



Review Article

KERALA TRADITIONAL AYURVEDIC PRACTICES IN CHILDREN FOR ENHANCING IMMUNITY - A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Kerala is rich in its culture for the traditional Ayurveda practices in children from the time of birth onwards. These traditional practices are mainly immune boosters and also enhance overall nourishment and development in children. Commonly used traditional Ayurveda practices are *Uramarunnu Prayoga*, *Prakara Yoga*, *Abhyanga*, *Rasanadi churna lepana*, *Snana* etc. for enhancing immunity and providing overall development to children. *Uramarunnu* is a baby care practice comprising of a group of drugs administered to the child in the form of paste in breast milk, after 28 days till 2 years of age. *Prakara Yogas* are immunomodulatory recipes and procedures to be adopted right from the day after delivery. *Abhyanga* provides nourishment, health, protection, emotional well-being and improves skin tone. All these can be used for enhancing immunity and preventing recurrent infections thereby helps in the maintenance of health and prevention of diseases. This mentions the importance of Kerala traditional Ayurvedic practices in the field of primary child health care. So, the present study aims to compile Kerala's traditional Ayurvedic practices in children, by reviewing regional textbooks like *Arogyakalpadruma*, *Vaidya Tarakam*, *Parambarya Balachikitsa* etc., and also interviewing Ayurveda pediatrician through telephone.

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is considered as the most important phase in one's life, which determines the quality of health, well-being, learning and behaviour throughout the life span. This may be the reason for giving the foremost position for *Bala chikitsa* among *Ashtanga* (8 branches) of Ayurveda. Early childhood is a critical period in development, as rapid gain in physical, cognitive and socio- emotional domains constitutes the "building blocks" of children's later growth.^[1]

Kerala's traditional Ayurveda practices provide much importance to primary child health care. Commonly used traditional Ayurveda practices are *Uramarunnu Prayoga*, *Prakara Yoga*, *Abhyanga*, *Rasnadichurna lepana*, *Snana*, *Swarna Prashana* etc for

enhancing immunity and providing overall development in children. *Uramarunnu* is a baby care practice comprising of a group of drugs administered to the child in the form of paste in breast milk, after 28 days till 2 years of age. *Prakara Yogas* are immunomodulatory recipes and procedures to be adopted right from the day after delivery. *Abhyanga* provides nourishment, health, protection, emotional well- being and improves skin tone. *Snana* removes fatigue, sweat, dirt and also enhances development in children. After bath, *Rasnadichurna* should be applied over the bregma in a preventive as well as curative aspect. *Swarna Prashana* is a unique Ayurvedic contribution in child health care. *Swarna bhasma* triturated with honey and *Ghrta*, given in semi solid form soon after birth up to 16 years of age. It enhances the immunity, improves memory, intelligence and appetite and tones up the skin. The purpose of this study is to compile Kerala's Ayurveda traditional practices in children for increasing immunity and enhancing the overall growth and development in children.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Reviewing regional textbooks like *Arogyakalpadruma*, *Vaidya Tarakam*, *Parambariya Balachikitsa* etc and also interviewing Ayurveda paediatrician through telephone.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Uramarunnu has derived its word from the method which is administered i.e., *Ura* refers to rub and *Marunnu*- medicine. *Uramarunnu* includes the drugs such as *Vacha* (*Acorus calamus* Linn.), *Hingu* (*Ferula asafoetida* Linn.), *Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.), *Lasuna* (*Allium sativum* Linn.), *Haridra* (*Curcuma longa* Linn.), *Jatiphala* (*Myristica fragrans* Hent.), *Bakuchi* (*Psoralea corylifolia* Linn.), *Chandana* (*Santalum album* Linn.), *Ela* (*Elettaria cardamom* Maton.), *Jyotishmati* (*Celastrus paniculatus* Wild.), *Yashtimadhu* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra* Linn.), *Vidanga* (*Embelia ribes* Burm. F.), *Sunti* (*Zingiber officinale* Rosc.), *Pippali* (*Piper longum* Linn.), *Maricha* (*Piper nigrum* Linn.), *Mustha* (*Cyperus rotendus* Linn.). These drugs in *Uramarunnu* are rubbed one by one (with breast milk/ honey/cow's milk/ butter generally as a medium and given to children in paste form. This fine paste is applied to tongue of the infant, after that the child is allowed to feed. Common examples that are practiced by traditional pediatric practitioners are in case of constipation *Hareethaki* (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.); in abdominal pain and flatulence *Lasuna* (*Allium sativum* Linn.) are given in more proportion.^[2]

