**Rasayana Therapy in Various Physiological Stages of Females**

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**ABSTRACT**

Woman plays a critical role in building the society. Nowadays it is quite common to see her render services both at home and the workplace. This dual responsibility subjects her to many physical and mental challenges, which makes her prone to many diseases that can jeopardize her performance in various aspects of her life. Hence a careful and timely attention to her specific health requirements at specific stages of life is the need of hour. Nutrition plays a major role in the physical and psychological status of health. Female malnutrition is associated with increased risk of low fertility, maternal mortality and child birth defects. Rasayana tantra mentioned in classical Ayurveda, is basically a science of nutrition for all the individuals of society that aims to promote a total gain of physical, mental and social health. Due to gender specific differences in physiology, some special diet, drugs and behavioral regimens are required for an effective prevention and management of female gender specific disorders. But very few female specific rasayanas have been directly mentioned in Ayurvedic texts. This article serves to throw light on those potential Ayurvedic rasayanas that can be used in the perspective of different physiological stages of females such as menarche, menstruation, ante natal, natal, post natal health and menopause.

**Key words:** Menopause, Menstruation, Pregnancy, Rasayana, Women

**INTRODUCTION**

The history of women in India has been eventful. Women in ancient India enjoyed equal status with men in all the aspects of life. But from the Mughal and British period, their condition went on deteriorating. After getting independence, the condition of Indian women started improving once again. Since then, several measures are being taken by the Government of India to provide equal opportunities to women in economic, political, social and health sector. So nowadays the condition of women has improved a lot, although it is still not satisfactory in the field of health, especially in rural areas, when compared to global health averages and to men in India. Currently the women in India face a multitude of health problems, which ultimately affect the family and society.

Ayurveda aims at prevention of diseases and maintenance of health. Its adhikarana (object) is Purusha, [1] which in fact refers to the whole human society including males and females. Hence, all measures related to diet, behavioral regimen and medicine are for women also. In our classical texts, woman has been mentioned as the procreator of children and abode of Dharma (righteousness), Artha (wealth), Lakshmi (auspiciousness) and entire universe. [2] The women are appreciated as the root of progeny. [3] Amongst the factors helping in conception, mental peace (happiness) has been considered the best, [4] which speaks of the importance of mental health in women. The ancient acharyas have explained in detail the antenatal, natal and postnatal regimen, the gynecological disorders and their treatment too. One of the eight parts of Ayurveda, the Rasayana therapy, aims at ensuring proper nourishment of all the seven dhatus (body tissues). [5] It is thus beneficial not only for enhancing longevity, intellect, physical and mental strength and reproductive well being, but also for alleviation of disease. But there is no any precise reference in the classical texts for use of Rasayana in females, except in Kashyapa Samhita. [6] In Kashyapa Samhita’s chapter Lashuna Kalpashatra, the medicated preparations Shatapushpa Shatavari Kalpa Rasayana have been described for the women.

**Aims and Objectives of this study**

In view of scarcity of direct references in Ayurveda on the use of Rasayana in accordance with different physiological stages of females, an attempt has been made here to do so after a critical study of authentic Ayurvedic literatures.

**MATERIALS AND METHODS**

For the purpose of this study, first of all the concept of rasayana and its various types was studied and thereafter a
comprehensive study of different relevant literatures was done in order to search for different Ayurvedic rasayanas that can be used in specificity with different physiological stages of female’s life.

DISCUSSION

Types of Rasayana therapy

Depending on the aims or result produced, rasayana can be of three types, i.e. Naimittika rasayana, Ajasrika rasayana and Kamya rasayana. Naimittika rasayana are disease specific and are given to combat or balance a specific cause, which is causing a disease in the body. Ajasrika rasayana are used in routine to maintain good health and improve the quality of life through a healthy lifestyle, e.g. daily intake of milk and ghrita (clarified or purified butter). Kamya rasayana are used to fulfill a wish or desire, or to serve a special purpose; it is further of three types: Prana kanya are used for achieving or maintaining the best quality of prana (vitality, energy) in the body. Medha kamy are used for enhancing the memory and intellect, Shri kamy are used for improving luster and physical beauty. [7] Ayurveda also mentions a drugless form of rasayana, the Achara rasayana, which literally means righteous physical and mental conducts of human. Achara rasayana includes: a) personal behavior - always speaking truth, not getting angry easily, avoiding alcohol intake etc.; b) social behavior- non violence, sweet spoken, respecting elders, teachers etc.; c) Satvika ahara and vihara (righteous diet, reverent and worshipful behavioral regimen)- viz. daily consumption of ghee and milk, having proper sleep and not awakening in night unnecessarily. So, achara rasayana may act as a rasayana in three dimensions, i.e. in improving the personality, social relationship and physical health. [8]

