

**VYADHIKSHAMATVA VARDHANOPAYA - A CONCEPTUAL STUDY
ON ENHANCING IMMUNITY IN CHILDREN****Dr. Nisarga S.*¹ and Dr. Girish Kumar S.V.²**

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ABSTRACT

Vyadhikshamatva, it is a fundamental concept in Ayurveda, refers to the body's inherent and acquired immunity to resist or overcome diseases. In children (*Baala*), whose immune system is still developing, enhancing *Vyadhikshamatva* is crucial for ensuring robust growth, reducing morbidity, and promoting long-term health. Various Methods (*Upayas*) are mentioned in classical Ayurvedic texts for strengthening immunity in children, collectively termed as *Vyadhikshamatva Vardhanopaya*. These include *Lehana* (Electuaries), *Rasayana* (Rejuvenating therapies), *Swarnaprashana* (Gold preparation), *Prakaradi yoga*, and practicing *Yoga* and *Asana* along with proper dietary habits. In the contemporary context, integrating these time-tested Ayurvedic practices with modern paediatric healthcare can provide a holistic approach to child immunity. Scientific validation of these methods is ongoing, and emerging evidence supports their role in enhancing resistance to infections and promoting overall well-being in children. In the present write-up, we explore these Methods (*Upayas*) in detail to understand how they help in boosting immunity in children.

KEYWORDS: Immunity, *Bala*, *Vyadhikshamatva Vardhanopaya*, *Ojas*.

INTRODUCTION

A healthy immune system is a vital necessity for children as they are exposed to a surplus of germs in their day-to-day activities. There is an increasing necessity to enhance immunity in children as it affects gut, intelligence, nutrition, etc, and in the paediatric age group, low immunity remains a major sector of concern. It does increase susceptibility to develop recurrent respiratory tract infections, skin diseases, irregular bowel habits, poor growth and development, which hampers the quality of life of children and parents.

WHO states that “Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. So as to maintain health, building a strong immune system is necessary.^[1]

Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of Health (*Arogya*) by considering it as a tool to achieve *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama*, and *Moksha* - the four *Purusharthas*.^[2] The term *Arogya* is explained as an equilibrium state of all *Tridosha*'s, *Agni*, *Dhatu*, *Mala*'s, which is very much essential in the prevention of diseases as well as the maintenance of a healthy status of an individual.^[3]

The main aim of *Ayurveda* is - *Swastasya swasthya rakshana* (To maintain the health of a healthy person) and *Aturasya roganut* (To cure the disease of a diseased one).^[4]

Baalyavastha (Childhood period) is characterised by *Alpabala* and more prone to develop repeated infections because of underdeveloped *Dhatu*s (*Bala sanchayane*).

Owing to the peculiar characteristics of *Baalyavastha* (Childhood), such as *Aparipakva Dhatu* (Immature tissues), *Ajata Vyanjana* (Underdeveloped secondary sexual features), *Sukumaratva* (Physiological delicacy), *Aklesa Sahatva* (Low tolerance to stress), *Asampurna Bala* (Incomplete strength), and the natural predominance of *Kapha Doṣha*,⁵ children are inherently more susceptible to various infections. This underscores the urgent need to enhance immunity during childhood, especially in the current era where environmental and lifestyle challenges further compromise immune resilience. So, we need to explain various measures that aid in increasing the *Vyadhikshamatva*.

The concept of Immunity is explained in *Ayurveda* under the broad sense of *Vyadhikshamatva*, which is an umbrella term made up of *Vyadhi* and *Kshamatva*. *Vyadhi* means disease, and *Kshamatva* means to resist - derived from “*Kshamus sahanē*”.^[6]

Vyadhikshamatva can be defined as^[7]

“व्याधिक्षमत्वं नाम व्याधिबलविरोधित्वं व्याध्युत्पादकप्रतिबन्धकत्वमिति ।

The term *Vyadhikshamatva* includes 2 aspects

- *Vyadhibala Virodhitva*: the capacity to suppress the severity of the disease i.e, antagonistic to the strength and virulence of the disease.
- *Vyadhyutpada Pratibandhakatva*: the capacity of the body to counteract the occurrence and reoccurrence of the disease, the capacity to inhibit and bind the causes and factors of disease.

