and Garbhadhana are the two samskaras related to preconception care.²

In Ayurveda, fertility is understood as spiritual and emotional as physical. Garbhadhana vidhi (method of impregnation) is the regimen followed during the pre-pregnancy period to achieve conception. Specific regimens and principles have been described in Ayurveda for preconception care like rajaswalacharya (mode of living during menstruation), selection of partner for marriage, appropriate age of marriage and conception, factors essential for conception, diet and regimen for conception, normal and abnormal position for coitus etc.

Following are various regimes focussing on preconception care mentioned in various Ayurvedic texts:

Rajaswalacharya (mode of living during menstruation)

	Ahara (diet)	Vihara (regime)
Indication	Meal prepared of ghee, Sali rice and milk (Havishya) Meal prepared of barley and milk (Yawaka)	During the first 3 days of menses, she should remain isolated. On the 4th day of menses, wear white or new clothes and ornaments and then, with the enchanting of religious hymns, should see her husband first clad in white garments.
Contraindication	tikshna, katu, lavana substances.	Nasya, Swedana and Vamana ²⁻⁴

Appropriate marital age

As mentioned by Acharya Sushruta, the marriageable age for men and women was 25 and 12 years, and Acharya Vagbhata was 21 and 12 years, respectively. Vagbhata added the qualities of an appropriate girl for marriage, i.e., she should not belong to the same gotra (atulyagotra), not suffer from any contagious diseases, should be beautiful, delicate, modest, should have complete body parts, etc.⁵

Factors responsible for conception

Various factors play a role in achieving proper conception. Ayurveda mentions the significance of four elements required for conception, which are as follows:

1. Ritu- i.e. ovulatory period, when the chances of conception are the highest.
2. Kshetra- i.e. the reproductive tract where fertilization and implantation occur
3. Ambu- i.e. nourishment including all the hormones
4. Beeja-i.e healthy sperm and ovum⁶

Proper age for Garbhadhan or conception

In achieving a healthy progeny, age plays an important role because biologically, a person (wife or husband) can produce a healthy child only after attaining sexual maturity. Charaka opines that males become sexually mature at the age of 16years, while Sushruta said that males at the age of 25years and females at the age of 16years are completely mature⁷; hence, they should attempt to achieve conception. Since both partners are full of courage and vigour at this age, the born child also possesses these qualities.

Following a specific regime before conception

1. Firstly, both partners should undergo shodhan therapy, starting with Purva karma snehan- swedan, then vaman, virechan, asthapan and anuvasan basti.⁸
2. After shodhan therapy, both partners should observe celibacy (brahmacharya) for one month, and after one month should go for coitus.⁸
3. The male should consume Sali rice with ghrita and milk. Taila and masha should be consumed by the female.⁹

Such a dietetic regimen has various scientific reasons

Male aspect

- Ghrita- It has vata-pitta shamak qualities and is shita virya. It is beneficial for rasa, shukra and oja¹⁰. It also has the quality of rasayana¹¹. All these help in the proper functioning of shukra and hence helps to attain conception.
- Sali- It alleviates pitta dosha. It is madhura rasa, snigdha, balya, vrishya, bringhana etc. which promote the qualities of shukra¹².

Female aspect

- Masha- It is vatahara, snigdha, ushna virya, madhura rasa. It has the qualities of balya and punstwa.¹³ Moreover, it is chemically constituted of proteins, carbohydrates, vitamin B, magnesium, calcium, iron and folic acid, which are essential for conception and pregnancy. Calcium and magnesium play a good role in regulating estrogen levels. The presence of folic acid in it helps in preventing neural tube defects. All these qualities help to promote the qualities of artava.
- Taila: It is effective in Vataja disorders and does not increase Kapha. It Promotes strength (balya) and helps in yoni vishodhana(cleanses the yoni marga).¹⁴Tila taila has a property of Garbhashaya vishodhanam.¹⁵ Therefore, these qualities of the above aid in the proper functioning of the female reproductive organs leading to better chances of conception.

Position of the couple during intercourse

The woman should lie in a supine position so that all the doshas remain in their normal locations, which also aids in the proper perception of the beeja.¹⁶

The normalcy of psychology or happiness of mind of the couple is one of the essential factors for conception.¹⁷

Stress, anger, despair, etc., can disturb the phenomenon and diminish sexual vigour.¹⁸

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda always stresses the promotion and preservation of health and the prevention of diseases. Preconception care is a cognitive measure mentioned in most Ayurvedic texts. Therefore, achieving both partners' conception, contentment, or balanced psychology is essential. It has been advised only healthy, physically and mentally fit couples should attempt conception. The dietary regimen has been mentioned in the Ayurvedic treatises for the couple before conception to nourish and enhance the functional activities of reproductive organs.

Therefore, it is seen that Ayurveda offers radical and informative knowledge about preconception care, which should be adopted by all couples planning for pregnancy and should be implemented as an integral part of community healthcare.

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