

UTILITY OF LEHANA IN CHILD HEALTH CARE: EVIDENCES FROM AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Childhood is a highly consequential period of life that lays an important substratum for the adult years. Because of the underdeveloped immune system, children are more vulnerable for recurrent infections which affect adversely their physical growth and development. Certain drugs prescribed by Ayurveda increase longevity and boost up immune system against various infectious diseases. *kāṣyapa saṃhitā* is the most important contribution of *Kāṣyapa* related to care of the children. *Kāṣyapa* describes *Lehana* as a procedure to be done in children to increase the digestive power, strength and endurance of the child. It protects and makes the child free from the diseases by improving the immune status. Non-specific immunity in the body is enhanced and average resistance is offered to all infections and the severity of the disease or disease itself is reduced which proves the multi-dimensional approach of *Lehana*. For this purpose, an attempt has been made to present concept of *Lehana* as immune enhancing therapy for children.

Keywords: *Lehana*, Immunity, Kashyapa, swarna, children

INTRODUCTION: Likable, that is given to the child in a semisolid form by increasing the palatability, concentration, potency and nutritional values can be called as *Lehana*. *Lehana* is one such procedure where in *Ahita* substances (incompatible materials) like equal quantities of Honey and the *ghṛta* (Ghee) along with *Svarṇa*(Gold) are given to the babies, regularly so that it continuously stimulates the immune system of body. In *saṃhitā* certain *lehas* (formulations in likable form) are described in detail with special emphasis on child health with their indications and contraindications which helps in improving intellect, digestion, metabolism, physical strength, immunity, complexion, fertility, and life span of children.

INDICATIONⁱ

- *Lehana* should be given to the baby whose mother is not able to produce breast milk. Here, *Lehana* is given as supplementary feeding to her baby.
- Mother with insufficient amount of breast milk can't fulfil nutritional requirements of her baby.
- Feeding should be avoided with vitiated breast milk due to post-natal complications in mother. Therefore, as a substitute and supplement, *Lehana* dravyas are given.
- Mother who suffered difficulty in normal delivery or suffering from some diseases and taking medications for that like the active tuberculosis thyrotoxicosis, HIV and taking the anti-malignant drugs can't feed their babies. Hence breastfeeding is better to be avoided in these conditions and *Lehana* provides the nutritional supplement to the child.

- Vāta and Pitta prakṛti represent the poor nutritional state of a child. So, these babies need extra calories in form of *Lehana dravyas*.
- Baby whose hunger is not satisfied.
- Cries in spite of breast feeding.
- Cannot sleep at night.
- Less amount of urine and stool reflects the inadequacy of breast milk.
- *Lehana* is always indicated for a disease free child because if child is suffering from any disease then he will not be able to metabolize the *Lehana* dravyas (micro nutrients) which can leads to abnormal storage in the body.
- Children with excessive appetite and good digestion power needs extra nutrition in form of *Lehana*.

- Those children with soft or delicate body parts are indicated for *Lehana* it promotes their muscle growth.
- *Lehana* is indicated in a constipated child passing stool once in three days which helps to increase digestion power and bulk of stool.

Contraindicationsⁱⁱ

- In children with poor digestive power *Lehana* dravyas will not get properly absorbed and metabolized in body which may lead to diarrhoea or deposition in body.
- Sleepy child may not require *Lehana* because of less caloric requirements due to inactivity and minimum body movements.
- *Lehana* may further aggravate the condition in children passing excessive stool and urine and children suffering from indigestion as the *Agni* (digestive power) is not normal.
- In stout bodied and child who is receiving breast milk with high caloric value, there is no requirement of extra nutrition or calories in the form of *Lehana*. It may lead to obesity in children.

- Whose mother is consuming food with all six *rasa* (taste) doesn't need any supplementation.
- It should neither be given in children who suffer from disease of head and neck, in āma roga (indigestion), fever, diarrhoea, jaundice, śotha (swelling), anemia, cardiac disease, dyspnoea, cough, rectal diseases, urinary bladder diseases, abdominal diseases, flatulence, hypothyroidism, erysipelas, vomiting, anorexia and infectious diseases.
- Broadly, *Lehana* has been contraindicated in conditions similar to agnimāndhya (poor digestive power), śleśmalāvasthā (over nutrition), and severe diseases.

