



**PRECONCEPTIONAL CARE THROUGH AYURVEDA FOR  
HEALTHY PROGENY**

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**ABSTRACT**

In the present era of competitive world there is endless struggle to achieve the best. With the increasing world population and adoption of small family norms it becomes essential to have a progeny endowed with best health, intelligence and all good qualities. But it is disheartening to know that cases of recurrent abortions, infertility, congenital and chromosomal abnormality, intra uterine growth retardation, mentally challenged babies are on an increase; probably because of delayed marriages, increased work stress, faulty lifestyle and increasing charm for western culture. In a race to achieve set goals, couples knowingly or unknowingly are compromising with their health; which is actually of prime importance. The main aim of ayurveda is to restore the health of healthy body and for this great emphasis has been laid upon *dinacharya*, *ritu charya*, *pathya-apathyta* in ayurvedic classics. Likewise in *prasuti tantra*(obstetrics) with the aim of achieving *shreshtha praja* (qualitative progeny) *paricharya* (diet and lifestyle) in antenatal phase is described. Preconceptional care is described in detail in terms of *garbhadhan vidhi*, *garbha sambhava samagri* and do's and don'ts for the couple while planning to have a baby so that one can achieve a healthy offspring and avoid certain anomalies. The aim of this article is to review the ayurvedic literature of preconception care, its relevance in present era and to make mass aware of its importance.

**Keywords:** *Garbhadhan vidhi*, preconceptional care, ayurveda

**INTRODUCTION:** A planned work action is always better than an unplanned one for its outcome. Likewise a planned pregnancy blesses the couple with a much healthier progeny. When a couple is seen and counseled about pregnancy, its course and outcome well before the time of actual conception is called preconception counseling. Its objective is to ensure that a woman enters pregnancy with an optimal state of health which would be safe both for herself and the fetus. Any risk factor that could potentially affect the perinatal outcome is identified and at the same time care is provided to eliminate or reduce the risk factor in an attempt to improve the

pregnancy outcome. According to joint WHO and March of Dimes meeting report birth defects account for 7% of all neonatal mortality and 3.3 million under 5 deaths. The prevalence of birth defects in India is 6-7% which translates to around 1.7 million birth defects annually. The common birth defects include neural tube defects, congenital heart disease and congenital deafness<sup>1</sup>. India newborn action plan formulated in Sep 2014, has integrated the approach for the prevention and care of new born with birth defects into primary health care, with an emphasis on maternal and child health<sup>2</sup>.

Ayurveda is a rich science and has very well described preconceptional care in terms of *garbhadhan vidhi* (including selection criteria of partner for marriage, perfect age for conception, healthy state of body and mind, *garbhadhan kaala*(fertile period) for *shreshtha praja*(healthy progeny). Importance has been laid upon *shuddha shukra, shonita, yoni* and *garbhashaya*(healthy sperm, ovum and genital tract, uterus) and for this a particular diet and lifestyle has been advised. Acharya Charaka has said that after adopting the prescribed dietetic regime and mode of life when both partners go for coitus in the fertile period then healthy sperm, passing through healthy tract, reaches healthy uterus and unites with healthy ovum; conception definitely occurs<sup>3</sup>. *Garbha* is defined as union of *shukra shonita* and *jeeva(atma)* inside *kuksi*(uterus)<sup>4</sup>

#### AIMS AND OBJECTIVES:

To explore the ayurvedic literature of *garbhadhan vidhi* and its relevance in preconceptional period in present time.

#### MATERIAL AND METHODS:

Ayurveda classics, books of obstetrics, medical research journals and internet were the source of present study.

**LITERARY REVIEW:** Various factors which have been considered of due importance for achieving healthy progeny can be compiled as:

**Marriageable Age:** The appropriate age of marriage as per ayurveda texts is considered as 25 years and 16 years for male and female respectively<sup>5</sup>. Some have considered it as 21 years for male and 12 years for female. Qualities of girl to be selected for marriage have been described in detail. She should be from different *gotra* (non-consanguineous), not suffering from any contagious disease, beautiful,

modest, having complete body parts, all good qualities, delicate, healthy, neither excessive tawny nor golden complexion, neither less nor extra body parts, does not bear a name identical to goddesses, snakes, rivers, mountains, trees, birds, planets or frightening names and who is devoid of sins. The marriage should be performed with auspicious methods<sup>6</sup>.