Various descriptions of *Vyadhikshamatva* and its *Vardhanopayas* are found in *Ayurveda* under the headings of *Bala*, *Ojus*, and *Prakruta kapha* in detail.^[8]

Concept of OJAS

Ojas is explained as an essence of all the *Saptha dhatus* - ‘*Rasadinam shukrantanam dhatunam yat param tejastat khalu ojaha*’ and the same thing is considered as *Bala* too (*Tadeva balamitityuchyate*).^[9] *Acharya Chakrapani* considers “*Hridayasya rasa*” as *Ojas* (*Rasa cha oja samkhyata*).^[10] further, *Ojas* is considered as superior among all the abodes of *Prana* and its destruction leads to death (“*Pranayatanam uttamam*”; “*Tat Nashat vinashyati*”).^[11]

Formation of ojas^[12]

Formation of *Ojas* begins from *Garbhavasta*. *Acharya Charaka* opines, *Ojas* is the *Adirasa* of *Garbha*. It appeared foremost in the human body. Before the *Garbha Utpatti*, it is in the form of *Saara* of *Shukra* and *Shonita*. After the manifestation of *Hridaya* in *Garbha*, *Ojas* acquires the position in *Hridaya* and *Garbha* and performs all its activities. *Acharya Charaka* describes the simile of how the *Ojas* is formed in the body, as the honeybees collect honey from different types of flowers and fruits and is deposited in one place, in the same way, *Ojas* is formed from all the *Dhatus* and deposited in one place i.e *Hridaya*. This *Ojas* will do the *Avastambhana* of the *Garbha*. It is said as *Jeevashonitham*.^[13]

Sthana

Ojas resides in the *Hridaya*, but also circulates all over body.^[14] *Acharya Bhela* mentioned 12 *Sthanas* for *Ojas* i.e, *Rasa*, *Rakta*, *Mamsa*, *Meda*, *Asthi*, *Majja*, *Shukra*, *Sweda*, *Mutra*, *Purisha*, *Pitta* and *Sleshma*.^[15]

BALA

"*Balam hi alam nigrahaaya doshanaam*" - bala is important in controlling the severity of a disease.^[16]

Bala is considered as the *Sharirika* (Physical) and *Manasika* (Mental) strength of the individual.^[17]

Karma

Sthira Upachita Mamsa (Stability and growth of muscles), *Sarva Chesta Apratighata* (Able to perform all activities without any hindrance), *Swara Varna Prasadana* (Bestows with clarity of voice and complexion), *Bahyaabhyantara Karana Atmakarya* (Ability of sensory organs to perform their own functions).^[18]

Types of Bala^[17]**1. Sahaja** - "*Sahajam yat sharirasatvayoho prakruthaha*"

The *Sharirika* and *Manasika bala*, which is attained from *Matruja* and *Pitruja bhava* (inherent potential of an individual). As per *Acharya Chakrapani Datta* it is the *Prakruta swabhava* of *Sharira* and *Satva* i.e., *Bala* of body and mind. This can be correlated to innate immunity, which is transferred from mother to child.

2. Kaalaja - That which depends on age and seasons, it is of 2 types

a. Based on Ritu - During *Adana kaala* the *Bala* will be more and during *Visarga kaala* the *Bala* will be less. *Ritu sandhi* is the best example of *Kaalaja balahaani* and therefore, during that period, special care is mentioned in *Ritucharya* for retaining *Bala*. The concept of *Rituhareetaki* is season-wise administration of 7 varieties of *Haritaki* with different *Anupana*, and each variety has its own action.

b. Based on Vaya - In *Balya avasatha* the *Bala* will be less due to *Aparipakwa dhatu* and it increases gradually with age because of *Dhatu sampoornata*, *Yauvana avastha* i.e. youth individual will be having the best *Bala*.

This *Kalaja* type of *Vyadhikshmatva* arises when an antigen infiltrates our body. To defend our bodies, our immune system produces specialised antibodies against that antigen.

3. Yuktikrita - "*Yuktikrutam punastadyaharacheshtayogajam*"

Which is gained by good food, lifestyle, and overall well-being, various other measures such as *Ahara*, *Cheshta*, *Rasayana yoga* etc.

