

Ayurvedic Concept of Food in Pregnancy

M. Dwivedi

Abstract: Food is given great importance in Ayurveda. Dietetics is a pre-requisite to leading a healthy life. The author outlines the significance of this point in the article.

In India inspite of best efforts made by Government, the magnitude of perinatal problem is not yet solved upto the mark, The death rate is still higher than developed countries.

It is true that the action of any drug including allopathic medicine are influenced by geographical, climatic, seasonal, racial familial, behavioral and constitutional factors. So the drug action studied abroad may not show identical effects in India. This may be the reason that drug shows its efficacy in one while in other it may not.

When we see the traditional wisdom of India we find that in normal course of pregnancy they had emphasized the importance of beneficial diet (Pathya) but they had not mentioned any particular medicine as modern practitioner does.

Now for Ayurvedic obstetricians the greatest challenge is the effort to cope with the disparity between traditional Eastern and modern Western ideas.

No doubt, Ayurveda is also a medical science yet it does make, very slender demarcation between food and medicine.

Charaka is of the opinion that there is no substance on the earth which cannot be used as a medicine. It has gone to the, extent that they declared that all the diseases can be cured through change in food habits while in absence of beneficial diet (Pathya) the use of medicine become infructuous. [2]

The modern classification of food is based on laboratory findings. Even for an educated person it is tedious task to memorise the data about food value of different food articles. According to Ayurveda, there is three-fold purpose of food, namely Tripti (satisfaction), removal of hunger and nutrition. It is proved by laboratory methods that hunger can be subsided through sham feeding and nutrition can also be achieved by non-oral route of feeding but satisfaction can

only be achieved by oral feeding. That is why they say the satisfaction is the foremost action of food and it is the first criterion for selection of food. In India where percentage of illiteracy is so high no body can think of educating the mass about food data.

In Ayurveda classification of food is made as its taste or as its effect on stay in body. Rasa, Guna, Veerya, Vipaka and Prabhava all these are felt by food taker through the digestive process of food at different times.

This is fact that Rasna or taste organ is sentinial of digestive system and desire for a change in food is primarily based for the change in taste, which indicates the body requirement. The craving unconsciously guided by the needs for quality or quantity of a particular substance. Probably this is the reason that during pregnancy suppression of desire a woman is not advisable and during dauhrida kala, desire of women in a family way should be taken care off.

For example thirst is a desire which reflects the need of water to body or during anorexia distaste for heavy meals like sugar, fats and protein is a common feeling. Such person like to have sour, saltish and pungent food. Such food acts as appetizer. Same way after physical or mental exercise, sweet dishes are satisfying food. It is beacause carbohydrate is immediately needed to replenish the best energy.

Thus, one should be clear in mind that Ayurveda is more practical and experience based medical science "Swasthasya Swasthya Rakshnam" is its primary goal, Even today notion "Prevention is better than cure" is given. Keeping this view in mind special food and few herbs, is prescribed to an expectant mother. It was the opinion of Acharyas that if a pregnant woman follows the regimen prescribed, she will seldom need any medication.

Minor change in physiology can be overcome by taking beneficial diet, If we peep into the scripts of Ayurveda, we find that there is rich store of food having wide variety of very specific effects. Even today by prescribing food alone with few herbs we are able to have great impact on the health of a pregnant lady and often we are able to reverse serious chronic disease.

To an expecting mother, milk, honey and ghee is appreciated in all the three trimester Milk is an ideal source of calcium since it contains both lactose, butter fat and moderate amount of protein and has got the anabolic property, so it gives strength to a woman, beside this It acts a laxative and alone is sufficient to cope with the constipative tendency of mother to be. Honey with milk is also advised to pregnant women. Though Madhur in taste is converted into Katu, Vipak, so it stimulate Pitta and has opposite effect of most sweet food.

During pregnancy there is tendency to put on undue weight. At this time, dieting is not suitable advice. Use of honey is best, as it helps one to lose weight. Harita appreciates the use of honey with Yogurt in 6th month. Rudolph Ballentine writes "The Ayurvedic scriptures say that Yogurt is an excellent food if it is taken with honey. On this basis it is also said that the diabetic can take honey without harm, whereas he should avoid sugar assiduously. Conventional modern medicine by contrast, has tended to forbid honey to the diabetic on the rationale that it is carbohydrate. Interestingly enough however, honey contains primarily fructose, which as we have seen, is different from most sugars in that it does not require insulin for its metabolism.[4]

Use of ghee (clarified butter) is also advised to pregnant lady. It promotes digestion which is in accordance with research which has shown that full fat Soya flour is digested with less gas than the defatted preparations. Use of Mamsa Rasa (meat soup) is also advised during pregnancy. It is sufficient to maintain the serum protein level in body from 6th month onwards. Use of Gokshuru (*Tribulus terrestris*) is also beneficial. There is tendency of oedema on feet or some generalized in last trimester of pregnancy. Probably it checks it and not allows it to be pathological one

All above said is the one side of coin. But another side of coin is very unpleasant. With the enough knowledge we are unable to prescribe the same to a needy. Nowadays, in India due to over population and poverty advising special diet becomes an impossible luxury.

References

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