

WOMEN'S INFERTILITY- AN AYURVEDIC PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

“True healing of any condition, ‘Prakriti Sthapana’, means to restore the mind, body, and spirit to their naturally balanced states.” -Charaka Samhita. Infertility is the failure to naturally conceive a child even after one or more years of regular unprotected coitus or to carry a pregnancy to full term. Reasons such as weight, diet, smoking, other substance abuse, environmental pollutants, infections, medical conditions, medications and family medical history could affect conception in couples. Infertility can arise from either of the partners. According to Ayurveda, there is a simile which emphasises the essential factors for conception. As the four factors – Ritu (season/ time), Ambu (water), Kshetra (Cultivating land) and Beeja (fertile seeds) are very essential to get a healthy crop, similar factors in the human body need to fall in sync to beget a healthy progeny². Ayurveda advises therapies, Panchakarma, lifestyle adjustments, Yoga, and herbal preparations.

KEYWORDS: Ayurveda, Infertility, Vandhyatva.

INTRODUCTION

Infertility is on the rise in many countries. Ayurveda coats that infertility primarily refers to the biological inability of a woman of reproductive age to contribute to conception & also the state of a woman who is unable to carry pregnancy to full term (Harit Samhita). Infertility is also defined in specific terms as the failure to conceive after a year of regular intercourse without contraception according to modern science. Causes of infertility includes ovulation problems, tubal blockage, age-related factors, uterine problems, previous tubal ligation, endometriosis.^[1]

Ayurvedic concept of Vandhyatva (Infertility)

Ayurveda is a science, having its own method of diagnosis & treatment based on it. According to Ayurvedic classics infertility is failure achieve a child rather than pregnancy as *garbha strava* (repeated abortions) & *mrutvatsa* (having repeated still births) is also included in types of infertility.

Important factors of constituents of *garbha* (foetus)^[2] are 1) *Ritu* (fertile period), 2) *kshetra* (reproductive organs), 3) *Ambu* (nutritive fluids), 4) *Beej*(Ovum) -Also healthy psychological status, normal functioning of *Vata* (one of the governing factor of body according to ayurveda), *shadbhava*³(Six factors - mother, father, *atma*, *satva*, *satmya*, *rasa*). Any abnormality in these factors causes infertility. In ayurvedic classics six type of *vandhyatva* are noted, which seems to be specific clinical features,

garbha kosh bhanga (injury to uterus), *kakvandhya* (one child sterility or secondary infertility), *anapatya* (no child or primary infertility), *garbhastravi* (repeated abortions), *mrutvatsa* (repeated still births), *balakshaya* (loss of strength) Prognosis of infertility (cited by classics) is depends on the cause, in *beejdosha*- (developmental abnormalities of reproductive organs) is incurable, *anapatya* & *kakvandhya* can be treatable. In *ayurveda* main cause of any abnormal function in body is *agnimandya* & *tri dosha dushti* (vitiation of three governing factors of body).^[3] (*Harita*).

Ayurvedic interpretation of the female reproductive system

Ayurveda identifies the female reproductive systems as follows: “*Shroni*” means the pelvis. Female pelvis is 24 *Angulas* and is heavier than the pelvis of the male. There are three *Srotas* (also called capillaries) in women’s body –

- *Rajovaha*:- includes uterus, cervix and vagina along with their blood supply.
- *Artavaha*:- includes ovary and fallopian tube along with their blood supply.
- *Stanyavaha*:- includes breast tissue along with its blood supply.^[3]

“*Ashaya*” means any recipient viscus. “*Garbhasaya*” means uterine cavity, situated behind the “*Bhagasthi*” (symphysis pubis) and a little above the bladder which is surrounded by coils of intestines and is placed between

small intestine (*Pittashaya*) and large intestine (*Paquashaya*). “*Yoni*” consists of all the female genital organs.

