



# DIVINE DELIVERY

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Thousands of years ago in the cradle of civilisation, mother India conceived a natural ayurvedic approach to nurture parents and babies through the journey of creation. Today, with the world's second largest population, India's accumulated wisdom complements modern obstetrics, offering tips for a healthy pregnancy, smooth delivery and a blissful baby.

## **Planned Parenthood**

"Making the decision to have a child is momentous. It is to decide forever to

have your heart go walking around outside your body." ~ Elizabeth Stone.

For many, the time to have a child is thrust upon them rather than consciously chosen. Some say there's never a perfect time to have a child but that fate schedules it, along with the moment of birth and death. Couples ambivalent about having children rather than following a calling may be called up to parental duty by destiny. Others can eagerly prepare for a child that never appears. Ayurveda sees children as a precious gift from the gods to be welcomed whether invited or not. They are gurus who can prompt parents to cultivate qualities that may have otherwise lay dormant, virtues like unconditional love. In many ancient cultures becoming a parent is considered an enriching rite of passage, a momentous milestone presenting an opportunity for spiritual growth and deeper relationships. As Peter De Vries appreciated "The value of marriage is not that adults produce children but that children produce adults." Though the prospect of parenting may seem overwhelming many couples say that once they arose to meet the challenge and accepted the lifestyle adjustment the blessings far outweighed the sacrifices.

Preparing psychologically and physically for the little angel's arrival optimises the mother and child's state through the childbearing process. Just as a healthy seed bears healthy fruit, if the parent's sperm and ovum are pure then the child is more likely to inherit a strong constitution and immunity. Conversely if parents conceive when mentally or physically weak this may impact negatively on the child's condition. With the intention of giving their child the happiest and healthiest genetic inheritance ayurveda suggests parents observe a preconception regime called vajikaranam. The ancient text Charaka Samhita explains- "The aim of vajikaranam is to enable a couple to produce healthy progeny who can assist them to perform their life's mission (dharma)." About six months before conception an ayurvedic physician prescribes a personalised purification and rejuvenation regime for the couple to ensure optimal ovum and sperm quality and quantity.

Men are advised to take virilizing herbs such as Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), Sariba (*Hemidesmus indicus*) and Kapi Kachu (*Mucuna pruriens*).

This may include lifestyle changes, a nutrition plan, herbs, cleanses, yoga and meditation. The couple avoids chemicals such as in food or personal care products and wean off pharmaceutical medicine when possible. Energising exercises also increase fertility and virility but must be done in moderation. To prepare the 'womb room' for the special guest women can balance their menstrual cycle and take cleansing and fortifying herbs and supplements. Essential fatty acids, Calcium, Magnesium, Folic acid, Iron, B12, B6 and Zinc are particularly vital to prevent birth defects. General female tonics include Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), Ashoka (*Saraca indica*). Men are advised to take virilizing herbs such as Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), Sariba (*Hemidesmus indicus*) and Kapi Kachu (*Mucuna pruriens*). There are also many compound formulations for optimum fertility. The efficacy of these can be seen at the specialist infertility centre at Kerala's Shoranur Ayurveda Samajam where they claim a 95% success rate with couples wanting to conceive. General reproductive tonic foods recommended include warm unhomogenised milk, ghee, yoghurt, black sesame seeds, urad dal, mung dal, honey, dates, almonds, ginger, garlic, onions and saffron. Hot spices should be avoided. Daily self massage and sufficient rest is observed to charge the body with positive hormones.

Couples who share their expectations, excitement and fears about having a child will forge deeper bonds of understanding to sustain them through the experience. Couples who attune their desires for parenthood are more mentally ready for the new phase of their life and are less likely to resent the sacrifices and compromises that may be demanded. Sharing the commitment to create a loving and supportive environment makes it a more positive experience for all. This is the time to iron out any relationship

riffs by spending quality time together aligning hearts and future intentions realising that a happy couple are more likely to make happy parents, transmitting contented energy to their receptive baby. Spending time together around babies can reinforce the realities and joys of the decision for them both. Another way to build excitement is to think of their child's character and envisage a fulfilling future for the family unit. Though this may not manifest precisely it builds a positive expectation that inspires couples to maintain faith and enthusiasm through any trials. This shared sankalpa or powerful intention for a beloved baby also generates a powerful magnetic attraction for the soul to enter the womb. Love is the best libido booster to set the mood according to ayurvedic sage Charaka who says "the best aphrodisiac for a man is a woman who loves him."

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Another Vedic belief is that one can connect with ancestors to invoke their blessings and support for the child. Annual rituals to appease forebears also help to clear detrimental familial karma, aka the 'Kennedy curse', that may be passed on to the child. A modern method of clearing negativity and receiving blessings from the family tree is called the 'Rayid Birth Order', developed by Denny Johnson. One can practice this easy process by ordering a fee booklet called Global Gratitude from [www.rayid.com](http://www.rayid.com).