Thus, *Sahaja bala* determined at the time of conception. *Kaalaja bala* depends on *Vaya* and *Ritu*. *Yuktikruta bala* could be increased by sincere efforts.

***Bala vruddhikara bhava's* (factors responsible for promotion of *Bala*)^[19]**

- ***Balavata deshe janma*** - being born in the place with naturally strong environment. For example. *Deshas* like *Punjab*, *Sindha* where people have naturally strong constitution since birth.
- ***Balavata purushe janma*** - *Bala* of *Apathya* which takes birth from strong parents is always better. Parents originating from *Punjabi* or *Sindhi* family are considered to be *balavan* parents.
- ***Balavata purushe kale*** - Being born at the time when people naturally gain strength, *Visarga kaala* due to dominance of *Sheeta* moon rays, *Bala* of *Purusha* increases day by day from the beginning to the end of the season.
- ***Sukhashcha kaala yoga*** - Favourable time and strength, *Kaala garbhashaya prakruti*. It means *Uttama prakruti* forms when *Kaala* is *Sadharana*, and *Dosha*, *Dhatu* and *Mala* are in *Samyaavastha*.
- ***Beeja kshetra guna sampat*** - Excellence of the qualities of sperm and ovum and *Ashaya* i.e. proper anatomical and physiological status of the uterus of mother.
- ***Aahara sampat*** - Nutritious foods like *Raktashali*, *Mudga yusha*, *Saindhava*, *Amalaki*, *Yava*, *Antarikshajala*, *Dughdha*, *Ghrita*, *Mamsa rasa*, *Madhu*.
- ***Shareera sampat*** - Those who have well-compacted body are strong otherwise weak.
- ***Saatmya sampat*** - Favourable disposition of race and species, due to *Abhyasa satmya* i.e. regular consumption of *Ghrita*, *Ksheera*, *Taila*, *Mamsa rasa* and *Sarva rasa* person will be able to tolerate heat, cold, hunger, thirst, and *Vyayama*.
- ***Satva sampat*** - Excellence of mind or the *Manobala*.
- ***Yauvana*** - The State of youthfulness.
- ***Karma*** - Regular exercises, *Vyayama shakti*, *Ahara*, it brings about lightness in the body, ability to work, stability, resistance to discomfort, enhancement of metabolic activity.
- ***Samharsha*** - A Person with *Prasanna Atma*, *Indriya*, and *Mana* will have a happy mind, and this way it promotes strength.

IMPORTANCE OF VYADHIKSHAMATVA IN CHILDREN

The immune system is a complex network of organs, cells, and proteins that defends the body against infections.

A strong immune system will protect the children from various infections, especially in environments such as school, play areas, where children are in close contact and can transmit infections easily.

“*Na cha Sarvani shareerani vyadhikshamatve samartani bhavanti*”^[20] which means not every individual has the capacity to fight against diseases.

In Ayurveda there are numerous useful herbal drugs, formulations for the enhancement of *Vyadhikshamatva*, beginning from the infantile period till the age of 16 years. *Vyadhikshamatva* implies a resistance against the loss of the integrity, proportion, and interrelationship amongst the individual's *Doshas* and *Dhatus*.

Vyadhikshamatva Vardhanopaya (Measures to enhance Vyadhikshamatva)

1. Concept of *lehana*

The word *Lehana* is derived from the Sanskrit word “*Lih dhatu*”, which means to lick or to taste. Acharya Charaka has mentioned about *Chaturvidhasya ahara*, i.e, four types of food which are *Ashita* (edible), *Peeta* (drinkable), *Leeda* (lickable), and *Khadita* (chewable).^[21] Among these, *Lehana* comes under the *Leeda* form, i.e, lickables. “***Sukham dukham hi balam drushyate lehanashrayam***” the *Sukha* and *Dukha* of the child depend upon *Lehana*.^[22]

Acharya Kashyapa allocated a separate chapter called *Lehanadhyaya* and quoted several *Lehana yoga* that contain polyherbal ingredients like *Samvardhana Ghrita*, *Abhaya Ghrita*, *Samangadhi leha* etc.^[22], which have benefits of *Medha*, *Ayu*, *Bala vridhi* in succession, enhance immunity, and also fulfil the nutritional requirement, thus minimizing infection. The drugs for *Lehana* should always be administered with *Madhu* and *Ghrita*.