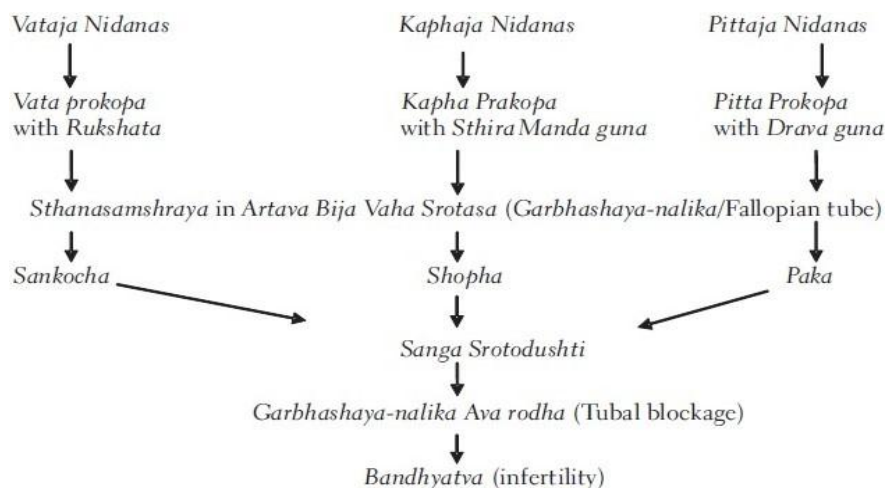
“*Vajikarana*” is the *ayurvedic* medicine that deals with issues of infertility. The word “*Vaji*” means “horse,” so *Vajikarana* means “to make one potent like a horse.” “*Guhyaroga*” is used for the diseases of the female reproductive system. *Garbharoga* is the term for the diseases of the uterus. *Yoni Vyapat* refers to the diseases of the vagina. *Ayurveda* states that, conception is the result of healthy sperm, healthy ovum, and a healthy uterus. Reproductive health of both men and women depends on the health of the *Shukra Dhatu*, (reproductive tissue). In women, the ovum is produced by *Shukra* tissue as a part of the monthly cycle, and in men, sexual stimulation is responsible for semen formation⁴. The *Shukra Dhatu* itself is created as part of a long chain of metabolic transformations, starting with the food digestion including the transformation of food to nutrient fluid, blood, muscle, fat, bone, bone marrow and finally,

to *Shukra* tissue. Healthy *Shukra Dhatu*, then, depends on the health of all the other tissues in the body⁵. In order to conceive a healthy child, one should be fully healthy oneself (*swastha*). This optimum state of health provides the fertile ground for the embryo to implant and grow.⁶

Types of infertility as written in classical texts:

- *Vandhya* absolute sterility and incurable.
- *Apraja* women can become pregnant and curable.
- *Sapraja* women who become inflicted with infertility during her childbearing years after already conceiving one or more children.

Menstrual cycle (an indication of the state of the health of the female) can be affected by many factors, such as diet, emotional instability, excessive physical exercise, life-style, and stress responsible for creating an imbalance of the *Doshas* (control the activities of the body-*Vata*, *Pitta* and *Kapha*).⁵



TREATMENT

“*Ayurveda* doesn’t rely on intervention by a foreign substance to correct or replace the hormones your body has been using all of your life. Instead, it supports your health by strengthening your body’s own self-healing and balancing mechanisms.” According to *Ayurveda*, preparing for conception can be easily compared to the process of farming. Just like the health of a crop depends on the quality of soil, seed, timing of sowing, and amount of watering it gets, the health of a baby depends on the health of its parents. For a pregnancy to be healthy and successful, a couple needs to take care of the following four essential factors:

- Sperm/Ovum (Seeds)
- Uterus (Soil)
- Nourishment (Water)
- Time for Conception (Timing of Sowing)

According to the *Charaka Samhita*, “All disease occurs due to imbalance in *Agni* (the power of digestion) and *Agni* is the single most important factor in the buildup of

Ama. As a result, the treatment of *Ama* must always include the treatment of *Agni*, including the use of digestive herbs and spices, eating meals on schedule and the elimination of cold foods and drinks.” *Panchakarma*, the *Ayurvedic* deep internal cleansing procedure, can also be utilized to eliminate *Ama*. Healthy *Agni* will also contribute to healthy *Ojas*.

Diet and Lifestyle Advice

- Consume more of dairy proteins, including milk, lassi (buttermilk), and panir (fresh cheese made of milk).
- Eat soaked almonds or soaked walnuts (you can grind them and add them to your vegetables).
- Sweet, juicy fruits such as mangoes, peaches, plums, and pears are recommended.
- Spices such as ajwain (bishop’s weed) powder, cumin (which purifies the uterus in women and the genitourinary tract in men), turmeric (to improve the interaction between hormones and targeted tissues),

and black cumin are also good for enhancing fertility.

- If your digestion is strong, eat urad daal (Split Black Gram) cooked with equal parts of turmeric, cumin, coriander, and fennel.
- A banana cooked in ghee, cinnamon, and cardamom is a tasty and wholesome dessert for people with strong digestion
- Avoid high-fat foods and foods containing preservatives
- Caffeine should also be limited, especially if you're having trouble conceiving.
- Refined carbs, such as white bread, pasta and rice, should be limited.
- Smoking, eating a lot of meat, or drinking alcohol is not recommended.
- Stress can have a major impact on women's fertility. The importance of a positive attitude is essential when trying to get pregnant.
- Being both overweight and underweight can impair a woman's odds of getting pregnant. If you are underweight, your reproductive system will shut down because of the body's inability to maintain a pregnancy. On the other hand, being overweight or obese reduces a woman's chances of getting pregnant.