### **Making a Miracle**

A relationship ripe with mutual love and commitment may naturally grow into the co-creation of a child. This is why the Vedas call the married phase expansion or garhasthyam. The sacred ceremony for impregnation is known as Garbadhana samskara. Ideally the field is fertile to germinate the seed through the preparatory purification, rejuvenation and emotional practices.

The prime time for procreation is calculated by the woman's ovulation phase. Women with regular menses and awareness of their cervical mucus changes and temperature shifts can often sense their most fertile time. Alternatively one can purchase a pharmacy ovulation test or seek guidance from a natural fertility consultant.

An Indian astrologer (Jyotish) can also advise the most auspicious time called rtu-samaagam for successful conception. Ayurvedic texts warn that it is detrimental to conceive at certain times including after a heavy meal, within 96 hrs of the menstrual period, during dawn or dusk, at midnight, on a full moon, new moon, fasting days and

when the woman is bleeding. Days considered lucky for conception are on the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 12th, 14th and 15th days after the end of the menses. If you have a gender preference the Vedas states conceiving on an odd day will produce a daughter and an even day a son. To optimise the man's sperm volume and motility it is best if he can conserve his sperm for three to seven days before the conception day. Because the couples' consciousness partially determines the type of soul attracted to them and imbues the zygote with its first subtle influence it is recommended that they elevate their spirits and connect with divine grace by meditation, offerings or rituals. On this significant day they should feel contented and deeply connected. If either feels thirsty, hungry, fearful, sad or angry it is better to wait. After preparing the 'love nest', bathing, dressing in fresh white garments and applying essential oils and flower garlands they can recite the following prayer from Charaka Samhita in unison.

Aum ahirasi ayurasi sarvata pratishtasi dhaata tvam,  
dadhaatu vidhaata tvam, dadhatu bramhavarcasa bhava  
Brahama brhaspatir vishnu soma surya tatha asvinau  
Bhagotha mitra varunau veeram daddaatu me sutaam

This is translated as "O creator and the cosmic truth! Please bless us with a courageous/strong child with a long life and health, with the qualities of Brahma (power to create), Brhaspati (power to alter the future), Vishnu (power to maintain), Soma (power to flourish), Surya (power to be succeed), Mitra (power to love) and Varuna (power to nurture)".

They can focus on welcoming the child to its new home and on tender feelings for each other. If the man then breathes through his right nostril and the woman through her left this is said to optimise conception chances. Alighting the bed with his right foot first the woman joins him by placing her left leg on the bed. Intimacy infused with blissful abandon will instil the child's initial cells with the same essence of ecstasy, giving it a positive start to existence and a sound foundation for a satisfied spirit. First they enjoy leisurely foreplay to stimulate the juices of arousal and establish an energetic connection. During intercourse the woman should not lie on her side or kneel as disturbed vata (air and ether) will affect the genitals when lying on the right side and on the left side pitta (fire and water) can overheat the sperm and ovum. Lying on her back with her legs straddling her partner promotes the upward flow of sperm.

After making love the woman lies down for 30 minutes and for a comfortable duration she can rest her raised legs at a 45° angle to optimise chances of conception. To rejuvenate they may then have a bath and eat sweet rice, saffron and honey. The woman takes it easy for the next three weeks and an Indian custom is to keep the news of conception a secret until the first trimester is complete.

## Pregnant Pause

“From the first day of conception the pregnant woman should always remain in a happy mood, be clean, wear ornaments, dress in white clothes and partake in prayers for peace, good deeds and worship.” Sushruta Samhita, sarira sthana

Pregnancy is a time of great transformation when the amazing changes experienced, though natural, can be stressful if not managed properly. Every woman has a unique experience of childbearing. The lucky ones find they thrive with the new life growing inside them and may feel healthier after pregnancy than before. Serious health conditions can even go into remission at this time as the body harnesses healing energy to support the baby. Others may struggle with symptoms such as nausea, acidity, body pain, fatigue, varicosities and depression, never quite recovering their former pre-pregnancy health. Ayurveda encourages mothers to adopt a nurturing daily routine and diet so she blossoms along with the flower of love flourishing inside her. It also offers effective solutions to common complaints such as morning sickness but these are safest when prescribed by an ayurvedic consultant.

Everything that affects the mother impacts on the baby thus she should surround herself with positive influences and avoid detrimental stimuli. As ayurvedic doctor Robert Svoboda advises, once pregnant “everything you do, see and hear should be soft, pleasing and wholesome, to reassure and strengthen the growing baby.”

The deep connection between the mother and child is called entrainment- a state where energies resonate in harmony. Hence a contented, healthy, aware mother will send nurturing energy to her child while a disturbed mother will adversely affect the child. A remarkable study illustrating this showed that an expectant mother in an abusive marriage had a 237% greater risk of giving birth to a psychologically or physically damaged child than a woman in a secure, supportive relationship. This is even a greater risk than a mother smoking or having a severe illness.<sup>1</sup> Other studies showed that a mother with a positive attitude to her baby and childbearing was more likely to deliver a healthy, well-adjusted child.