Method of Administration of *Lehana*

The drugs are to be given in small dose only; never in greater quantity. The dose of herbal drug should be in the size of a viḍāmgaphala (*Embelia ribes*) and increased each month till it attains the āmalaka (*Emblica officinalis*) size.ⁱⁱⁱ

For svarṇaprāśana, has described the method of *Lehana* wherein gold should be rubbed on a clean stone along with water, honey, and ghee, facing east direction and given to child.^{iv}

Drugs Used For *Lehana*

Both single drugs and compound formulations have been prescribed by .

1. Single drugs^v: Brāhmī (*Baco monnierii*), Mandūkaparnī (*Centella asiatica*), Triphala(mixture of *Emblica officinalis*, *Terminalia bellirica*, *Terminalia chebula*), Chitraka(*Plumbago zeylanica*), vacā (*Acorus calamus*), saunḍpha (*Foeniculum vulgare*), śatāvarī (*Asparagus racemosus*), dantī (*Baliospermum montanum*) nāgabalā (*Grewia hirsuta*), niśotha (*Operculina turpethum*) may be used separately with honey and ghee to enhance intellect.

2. Compound formulations^{vi}: *Kalyāṇaka ghṛta*, *Brāhmī* ghṛta, pañcagavya ghṛta, abhaya ghṛta, saṁvardhana ghṛta.
3. Svarṇaprāśana with honey and ghee.

Benefits of *Lehana*

1. Emphasizes the importance of *Lehana* by stating that happiness and sorrow of children are dependent on *Lehana*.^{vii} We can understand happiness and sorrow with health and disease of child respectively. It is so much beneficial if given in proper dose and by appropriate method but it may be harmful if given in those conditions where it is contraindicated.
2. Single drugs like *Brāhmī* (*Bacopa monnieri*), *Mandūkaparṇī* (*Centella asiatica*), vacā (*Acorus calamus*), etc. may be used separately with Honey and *Ghee* to enhance intellect because growth of the brain and the nervous system is very rapid in the first few years of the life which slows down afterwards as evidenced by the head circumference. So the concept behind *Lehana* may be to produce the rich quality neurons in the initial period, so that child will become extra brilliant in future.
3. Svarṇaprāśana increase the digestive power, intelligence and the immunity of the person. If this is taken for 1 month continuously child becomes *Parama medhāvī* (Genius) and devoid of diseases. And the same when taken for 6 month it will make the child śrutadhara (able to retain once heard matter).
4. By the use of saṁvardhana ghṛta^{viii} the child grows rapidly and remains free from diseases. Crawls and walks early. Lame, dumb, deaf and mentally retarded child shows marked improvement.
5. Abhaya ghṛta^{ix} provides protection against rākṣasa, piśāca, mātṛkā (infections) which are common in infancy.
6. Usually the *Lehas* are palatable and easy for consumption. The smaller kids will always have difficulties and are reluctant in taking the medicine in the

tablet, cūrṇa or kvātha form. Incomparable to this *Lehana* form with added *Madhura* drugs is easy to administer.

7. It could be used as a substitute for the mother's milk or the dhātrī (wet nurse) milk in conditions like lack of breast milk or vitiated breast milk. There may be vitamin, micro and macro elemental deficiencies in children which can be corrected by the usage of the *Lehana*.

CONCLUSION

Lehana is a supplementary feed for the proper growth and development (both physical and mental) for children and also a remedy for infectious diseases in curative and preventive aspect. *Lehana* may yield non-specific immunity by boosting the immune system and keeping the system alert all the time. Therefore, average resistance is offered to all infections and the severity of the disease or disease itself is reduced which proves the multi-dimensional approach of *Lehana*. Moreover, the drugs used in *Lehana* are easily accessible and palatable in children as they are in semisolid form mixed with ghṛta and *Madhu*.

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