Ayurvedic herbs

As infertility is not a disease by itself but a manifestation of some disease, the herbs used in the treatment are directed towards eradicating the underlying cause.^[6] The most commonly known and used herbs such as *Ashwagandha* (*Withania Somnifera*), *Shatavari* (*Asparagus Racemosus*), *Amlaki* (*Emblica Officinalis*) and herbal formulas such as *Mensu* and *Chyavanprash* are extremely useful formulations which help create the synergistic hormonal balance between the Follicle Stimulating Hormone (FSH) and the Luteinizing Hormone (LH).^[7]

Fertility boosting herbs

- Vitex: Boosts fertility; alleviates symptoms of premenstrual syndrome; regulate irregular menstrual cycle and heavy bleeding.
- Red raspberry: Excellent source of calcium, magnesium and Iron, strengthens the uterus.
- Nettles: Nourishes reproductive and adrenal systems; prevents birth defects and aids in implantation and cell division.
- Oatstraw: Hormone balancer; Nervine; aphrodisiac; nourishing herb.
- Damiana: Balances irregular menstrual cycle; nourish reproductive system; boosts fertility Maca: Boosts libido; regulate hormones and improves the health of egg.
- Alfaalfa: Nourishes reproductive organs.
- Red Clover: Fertility booster; blood purifier.
- False Unicorn: Promotes healthy menstrual cycle and help in correcting recurrent miscarriages.

- Saw Palmetto: Nourishes reproductive system; boosts fertility.

No individual herb alone is considered useful for promoting fertility. Therefore, a combination of herbs is used in the treatment of infertility with the purpose of correcting an organic or functional problem that caused infertility.^[14]

Medicated ghees and oils such as *satapushpa tailam*, *narayana tailam*, *phala sarpis*, *kalyana ghrita*, *kalyana gulam*, *dadimadi ghrita* and commonly used.^[8] The right combination of herbs helps in regulating menstrual cycles, enhancing general health and wellness, invigorating sperm (enhancing a man's sperm count, morphology and motility), reducing stress, enhancing sleep controlling anxiety and increasing energy level, balancing the endocrine system, increasing the chance of pregnancy for women undergoing in-vitro fertilization (IVF) and improving blood flow in pelvic cavity, thereby promoting fertility.^[9]

Body therapies: *Ayurvedic* body therapies such as *Shirodhara*, *Abhyanga*, *marma* therapy, *Nasya*, *Basti*, *chakra* balancing *Pinda*, *Visesh* and *vedana* help in releasing tension, impurities and trapped energy within the body. They nourish the body, revitalize the mind and strengthen the immune system. Rejuvenation therapies are beneficial in reducing stress, nourishing all *dhatu*s of the body and pacifying *Vata*.^[10]

Panchakarma: is usually prescribed for infertile couples. Rejuvenative therapies are basically recommended for *Vata Dosh*a, and cooling light therapies for *pitta Dosh*a. *Shodhana chikitsa* helps in uterine hostility, and non-ovulatory cycles. To remove local disorders, to remove obstructions in passage and to facilitate proper coitus, and to increase receptivity of the genital tract to the entry of the sperm, *Basti* is recommended. Massaging the body reduces stress, rejuvenates the entire body, and pacifies the underlying *Dosh*a.^[11]

Massage therapy: The massage can help in increasing the chances of conception by clearing blocked fallopian tubes. Reflexology, is an effective technique of interrupting stress and returning the body to a state of equilibrium which involves massaging different areas of the hands and feet (to establish the tension level for the rest of the body) corresponding to those internal organs that may cause infertility.^[12]

Acupuncture is yet another option that can be done on its own or along with other assisted reproductive technology (ART) procedures.^[11]

CONCLUSION

Infertility has increased tremendously in the past decade and this is due to the result of a combination of social, environmental, psychological, and nutritional factors. Today, the modern medicine has the ability to find out

the causes of infertility in an individual through several diagnostic tests and examinations. Using these tests, the treatment focuses on correcting and treating the dysfunction. Infertility is managed by looking at the reproductive system components. *Ayurveda* pays attention to each individual body types, enhances the body systems participating in the process of fertilization and therefore serves as an excellent alternative for reaching fertilization. *Ayurveda* addresses the internal balances and external influences contributing to the problem by building the *Ojas*, improving the overall health of the individual, stimulating the hypothalamus and pituitary glands thereby indirectly inducing the ovaries to ripen and release eggs. *Ayurveda* provides a noninvasive, low cost and non-iatrogenic alternative and complement to modern western medicine in the treatment of female infertility. Because *Ayurveda* focuses on rebalancing individuals rather than just treating diseases, its treatments are have low potential for side effects.

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