Rasayana therapy in specific physiological stages of female life

In menarche

The timing of menarche is influenced by female biology as well as genetic and environmental factors, especially the nutritional factors. The average age of menarche is thirteen years, [9] whereas Ayurveda considers rajadarshana ayu (menarche) after twelve years. [10] However, prolonged emotional stress, poor nutrition or consistent intensive exercise may delay the onset of the menstrual cycle. According to Charaka, Balyavastha (childhood and young age) extends from birth to 30 years of age. First stage extending from birth to 16 years is characterized by aparipaksa dhatus and sukumarata (stage of immature tissues and infirmity). Second stage extending from 16 to 30 years is characterized by vivardhamana dhatus (tissues undergoing maturation), in which gradual development of dhatus takes place quantitatively and qualitatively and anavasthitra satva (mental faculties in immature stage) is seen in this period. [11] During balyavastha, for proper nourishment and development of dhatus, proper diet plays a major role as it is responsible for development of body, energy, complexion and longevity of Ayu. [12] So for proper development of body during childhood, it is mainly the diet that plays the role of rasayana. Hence females of this stage should also have ideal diet, which includes Rakushali (red variety of rice), Shashtika (a variety of rice which is harvested in summers and gets matured in 60 days), Maduga (Phaseolus mungo- green pulse), Amla (Emblica officinalis), Ghrita and Dugdha (milk) etc. Along with nutritious diet, mental support of the family is also important for the adolescent girl to cope up with this turning point in their life.

During menstrual (reproductive) phase

As there is significant blood loss during this period, nutritious diet and appropriate rest are important elements in this phase of life. The common conditions like menorrhagia, hypomenorrhoea (scanty menstruation), dysmenorrhoea (painful menstruation) and leucorrhoea have been mentioned under different types of artava dashi (different pathological conditions of menstruation) and yoni vyapad (various gynecological disorders). Many rasayana formulations in the form of single drugs, compound drugs or diet have been given importance as a part of treatment for these disorders.

- Rasayana for DUB- Kushmanda khandha (a linctus made of Benincasa hispida and other herbs), [13] Tandulyakamada (Amarahtus tricolor) with Madhu (honey), [14] Madhuka (Glycyrrhiza glabra) and Shākara (crystallized sugar) with rice water, [15] Mudgadya ghrita (a medicated ghrita made of green pulse and other herbs), Shalmali ghrita (a medicated ghrita made of Salmalia malabaricum), Shitakalyanak ghrita (a medicated ghrita made of many herbal drugs), [16] and Rasnadi niruha vasti (a medicated enema made of many herbal drugs). [17]

- Rasayana for Oligomenorrhoea – Oligomenorrhoea in case of nutritional deficiency can be understood as Vataja artavadushti, with inflammatory conditions of reproductive organs as Pittaja artavadushti, and with chronic endometritis or cervicitis as Kaphaja artavadushti and hypoestrogenic oligomenorrhoea as Kshina dushti. [18] Rasayana and Vijakarana (reproductive health enhancers) should be used in these conditions. [19] Shatupsupa (Anethum sowa), Shatavari (Asparagus racemosus) and Lashuna kalpa (Allium sativum) are mentioned to be taken as rasayana in all female disorders. [20] As per Ayurveda, Shatpushpa and Shatavari are just like nectar to the women who suffer from ammenorrhoea, oligomenorrhea, early menopause, absence of menarche, infertility etc. Other rasayana that may be used in this phase of female life are Bhṛata shatavari ghrita, [21] Phala ghrita, [22] Shatavarryadi anuvasana or Guduchiyadi rasayana basti (medicte enemas), Bāladiyamaka anuvasana basti, Yogarajgudagula, [23] Chandraprabha vati, [24] Pugapaka, [25] Mustadi yapana basti, [26] etc. Shali (a variety of rice), Yaava (Hordeum vulgare), Kadattha (Dolichos biflorus), Amla (Emblica officinalis), Tila (Sesamum indicum), Masa (Phaseolus radiata), Dadhi (curd) etc. are mentioned as diets useful in aforesaid conditions.