**Age of attaining full maturity:** Male at the age of 25 years and female at the age of 16 attain full maturity and thus become capable of producing a healthy child<sup>7</sup>. Conception should not be done in either in too young or too old woman; else the conceived fetus is affected inside uterus and if the child is born it would not live long or would have ill health, deformed body parts<sup>8</sup>.

**Essential factors for conception:** Union of 4 factors i.e. *ritu* (fertile period of menstrual cycle), *kshetra* (female reproductive system), *ambu* (nourishing substance), *beeja* (sperm and ovum) has been considered essential for conception equating it with the germination of seed<sup>9</sup>. Vaghbhatta has also quoted healthy psychological state as an essential factor<sup>10</sup>.

**Body detoxification and diet in preconception period:** Acharya Charaka has advised *sanshudhhi* (purification) procedure for the couple. Both should be given *snehan* (oleation), *swedana* (sudation), *vamana* (emesis), *virechana* (purgation) and thus brought to normal state (*pathya*). Thereafter *aasthapana* and *anuvaasana basti* (oil and decoction enema) should be given. After these purifying measures the man should use *madhura aushadha siddha ghrita* and *ksheera*(milk and ghee medicated with *madhura varga* drugs) in diet and woman should consume *taila* (tila oil) and *maasha* (black kidney bean)<sup>11</sup>

Acharya Sushruta has considered this preparatory phase of 1 month and has said that in this phase man should be oleated with ghee and consume *shali* rice with *ghrita* and milk and should maintain complete abstinence. Likewise female should be oleated with *taila* and consume *taila* and *maasha*<sup>12</sup>.

**Fertile period for conception:** Acharyas have given varied opinions about duration of *ritukala* (fertile period). It may be of 12 nights or 16 nights or even 1 month after *aartava darshana* (menstruation) but sometimes may come without menstruation. After following *rajaswala charya* (do's and dont's during menstrual phase for 3 days) female is allowed to take bath on 4<sup>th</sup> day and to go for union on alternate nights from 4<sup>th</sup> day. It has been said that child conceived on successive days of fertile period has long life, *arogya* (good health), fortune, strength, better complexion and *indriya* (sense organs)<sup>13</sup>.

**Physical and psychological state of couple at the time of coitus:** Happiness, healthy body and stable psychological state of couple are most important for healthy conception. Happiness is the most essential factor in *garbhadharana*<sup>14</sup>. Coitus is contraindicated in the state of hunger, thirst, *bhaya* (frightened), grief, anger, longing someone else, and excessive desire for sex and in diseased state<sup>15</sup>.

**Mantra (hymn) recitation before coital act:** *Mantra chikitsa* is unique to ayurveda and great importance has been laid upon enchanting specific mantras on specific occasions. The mantra to be enchanted before coitus is; "O *garbha* you are like sun, you are my longevity, my prestige by all means. *Dhata* and *Vidhata* (God of

creation) should protect you; you should have Brahma in you"<sup>16</sup>.

**Posture for coitus:** The best posture advised for accepting *beeja* (sperm) where all humors are in their normal state, is the one with woman in *uttana* (supine) position and man lying above her. Rest other postures have been considered as abnormal; due to vitiation of one or the other humors (*doshas*), thus impairing conception/impregnation<sup>17, 18</sup>.

**Putreshti yajya:** Acharya Charaka and Kashyapa have described the detailed methods of *putreshti yajya* for achieving offspring of desired qualities<sup>19</sup>.

**DISCUSSION:** The various factors enumerated in ayurvedic classics for healthy progeny are fruitful when followed properly. Age criteria as defined in ayurveda texts for marriages and conception was taken for physical as well as psychological maturity and holds true even on modern scientific parameters which clearly say that the less risky range of maternal age to bear babies is 20-30 years<sup>20</sup>. There is increased risk of having an offspring with neural tube defects for mothers 40 years of age or older and 19 years old or younger<sup>21</sup>. Also incidence of Down's syndrome increases to the extent of 1 in 100 with advancing maternal age (>35 years)<sup>22</sup>.