2. *Suvarnaprashana*

It is one among the *Lehana yogas*, which is said to have both preventative and curative therapeutic properties. *Suvarna dharana* (the wearing of gold jewellery) is mostly employed in *Grahabadha* and is regarded as spiritual.^[23] Whereas internal usage of gold is recommended as rubbed gold, incinerated gold/*Suvarna Bhasma*.

Procedure^[24]: The gold should be rubbed on a cleansed stone with a small amount of water, then churned with honey and *Ghrita*, and handed to the child for licking.

Suvarnaprashana is given on *Pushya Nakshatra* to yield its additional benefits. *Pushya Nakshatra* is one among the 27 *Nakshatras*, and it is observed at every 27-day interval. Astrologically, this *Nakshatra* is considered very auspicious and, as its name suggests, it is also believed to have some nourishing effect on the body.^[24]

Various *Suvarnaprashana yoga*^[25]

Some of the *Suvarnaprashana yogas* mentioned by *Acharya Vagbhata* are

- i. *Suvarna* (Gold), *Vacha* (*Acorus Calamus* Linn), *Kushta* (*Saussurea lappa*)
- ii. *Suvarna* (Gold), *Arkapushpi* (*Holostemma annularium* Roxb.)
- iii. *Suvarna* (Gold), *Matsyakhyaka* (*Alternanthera sessilis* Linn.), *Shankhapushpi* (*Convolvulus pluricaulis* Chois.)
- iv. *Suvarna* (Gold), *Kaidarya* (*Murraya koenigii* Linn), *Vacha* (*Acorus Calamus* Linn.)

Mode of action:^[24] Nanoparticles present in gold show that they can bypass digestion and enter the circulatory system directly through the sublingual route.

Importance^[26]

द्रव्याणां लेहनीयानां विधिश्चैत्रोपदेयते ॥ विघृष्य धौते दृषदि प्राङ्मुखी लघुनाऽम्बुना आमध्य मधुसर्पिथ्यो लेहयेत् कनकं शिशुम् ॥ सुवर्णप्राशनं ह्येतन्मेधाग्निबलवर्धनम् आयुष्यं मङ्गलं पुण्यं वृष्यं ग्रहापहम् ॥

Suvarnaprashana promotes intelligence, digestion and metabolic ability, and strength. It encourages longevity, it is prosperous, virtuous, and aphrodisiac, enhances complexion and it counteracts the negative consequences of *Graha Roga*.

Suvarna Vacha:^[24] It is a purified gold wire inserted into processed underground stem (dry or fresh) of *Vacha* (*Acorus calamus*), which is yet another unique formulation which is popularly used for giving *Suvarnaprashana*.

3. *Rakshakarma*

It is a *Sanskrit* word which means “protective measures”, such as tying *Dravyas* like *Vacha*, *Kustha*, *Kshomka*, *Atasi* around the neck of mother and child, performing *Tandula bali homa* twice a day i.e., morning and evening.²⁷ It is an *Adravyabhoota chikitsa* that prevents infections.

Dhupana also helps protect against millions of microorganisms. *Acharya Kashyapa* dedicated a separate chapter to various *Dhupa kalpas*. Medicines that are used in the form of smoke by

burning are called *Dhupa*. Some of the examples mentioned include *Kumara Dhupa*, *Shaisuka Dhupa*, *Maheshwara Dhupa*, and *Rakshoghna Dhupa*, etc.^[28] among others. *Dhupana* helps dilate blood vessels and facilitate blood oxidation. It leads to adequate tissue perfusion and oxygenation. Thus, helps in eliminating infection.^[29]

4. *Prakarayoga*^[30]

The word *Prakara* means boundary or a wall that protects the house from various odds. It is an immunomodulatory method explained in *Arogya Rakshakalpadruma* for preventing childhood illness and for boosting general immunity in children. These interventions should be administered in a structured and age-appropriate schedule, beginning from birth and continuing periodically up to 12 years of age.