During pregnancy and postnatal care

Nutritious diet is most important for having a healthy child because the nourishment of fetus is done by the upsneha and upsveda (special nutrition) from the body of the pregnant mother.
Nutritionally poor diet leads to a weak fetus and ultimately intrauterine growth retardation. Ajasrika rasayana plays a role here. Dravyas of rasayana category like Andri (Bacopa monnieri), Brahmi (Centella asiatica), Shatavirya (Asparagus racemosus), Haritaki (Terminalia chebula), Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia) help in conception and maintenance of pregnancy. Monthly regime for the pregnant female has specifically been described, which hints towards the balanced diet. This monthly regime may serve to decrease the risk factors (especially the nutritional) which are harmful for the growth of fetus. The diet mentioned here is based mainly upon milk (or milk products), which in general is considered as the best rasayana. Treatment of pregnant female should be done with mridu (soft), madhura (sweet), sheeta (cold potency) predominant drugs and given in the form of a pleasant diet.

Pippali (Piper longum), Pippalimoola (root of Piper longum), Chavya (Piper chaba), Chitrika (Plumbago zeylanica), Shunthi (Zingiber officinalis) [the Panchakola] with ghrita (purified butter) and taila (oil) followed by Pippalyadi yavas (a dietary preparation made with Piper longum and other drugs) have been mentioned as a part of Sutika swasthavritta (post-natal regimen). Various rasayana used in post natal care are Dasamool ksvath (a decoction etc.) Proper behavioral regimen, mental peace and rest are mandatory, both in pregnancy and postnatal care.

Rasayana for improving lactation are Jiviniyagana churna and Stanayjana mahakashaya (group of lactogenic drugs) which contains eatables like Shali, Shashthika (types of rice), Ikshurasas (juice of sugarcane) and Kasha (Desmotachya bipinnata), Kashva (Saccharum spontaneum) etc. Rasayana mentioned for purifying breast milk are Godhuma (wheat), Shali, Shashthika (types of rice), Mudga (Phaseolus mungo), Kalattha (Dolichos biflora), ashuna and other drugs. This mentioned for purifying breast milk. Eating ashuna with Beutis (sweet), Madhura (sugar), Madhu (honey), Shala (safflower), Madhu (honey), Shala (safflower), Salaka (Asparagus racemosus) and other drugs) has proved beneficial in special situations. The decline of estrogen levels during the premenopausal and postmenopausal period may cause fatigue, hot flushes, water retention, anxiety, depression, mood swings and insomnia. Because estrogen is necessary for the nourishment and building of bone tissue, menopausal women become more susceptible to osteoporosis. Except the mention of age of menopause, there is no any description of menopause and related changes in classical texts. So on the basis of clinical manifestation, some rasayanas may be used for preventive and curative use in this phase of life. Most common are Shutavari and Vidyotini (Pueraria tuberosa), which contain phytoestrogens that help to regulate the hormone levels during menopause. Brahmi (Centella asiatica) and Shankhpushi (Convolvulus pluricaulis) can help to relieve nervous symptoms and calm mental agitation. Also, special calcium rich diet can significantly help in pacifying the menopausal syndrome.

CONCLUSION

Women being an important determinant of the health of family and society need special attention and care, especially with respect to reproductive health. Rasayana Tantra mentioned in Ayurveda is basically a science of nutrition. Simple and easily available and accessible measures as Ajasrika Rasayana in the form of nutrition, Achara Rasayana in the form of mental and emotional support from family members, etc. prove beneficial in special physiological conditions of females like menarche, reproductive (menstrual) age, pregnancy and menopause. A judicious use of various single and compound drugs mentioned under the category of Rasayana and Vajikarana, can act as a boon for women’s health.

3. Ibidem(1): Charaka Samhita: Chikitsasthana; chapter 2.1, verse 6-7; p.390
4. Ibidem(1): Charaka Samhita: Chikitsasthana; chapter 30, verse 5; p.634
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27.Ibidem(1): Charaka Samhita: Sutrasthana; chapter 4, verse 18; p.34.
32.Ibidem(23): Sharangdhar Samhita: Madhyam khand; Chapter 6, verse 17-19; p.176.
35. http://www.menopausematters.co.uk/diet


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