

PRECONCEPTION CARE- AN AYURVEDIC REVIEW**Swati Bala^{1*} and Prabhakar Shukla²**

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ABSTRACT

Pre-conception care is considered as “**Preventive Obstetrics**”. Pregnancy and parenthood are amongst the most exciting times in the life of an individual. Ante natal care and postnatal care are very important to ensure the well-being of both the mother and her child. But, preconception care is also equally important, for healthy young couples as well as couples facing fertility issues. Ayurveda has mentioned preconception counselling starting from the age of marriage for conception and also mentioned the criteria of bridal selection. The preconception care as per Ayurveda ensures a physically, mentally, intellectually healthy progeny (*shreysi praja*). To prepare for the desirable and quality pregnancy outcome, preconception care is essential and may reduce the risk of adverse outcomes such as

congenital defects, miscarriage and preterm delivery.

KEYWORDS: Pregnancy, Ayurveda, Preconception care, Obstetrics.

INTRODUCTION

Preconception care is a broad term that refers to the process of identifying social, behavioral, environmental, and biomedical risks to a woman's fertility and pregnancy outcome and then reducing these risks through education, counselling appropriate interventions before conception. It is defined as a set of interventions that aim to identify and modify biomedical, behavioral 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.

Ayurveda has given detailed descriptions of the preconception care to be given for both the partners. Detoxification concept is described for both partners before conception will help to improve the number of healthy progeny. Ayurveda also describes the contraindication condition of woman for coitus and their effects on conceptus as well as fetus. Influence of psychological status of couple has been described (*somanaysa hi garbhadharanam*). Normalcy of psychology and happiness of both partner is equally important for conception. In preconception care, encourage the body's innate ability to cleanse, renew and heal itself. Panchakarma procedures, not only ensures a total cleansing of the body and the reproductive organs, but also rejuvenates and improves the vitality of a person.

OBJECTIVES

1. To collect the literary resource regarding preconception care in Ayurvedic text and its utility in present era's obstetric care.
2. To promote healthy progeny through preconception care as per Ayurveda.
3. To elaborate concepts of preconception counselling to reduce the risks and adverse pregnancy outcomes, through Ayurvedic principles.

Literature and conceptual study studying all the concepts mentioned in *Ayurvedic samhitas*:

1. *Rajaswala paricharya* (Mode of living during menstruation)^[1]

Indication	Contraindication	Day of mensuration
1. She should sleep on <i>daryha</i> spread around ground 2. Eat <i>havishya annapana</i> (meal made of ghee) or <i>yavaka</i> 3. Take less quantity of meals 4. Thinking good or auspicious things.	1. Sleeping in day time, shedding of tears, bathing, massaging, paring of nails, laughing etc. 2. <i>swedna & vamana karma</i> 3. avoid pungent, hot & salty substances	-1 st to 3 rd day of menstruation. -On the 4 th day she should take bath washing her head, wear white clothes, and she should first of all see her husband.

2. Criteria for marriage

Acharya Sushruta mentioned that the marriageable age for man is 25 year and woman is 12 years^[2] respectively while *Vagbhata* said 21 and 12 years respectively.^[3]

Vagbhata added with this, the qualities of appropriate girl and boy for marriage i.e. - she should not belong to the same gotra (*Atulyagotra vivaha*), not suffering from any contagious diseases, beautiful, modest, having complete body parts, delicate etc.^[4]

3. Appropriate age for conception

Age factor plays a significant role in achieving a good progeny because biologically a person (wife or husband) is capable of producing a healthy child, only after attaining sexual maturity. *Charaka* opines that the male become sexually mature at the age of 16years, while *Sushruta* and *Vagbhata* said that male at the age of 25years and females at the age of 16years are completely mature hence, they should attempt for achieving conception.^[5]

If a woman below 16 years and man below 25 year, either she will not conceive or if at all conceives, she will have IUD fetus, if the child is born, it would not live or will have weak organs, ill health and deformed body parts. Aged women should also not impregnated.^[6]

4. Contraindicated conditions or Psychology of woman during coitus and their effects

The coitus should not be done with a woman who is hungry or over eaten, thirsty, frightened, who is angry or full of sorrows, having absence or excessive desire for sex, who have chronic illness, who is pregnant or emaciated. These types of woman either do not conceive, if conceive the newborn suffers from teratogenic abnormalities.^[7]