Age of administration: Usually administered after 28 days from birth till 2 years of age

Dose: Given in a dose of 1 pinch or 1 *Vidangaphala* dose and increased as per age to maximum dose of 1 *Amalaki*

Effect of *Uramarunnu* in body

Uramarunnu is seemed to have an effect on these three aspects that needs to be taken into consideration with respect to its action. They are

1. Gastro- intestinal tract protection
2. Central Nervous system stimulation
3. Immunomodulation

Majority of the drugs in *Uramarrunu* are predominantly pungent in taste, light in quality, pungent after digestion and hence alleviates the vitiation of *Kapha*, since childhood is dominant with *Kapha dosha* and hence produce *Kaphaja* disorders. All these *Kaphaja* disorders are brought about due to imbalance in digestive fire. Thus the drugs of *Uramarunnu*, clearly promotes the gut health of the children and thereby improve overall growth both physically and mentally. Enteric nervous system is a subdivision of central nervous system. This enteric nervous system can alter its response depending on the bulk and nutritive content of food materials and medicaments. This bidirectional gut-brain axis integrates the gut and central nervous system activities. Gut- brain axis influences a range of disease, influences the behaviour, links the emotional and cognitive centres of brain with the intestinal function. The healthy gut thus helps the body to develop a strong immune system to fight and resist diseases. It covers multiple positive aspects of the gastro-intestinal tract, such as effective

digestion and absorption of food, the absence of gastro intestinal illness, normal and stable intestinal microbiota, effective immune status and a state of well- being itself.^[3]

Prakara Yogas

Prakara Yogas are immunomodulatory recipes and procedures to be adopted right from the day after delivery. *Prakara Yoga* is explained in the 35th chapter of *Arogyakalpadruma* authored by *Vaidhya Kaikkulanagara Rama Varrier*. *Prakara Yogas* are the indigenous practices for enhancing body immunity and to prevent disease in children. Most of the combinations in *Prakara Yoga* are in the form of powder or ghee. It should be administered right from the birth upto 12 years of age for enhancing no- specific immunity of the body and thereby preventing childhood diseases.

Prakara Yogas will protect the body like walls protecting a house from enemies.

1. For a *Jathamatra*- 3 drops of *Treevatikarsam* with *Vacha* should be instilled on the *Moordhani* for 7 days in the morning from the very next day of birth.
2. For *Pakshateetashishu* (completed 15 days)- *Choorna* of *Vilwapanchanga* mixed with *Dhatrirasa* for 7 days in the morning.
3. For a one-month-old baby- *Choorna* of *Musta*, *Hingu*, *Vidanga* in *Brahmi swarasa* should be given for 7 days in the morning
4. For a 3 month baby-*Choorna* of *Trikatu* and *Sariva* with *Navaneeta* for 7 days in the morning
5. For a 6 month old baby- *Musalikandaja raja* and *Trikatu* with *Madhu* for 7 days in the morning.