**Consanguineous Marriage:** Ayurveda strictly denies the marriages in similar *gotras*. Now research studies have proved that women in consanguineous unions (marriages among blood relatives) are more likely to have adverse pregnancy outcome including stillbirths, abortions, miscarriages<sup>23</sup>. It is estimated that 1 billion of the current global population lives in communities with a preference for consanguineous marriage<sup>24</sup>. So awareness

must be brought among people in this respect.

Much importance has been laid upon the good physical and mental health before planning for conception as a healthy state leads to normal and healthy pregnancy too. *Sanshodhana* therapy has been advised to detoxify the body and rejuvenate body cells in order to achieve supreme progeny. Stress, grief and emotional disturbances can affect HPA axis causing hormonal disturbances in male and female. Prolonged exposure to stress can lead to complete impairment of reproductive function. In females stress can lead to anovulation, amenorrhoea and other menstrual irregularities<sup>25</sup>. In males there can be decreased sperm count, motility and morphology<sup>26</sup>.

**Diet:** The diet advised for male in preconception period is milk and *ghrita* medicated with drugs having sweet taste. It can be so because *shukra* is *saumya* and similar articles having sweet and cold properties as milk, *ghrita* increase the potency of the sperm and its count in the semen. *Ghrita* is *pittavatahara* and *rasa shukra oja vardhaka*<sup>27</sup>. Studies conducted for analyzing the chemical composition of *ghrita* prepared by traditional ayurvedic method using curd starter fermentation revealed that this *ghrita* contains higher amount of essential fatty acids (DHA); omega -3 long-chain polyunsaturated fatty acids thus acts as anti oxidant and rejuvenates *dhatus*<sup>28</sup>. Diet advised for female is *taila* and *maasha pradhan*. *Taila* (*tila taila*) alleviates *vata dosha*, strengthens the body, is having the property of heat and purifies the genital tract<sup>29</sup>. *Maasha* (*Teramnus labialis*) commonly known as black gram being *madhura, snigdha & ushna* is aphrodisiac, regulates the *vata*, is nourishing and

increases the fertility<sup>30</sup>. Its seeds are rich source of protein, carbohydrate and dietary fibre. It also contains ample of essential minerals like Ca, K, iron, Mg, Cu, Zn and essential amino acids<sup>31</sup>. On the whole the diet prescribed is nutritive, free radical scavenging and yields qualitative sperm and ovum.

**Mantra** enchanting has its own importance in Hindu mythology. Regular chanting of mantras is believed to wipe out fear, anger and depression, and help relieve disorders of the respiratory, digestive, reproductive, circulatory, speech, intellectual and cognitive systems. Vedic chanting is said to help develop one's mental powers and strength, ease stress, and take one to a higher level of consciousness<sup>32</sup>.

To attain an offspring blessed with excellent physique and intelligence; coitus is advised on successive nights of *ritukala*, on alternate days and the ideal position of female is supine. Due to deposition of ejaculate in the posterior fornix which facilitates the easy transfer of sperms into the uterine cavity and the conception thereof this position is advised by modern gynecologists. In a menstrual cycle of 28 days, ovulation occurs usually on 14<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> day. The life of ovum after ovulation is 24 to 48 hrs while that of sperm in female genital tract is 48 to 72 hrs. This might be the reason that ancient Acharyas have quoted specific days of *ritukala* for achieving healthy progeny. Thus each and every thing enumerated in ayurveda classics has its own relevance and significance when studied on scientific parameters.

**CONCLUSION:** Development of a nation greatly depends upon the quality of its budding generation. On one side people are being dragged toward western culture

moving away from the traditional concepts of preconceptional care and on the other side the incidence of congenital, chromosomal abnormal babies is on an increase owing to delayed marriages, delayed conception, consanguineous marriages and faulty lifestyle & dietary habits. It is high time that people of reproductive age should be made aware of timely planned pregnancies, improving health and nutritional status prior to conception through ayurveda. It is essential to have the holistic approach towards preconceptional care focusing on physical as well as psychological well being to achieve a healthy progeny blessed with all good qualities. Clinical studies on preconceptional preparation of body and mind based on ayurveda regime should be conducted among couples having prior history of congenital and chromosomal abnormal babies in next pregnancy to evaluate its utility.

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