

# *Ayurveda - MOTHER-CARE*

(Ancient Indian System of Medicine)

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Ayurveda (ancient Indian system of medicine) makes clear the high value put on the expectant mother-care and well-being of children. Before trying to know what Ayurveda has said about the need of expectant mother-care, it will not be out of place to remind ourselves how advanced this system of medical science was until it was subdued by certain section of vested interests. After the long foreign rule in India, majority of us have a wrong notion that Ayurveda is a primitive system of medicines with some herbs and ashes (*bhasmas*). Modern medicos sneer at it. Yet, a slow awareness is growing nowadays about the genuineness of Ayurveda.

Ayurveda is an ancient medical system which originates in the Vedas with 'Dhanvantari' as the first physician and Asvinikumāras (twins) as the first surgeons. It is interesting to note here that Asvinikumāras had done successfully head transplants between the sage Dadhyañ Muni and a horse twice (*Br.U.2-5-16 and 17*). Dhanvantari taught it to sages and thereafter it continued in oral tradition from the teacher to the taught.

Historically this tradition is traced to 5000 BCE. The great two luminaries whose texts called *Samhitās* (compendiums) are followed now are Charaka and Sushruta (circa - 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE). These texts are further enlarged by their disciples. Both *Samhitās* discuss the eight branches of Ayurvedic medicine. Deep knowledge of anatomy, etiology, embryology, digestion, metabolism, genetics and immunity is also found in many texts. Charaka and Sushruta have presented this medical science in a very organised manner. But in addition to emphasizing therapeutics, Sushruta also discusses surgery, which Charaka barely mentions. Sushruta is considered as the father of Indian surgery and also the father of plastic surgery and Cosmetic surgery. Surgeons in his times conducted surgeries such as caesareans, cataract, artificial limbs, fractures, urinary stones, plastic surgery and even brain surgery. Usage of anaesthesia was well-known in ancient India. Over 125

surgical equipments were used. The technique of forehead flap rhinoplasty (repairing the disfigured nose with a flap of skin from the forehead) that Sushruta used to reconstruct noses is practised almost unchanged in technique to this day. Sushruta *Samhita* details about 650 drugs of animal, plant and mineral origin. In addition, it describes more than 300 kinds of operations that call for 42 different surgical processes and 121 different types of instruments. In keeping with the Āyurvedic philosophy of preserving life and preventing the infirmity of old age, he extols the benefits of clean living, pure thinking, good habits, regular exercises, special diets and drug preparations. It is worth noting here that Āyurveda treats the diseases taking into account the entire body as one composite whole entity than the linear method of modern medical science like repairing a motor car part by part independently.

Both these *Āyurvedic* texts were translated into Arabic and later in Persian in the eighth century. That made Āyurveda spread far beyond India. Chickenpox inoculation has its origin in India. The procedure of rhinoplasty was observed in India by a British surgeon in 1793. He published it in London the following year. That changed the course of plastic surgery in Europe.

Charaka describes the need of expectant mother-care at length. He says: It is indispensable that the expectant mother has to observe certain restrictions during the pregnancy. Her food and other habits have to be regulated so as to be conducive to the nourishment and the growth of the foetus. Otherwise it can have adverse effect on the foetus in terms of some incompleteness or sickness. Similarly, at a certain stage of pregnancy the mother gets some intense cravings. Their fulfilment has a bearing on the healthy growth of the foetus. At times the causes of such cravings can be mental in nature. Just as her health has to be kept in good condition, so also she should be kept cheerful all along. This is very necessary from the standpoint of both the mother and the foetus. Lack of such conditions has an adverse effect on the healthy growth of the foetus (*Charaka Śātr̄a*, 3-23).

At times the cravings of the expectant mother can be prohibitive in terms of demanding verily the restricted food etc. In such case she should be handled very tactfully without hurting her by harsh words or scolding. Lovingly she

should be dissuaded from such a desire. If, in spite of persuasion from different angles if she cannot be convinced, she should be referred to the Vaidya (Āyurvedic Doctor). The *Vaidya* should fulfil her desire partly by simultaneously counteracting the adverse effects on her and the foetus through the nullifying medication. But the cravings should not be denied. Defects arising from the faulty diet of a pregnant lady and the non-appeasement of her cravings produce different types of defects in the foetus. If there are drawbacks in the conditions necessary for the foetus to grow or if they are totally contrary, the foetus gets destroyed in the beginning itself or gets aborted without remaining for a long period. This is why the *śruti* exhorts the husband to take special care of his wife during the pregnancy (*Ai.U.2-3*).