Likewise, *Prakara yogas* are being given upto 12 year of age in our Kerala's culture. *Prakara Yogas* are *Deepana* (carminative), *Pachana* (digestive), *Krimighna* (anti-helmenthic), *Medhya* (brain stimulants). *Deepana*, *Pachana* and *Laghu* property helps in correcting deranged digestive fire. Majority of the *Prakarayogas* are in the lipid form (ghee), so it can easily cross the blood brain barrier and thus stimulates the brain. So *Prakara yogas* can be used as immunomodulatory recipe from the time of birth for the overall growth and development in children.^[4]

Abhyanga and Snana

Abhyanga is a very delicate and sophisticated protocol for the infant. *Abhyanga* in children is a way of comforting skin inputs and nourishment for the healthy development of body. In Kerala's tradition, healthy child after birth should perform *Abhyanga* in head and body with milk of *Varattuthenga* (coconut in which water is dried). After *Abhyanga*, cold water from well, pond or lake are used for head bath and body should be bathed with water boiled with leaves of Banyan Tree (*Ficus benghalensis* Linn.) or *Thechi* (*Ixora coccinea*) or *Chandana* (*Santalum album* Linn.) or *Nalapamarapatta* (barks of *Ksheervriksha*).^[5]

According to modern physiology, *Abhyanga* (massage) soothes the nervous system and endocrine system. The pleasure from touching is mediated through limbic system which causes the secretion of hormones

physically equivalent to health and happiness. Massaging found to increase the secretion of human growth hormone (HGH). Growth hormone is believed to speed up the movement of digested proteins (amino acids) out of the blood and into the cells and this accelerates cell anabolism (bulid up of amino acids to form tissue proteins), hence this action promotes normal growth.^[6] *Snana* (bathing) enhances the sleep of children, majority of growth process occur in children during the time of sleep. Thus, both *Abhyanga* and *Snana*, play an inevitable role in the enhancement of child's growth and development.

Rasnadi churna rubbed on the bregma after bath helps to prevent the occurrence of common ailments in children such as *Jwara* (fever), *Pratisyaya* (rhinitis) etc. by cold water head bath may reduce the temperature.

Swarna Prashana

Swarna prashana is a unique Ayurvedic contribution in child health care. According to our tradition, metallic gold is rubbed on clean rubbing stone with honey, till the fine gold particles are released. The rubbed gold or gold powder mixed with fine powder of *Medhya rasayana* herbs, ghee and honey is given to newborn. Nowadays, *Swarnabhasma* triturated with honey and *Ghrta* is being given children upto 16 years of age. Studies revealed that these nano particles of gold might have been absorbed into the body through both sublingual and intestinal route and reach the target site of action causing catalytic stimulation of reticulo-endothelial system and general defence mechanism of the body.^[7]

Time of Administration: It is administered orally on empty stomach, preferably in the early morning.

Dosage

- 2 drops - Upto 6 months
- 4 drops- After 6 months
- It can be given daily for a minimum of 30 days or maximum of 180 days
- It can be given in *Pushya Nakshtra*

Swarna prashana enhances immunity, improves memory, intelligence and appetite and tones up skin. *Swarna prashana* particles comprise of mosaic features in terms of size and shape which results in the intercellular trafficking in dendritic cells. Therefore, dendritic cells present multiple antigens effectively to the T cells. Activated dendritic cells and T cells require soluble

cytokines including IL-7, IL-6, IL-10, IL-12, IL-23, TNF and IFN to exhibit immunogenic response. Thus *Swarna Prashana* provides immune modulatory effect to children.

CONCLUSION

In Kerala there are so many traditional paediatric Ayurveda practices being practiced as well as custom and a part of our culture. There are so many books specifically for *Bala chikitsa* available in Malayalam language in Kerala. All these traditional practices are intended to enhance overall growth and development of child. Among them *Uramarunnu Prayoga*, *Abhyanga* etc are popularly performed procedures for child health care. There are so many other traditional practices which are still forbidden. Further research studies are needed for scientifically validation of these procedures. So research works has to be carried out to establish the efficacy and applicability of this unique legacy for documentation and evidence creation.

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