Some examples of the administration of drugs

Newborn child: The drug *Vacha* is grinded in the juice of *Tripadika* is prepared and three drops of this mixture are advised to be instilled over the centre of the head, from the first day of birth up to the seventh day, which is beneficial to prevent the occurrence of disease.

3 months old: After three months, the drugs such as *Vyosha*, and powder of *Sariba* are added with butter and given internally for seven days is beneficial to prevent the occurrence of diseases.

Mode of action

The prescribed use of *Prakara yogas* corrects *Agni* and alleviates *Doshas* by their *Deepana* (Carminative), *Pachana* (Digestive), *Strotoshodhana* (Channel clearing), and *Rasayana* properties, preventing morbidity during infancy.

Importance

It is the only age-wise immunisation method explained in Ayurveda. The practice of administering *Prakarayoga* from birth is recommended, as it plays a significant role in enhancing innate immunity, thereby contributing to improved health outcomes and overall quality of life in children.

5. *Karnavedhana*

रक्षाऽभूषणनिमित्तं बालस्य कर्णी विध्येते।

It is done mainly for *Abhushanarta* and *Rakshartha*.^[31]

As per the classics, the best time indicated for *Karna Vedhana* is 6th, 7th month.

Procedure:^[33] in the above indicated months on an auspicious day, of *Shukla paksha*, after performing prayer, oblation, *Homa*, this procedure should be performed. The physician should hold the ear of the child, i.e., the right ear in case of a male child and the left ear in case of a female child, with the left hand. Meanwhile, with his right hand, he has to pierce the ear lobe straight through the *Daivakrita Chidra*. The instrument used is *Suchi* (Needle) in case of thin skin, and *Aara* (Owl of the shoemaker) in case of thick skin.

Mode of action^[32]

It stimulates the immune system in response to injury to the ear lobules, which initiates an antigen-antibody reaction in the early life period so as to bring a secondary immunity against several infections.

6. Yoga & Asana^[33]

Yoga helps improve flexibility, create awareness of the body, and enhance the energy circulation throughout the body. *Asanas* primarily act on the muscles and joints, creating space within the body's structure to enhance circulation and improve flexibility. As a result, physical functioning becomes more coordinated, efficient, and less stressful.

For example, *Surya namaskarsa*, *Dhanurasana* (Bow posture), *Sasakasana*, *Trikonasana* (Triangle posture), *Prasarita padottanasana*, etc. A child who does not exercise in any of the forms may become susceptible to many diseases, like obesity.

7. Rasayana

The term *Rasayana* is composed of two words, *Rasa* and *Ayana*.

The word *Rasa* means one who moves day and night, and the word *Ayana* means pathway or place. *Rasa* means nutrition, and *Ayana* means microcellular channel, and hence *Rasayana* essentially means nutrition at the microcellular level.^[34]

लाभोपायो हि शस्तानां रसादीनां रसायनम् || *Rasayana* promotes long life, memory, great intelligence, perfect health, youthfulness, bright complexion and colour, bold voice, increased strength of the body and sense organs, perfection in speech, and brilliance.^[35]

Classically, *Rasayana* therapies are categorized as below

Based on utility^[36]

A. *Kamya Rasayana* - where the healthy individual takes it for maintaining health. Such *Rasayanas* are again divided into,

1. ***Srikamya*** - which promotes luster of the physical body, Ex: *Amalaki Rasayana*.
2. ***Pranakamya*** - for longevity, it is useful, Ex: *Chyavana-prasha Rasayana*.
3. ***Medhakamya*** - for enhancement of cognitive ability and mental health, Ex: *Shankhapushpi*, *Yashtimadhu*, etc.

B. *Naimittika Rasayana* - is useful as a disease-specific treatment for a patient, and it varies according to the disease.

C. *Ajasrika Rasayana* - where the *Rasayana* effect is gained by the use of good food substances regularly.

Based on the mode of administration^[37]

A. *Vatatapika Rasayana* which can be used by outdoor patients without adopting any kind of intensive regimen.

B. *Kutipraveshika Rasayana*, where patients should be kept in intensive care on placing them in a *Trigarbhakuti*, according to the individual's *Prakriti*, *Vaya*, *Kala* for a specific period.