5. Position of woman during coitus

For reception of *beeja* (Seminal fluid) women should lie in supine position, so that all the *doshas* remain in their normal position. The man should not lie below the woman, because after this postural copulation if a woman delivers a male child, he will have feminine characters and if female child then she will have masculine habits.^[8]

6. Effect of coitus performed during menstruation^[9]

Menstrual day	Effects on the child
1 st day	No pregnancy or IUD or death immediately after delivery
2 nd day	Either abortion or IUD
3 rd day	Defective body parts
4 th day	Normal healthy with all body parts

7. Factors responsible for conception

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

“ritukshetraambubeejanam samgryadhankuro ytha (s.sh.2/33)^[10]

<i>Acharya sushruta</i>	<i>Acharya vagbhata</i> ^[11]
Ritu -Time of ovulation, when the chances of conception are Maximum.	Healthy <i>garbhashya</i>

<i>Kshetra</i> - the reproductive tract where fertilization and implantation occurs	<i>Marga</i> -vaginal canal
<i>Ambu</i> - nourishment including all the hormones	<i>Rakta</i> -ovum
<i>Beeja</i> - Healthy sperm and ovum.	<i>Shukra</i> -sperm
	<i>Anil-apana</i> vayu

8. Adoption of measures prior to conception^[12,13]

After menstruation i.e. 4th day onwards the couple after being purified by the use of oleation, sudatory measures, emetics, purgatives, *asthapana* and *anuvasan basti*. etc. After these purifying measures

- Both the partners should observe celibacy (*brahmacharya*) for one month before attempting coitus.
- The male should consume *Shali* rice with ghrita and milk, *Taila* and *masha* should be consumed by the female for one month. Absistence is maintained for one month period and in the next cycle couple can happily go for sexual contact for reproduction.

The reason of such dietetic regimen in light of science may be as follows

1. Male aspect

- Ghrita***- It has *vata-pitta shamak* qualities and is *shita virya*. It is beneficial for *rasa*, *shukra* and *oja*. It also has the quality of *rasayana*. All these aids in the proper functioning of *shukra* and hence, helps to attain conception.
- Shali***- It alleviates *pitta dosha*. It is *madhura rasa*, *snigdha*, *balya*, *vrishya*, *bringhana* etc. which promotes the qualities of *shukra*.

2. Female aspect:

- Masha***- It is *vatahara*, *snigdha*, *ushna virya*, *madhura rasa*. It has the qualities of *balya* and *punstwa*. Moreover, it is chemically constituted of proteins, carbohydrates, vitamin B, magnesium, calcium, iron and folic acid which are very essential for conception and pregnancy. Calcium and magnesium play a good role in regulating estrogen level. All these qualities help to promote the qualities of *artava*.
- Seasme taila***: It is effective in *Vataja* disorders and does not increase *Kapha*. It is *balya* and *yoni vishodhana* (cleanses the *yoni marga*).

9. Effect of psychology of the women on the fetus^[14]

‘somanysya garbhadharnam’ (ch.s.su.25/40)

The women desirous having a child resembling to the persons of any specific country should use diet, mode of life, behavior and garments identical to the persons of that very country and also by the same method as practiced by them.

The born child emulates the character of creature who comes in thoughts of the women during coitus or fertilization. For healthy progeny happy mood is essential.

‘dormansya avrishyanam’ (ch.s.su.25/40)

Stress, anger, despair etc. can disturb the phenomenon leading to diminution of sexual vigour.

10. Putreshti yagya

Charka and *kashyapa* have described the detailed method of *puteshti yagya* which is actually a subject or religion. A *yagya* included major ceremony with or without a sacred fire, sometimes with feasts and community events.^[15]

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda focuses on the promotion and preservation of health and prevention of diseases. The preconception care is a cognitive measure as mentioned in all the Ayurvedic texts. Therefore, to achieve conception, contentment or balanced psychology of both the partners is very essential. It has been advised only healthy, physically and mentally fit couples should attempt for conception. The dietary regimen has been mentioned in the classics for the couple prior to conception in order to nourish and enhance the functional activities of reproductive organs. Hence, Ayurveda offers a radical and informative knowledge about the preconception care which may be adopted by all the couples planning for pregnancy and also may be implemented as an integral part in the community healthcare.

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