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An Ayurvedic & Modern concept of Human Breast Milk & Breast Feeding –A Review

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Abstract:

Human breast milk is complete food for newborn & infant up to two years. Breast milk is the best nutrition for infants & is rich source of protein, carbohydrate, fats, antibodies & numerous components, which are helpful for growth & neurological development of baby & also protects from many diseases.

Breast feeding should begin soon after birth. It is important that infants open their mouth wide enough to grasp nipple & the areola. Besides the overwhelming bonding it creates, breast milk is perfect food for baby. This is an attempt to explain the Ayurvedic & Modern concept regarding stanyotpatti (formation of breast milk), stanya pravritti (milk ejection), stanapan vidhi (breast feeding).

Key Words: Stanyotpatti, stanya pravritti, stanapan vidhi

Introduction:

The first consideration that comes to mind when we talk of infant feeding obviously it takes us to most natural, God given gift to mother that is 'Breast Milk'. As soon as the child is born, nature prepares both, mother & baby to make the best of this natural gift. Human milk is the natural & superior food for the infants containing the optimal composition to meet their nutritional needs in early life.

WHO says with full confidence that breast feeding reduces child mortality & has health benefits that extend into adulthood. On a population basis, exclusive breast feeding for six months is the recommended feeding mode for the vast majority of infants, followed by continued breast feeding with appropriate complementary foods for up to two years or beyond¹.

The concept of Ayurveda for human breast milk & breast feeding and their advantage describe in all samhita. Acharya Charaka describes properties of breast milk, ideal breast & related topics. Acharya Sushruta & Acharya Vagbhata also describe Stana,

stanya sampat, properties of breast milk. Formation of breast milk is described in Kashyap samhita.

Characters of Pure Breast Milk:

Aacharya Charaka: Breast milk is of natural colour, taste, smell, consistency & get mix uniformly when mixed with water. It stabilizes strength & health².

Aacharya Sushruta: Breast milk when mix with water it should get mix well with it without sinking or floating as well as should not have stickiness & should not form foam. It is sheeta, clear, thin & shweta i.e. white as Shankha (Conch shell). It helps in growth, health & gives energy³.

Properties of Breast Milk:

- According to Aacharya Charaka, Breast milk is vitaliser, bulk promoting, suitable, used as snuff in internal hemorrhage & saturating in eye pain⁴.
- It is sweet in taste, astringent, beneficial as nasal & eye drops, vitalizing, light & as appetizer⁵ stated by Aacharya Sushruta.
- According to Aacharya Kashyapa, Breast milk is used in development of strength, body parts, growth as well as disease-free & trouble-free state of child⁶.

Stanyotpatti (Formation of Breast Milk): According to Aacharya Charaka, in the pregnant woman nutrition takes place three courses, first for nourishment of her baby, second for the lactation & third for the growth of foetus⁷.

While according to Aacharya Sushruta, the sweet part of essence of well digested food getting into breast from all over the body is called milk⁸.

Stanya pravritti (Milk Ejection): Shukra (semen in men) is ejaculated by seeing, remembering & touching the desired female, similarly, breast milk is induce due to touching, seeing, remembering the child. This is the cause of milk ejection⁹. The more the baby sucks at the breast the greater is the stimulus for milk production.

Physiology of Lactation: Milk is produced by interaction between maternal hormonal reflexes & reflexes in baby. Prolactin & oxytocin both hormones play important role in lactation. Nerve ending in nipple & areola of mother are stimulated when baby sucks the breast, which gives stimulus to hypothalamus & to anterior pituitary. Anterior pituitary secretes prolactin which stimulates epithelial cells to produce milk. When baby sucks the nipple oxytocin is released by posterior pituitary which stimulates myoepithelial cells surrounding alveoli draining milk through lactiferous ducts¹⁰.

Stanapana Vidhi (method of Breast Feeding): According to Aacharya Charaka, mother should take bath before feeding the baby, followed by applying the paste of Bramhi, Shatavari, Vatyapushpi, then taking the baby facing towards east with giving milk from right breast first¹¹.

According to Acharya Sushruta, on auspicious day child should be given head bath, new cloths. With facing north, mother should face toward east & should give feeding from right breast first¹².

Breast feeding technique according to Modern:

Mother can take any suitable position with back well supported. Baby should be wrapped properly in clothes with whole body well supported with baby's abdomen touching mother's abdomen.

After positioning, baby's cheek touches the breast which helps to open mouth (rooting reflex). Be sure that the nipple & most of the areola is within baby's mouth. It is important that the baby is brought near to the mother rather than leaning on the baby¹³.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, significant & long term health benefits are associated with breast feeding for the individual mother, baby & society. Breast feeding the ideal way to feed babies; Breast milk serves both as a source of nutrition & immunological support for the developing infant. Breast feeding helps in improving mother's health; breast related diseases can be prevented by feeding the baby. Importance, characters & formation of Breast milk, ejection of Breast milk, and method of Lactation are explained above. Long term benefit of breast feeding for child in neurological growth & development has been explained. Description of these according to Ayurvedic Samhitas is described.

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