Mode of action of *Rasayana*

Rasayana helps to improve metabolic processes, which results in the best possible biotransformation to form the best quality *Dhatus* (tissues)

Rasayana works at three levels, such as at the level of *Poshaka Rasa* (increases nutrition), at the level of *Agni* (increases digestion and assimilation of food), and at the level of *Srotas* (increases absorption of food from serum to various parts of the body).

It has a nutritive function, immunomodulatory action, antioxidant action, anti-aging effect, neuroprotective action, and acts as a natural scavenger.

Rasayana drugs correct *Dhatuvyapara*, thus leading to the production and protection of tissue proteins. Hence, it is responsible for building up the body. It was well known that the delicate cellular machinery of the body suffers from trauma (stress), resulting in wear and tear of different body structures and deterioration of the functional capacity of human beings. For

cytoprotection, procedures of revitalization and rejuvenation were adopted to increase the power of disease resistance. Hence, *Rasayana* drugs act as cytoprotective agents.^[34]

There is reference to *Chaturvidha Medhya Rasayanas* such as *Mandukaparni*, *Yashtimadhu*, *Guduchi*, and *Shankhapushpi*³⁸ as well as the other important *Rasayana* drugs such as *Triphala*, *Ashwagandha*, and *Shatavari*. They exhibit a range of pharmacological actions, such as

- Immunopotentiating property of *Guduchi*, *Ashwagandha*, and *Shatavari*^[39]
- Antioxidant property of *Yashtimadhu* and *Haritaki*,^[40]
- Antioxidative effect and Immunomodulatory activity of *Triphala*,^[41]
- Antibacterial activities of *Amalaki*.^[42]

Rasayana helps in strengthening *Oja*, *Bala* and hence increases *Vyadhikshamatva*.

8. Ahara

Ahara is mentioned as one among the *Trayopasthambha*⁴³ (the three pillars of life), *Acharya Kashyapa* says that *Ahara* is *Mahaushadhi*⁴⁴ and *Acharya Harita* has mentioned it as *Mahabheshaja*.^[45]

आहार शुद्धौ सत्त्व शुद्धिः from purity of food comes purity of the mind.^[46]

The *Shadrassa yukta ahara sevana* helps to maintain *Dhatusamyas*, in turn enhancing the *Bala*. *Go ksheera* and *Go ghrta* have *Gunas* like *Madhura*, *Sheeta*, *Snigdha*, etc, which are similar to *Ojo guna*, hence will act as *Ojovardhaka*.

“*Pareekshya hitam ashniyaad deho hi ahara sambhava*”⁴⁷ one should consume food only after knowing its benefits to the body, hence, mindful eating should be given importance.

DISCUSSION

Vyadhikshamatva, as described in ayurvedic literature, it's a multifactorial concept that denotes the body's intrinsic and acquired capacity to resist disease and maintain homeostasis. It primarily depends on the strength of *Agni*, the quality of *Dhatus*, and the vitality of *Ojas*. Due to the physiological immaturity in *Balyavastha* (Childhood), including underdeveloped tissues (*Aparipakwa dhatus*), children are more susceptible to infections. Therefore, strategies to build resistance are especially crucial in this age group. Such strategies are called *Vyadhikshamatva Vardhanopaya*'s, which include *Lehana* (Electuaries), *Rakshakarma* (Protective ritual), *Karnavedhana* (Ear piercing), *Suvarnaprashana* (Gold electuaries),

Rasayana (Rejuvenation methods), *Prakaradi yogas*, *Ahara* (Food), *Yoga* (Exercises), and *Asana*. thus, incorporating *Vyadhikshamatva Vardhanopayas* in pediatric care offers a holistic, preventive approach rooted in Ayurveda, aimed at strengthening immunity and promoting the overall well-being of children naturally and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

Ayurveda believes that maintaining *Swasthya avastha* (A state of wellbeing) requires the development of strong immunity. In the current era, where children are increasingly vulnerable to infections and lifestyle-related disorders, enhancing immunity has become more essential than ever. By adopting the time-tested measures prescribed in Ayurvedic classics, such as *Lehana*, *Rakshakarma*, *Suvarnaprashana*, *Rasayana*, *Yoga*, *Asana*, and *Ahara*, both children and their caregivers can experience improved health outcomes and a better quality of life.

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