When the expectant woman is showered with love this filters through to the baby along with all other positive input. Hence, friends and family, especially the father, are encouraged to offer the pregnant woman any assistance and attention she needs, including help with domestic duties, massage, having fun or allowing her the stress-free solitude she may desire. Since a woman’s brain literally shrinks during pregnancy and she is under the influence of fluctuating hormones those around her should be particularly sensitive and understanding of uncharacteristic mood swings or emotions. Ayurvedic texts say a pregnant woman is to be treated as delicately as if one is carrying a pot full to the brim with oil, without spilling a drop.

To reduce the chance of disturbances during pregnancy ayurveda’s art of obstetrics advises a regime for the pregnant woman to follow called Garbhini Paricharya. These reduce the risk of miscarriage, harm to the foetus and toxemia.

### Things to avoid during pregnancy include:

- 1 Constipating, drying foods such as spinach, dried fruit, potatoes and bitter tasting items.
- 2 Heavy, hot, pungent or fermented (sour) food.
- 3 Processed, artificial foods, nutmeg, saffron and ginseng
- 4 Overeating, irregular eating or fasting
- 5 Exposure to extreme emotions such as anger, excitement, fear and grief
- 6 Excessive exposure to pollution and electromagnetic energy including computer and television screens
- 7 Alcohol, drugs and caffeine
- 8 Hot baths
- 9 Deep bodywork
- 10 Excessive sun and wind
- 11 Heavy, jerky exercise, weights, wearing high heels
- 12 Physical and emotional strain
- 13 Exposure to sick people
- 14 Excess of any taste. This can have serious repercussions on the baby's health.
- 15 Wearing red
- 16 Rough, rocky roads or trips
- 17 Sitting on hard surfaces
- 18 Sleeping regularly during the day
- 19 Suppression of natural urges (such as sneezing or burping)
- 20 Squatting
- 21 Exposure to an eclipse
- 22 Looking down from a great height or into canyons
- 23 Vomiting therapy and blood letting
- 24 Sleeping supine with outstretched extremities as this may cause the umbilicus to tie around the baby's neck
- 25 Sex, especially in the first four months as it may harm the foetus or strain the mother.
- 26 Vitamin C more than 1000mg (1gm) per day and -Vitamin A (retinol) intake is dangerous for the foetus therefore should be avoided during pregnancy.
- 27 Some essential oils should be avoided during pregnancy including Angelica, Basil, Clary sage, Clove, Cinnamon, Cypress, Fennel, Lemongrass, Marjoram, Pennyroyal, Peppermint, Rosemary, Sage and Thyme.
- 28 Avoid cat and dog faeces as they can contain a toxin called toxoplasma which harms a foetus

### Things to do during pregnancy include:

- 1 Sleep before 10am and arise before 6.30am. Women with regular sleep patterns were found to have babies with similar habits
- 2 Practice daily self-massage with warm sesame oil or herbalised oil such as Dhanwantaram Thailam. Massage should be done in a warm, quiet room with pleasant music playing. Use an open palm rather than fingertips and apply long strokes on long bones and circular strokes around the joints. Spend more time on painful areas but be careful to be gentle on the abdominal region where it is best to softly stroke in a clockwise direction around the naval. This reduces stress marks, soothes the neuromuscular system, aids assimilation and elimination whilst reducing leg swelling and varicosities.
- 3 Wear loosing fitting clothes of natural fibers and comfortable shoes.
- 4 Enjoy at least twenty minutes of fresh air and sunshine daily
- 5 Practice gentle yoga, pelvic floor exercises and pranayama or Lamaze techniques as guided by a qualified teacher. This promotes a peaceful mind and a strong, flexible body, preventing problems during pregnancy and delivery whilst hastening post-natal recovery.
- 6 Practice daily prayer, yoga nidra and meditation. This unifies one's physical, mental and spiritual self, creating a better biochemical environment for the child to thrive in. A relaxed mind supports a relaxed body as proven in studies that showed meditation decreases the stress hormone cortisol significantly.<sup>2</sup> Studies have also shown that babies of mothers who meditated regularly through pregnancy experienced alpha brainwave states twice as much after birth as babies of non-meditating mothers.
- 7 Take gentle walks or swims to ease muscle tension, assist circulation, elimination and assimilation. It is said that a lazy, inactive mother is more likely to beget a lazy child.
- 8 Wear calming, cooling sandalwood essential oil.
- 9 Observe the personalized dietary guidelines as prescribed by an ayurvedic physician or follow basic nutrition tips.
- 10 Choose the location of the birth whether at home, a birth centre or a hospital. Familiarise yourself with the set up and systems of the place.
- 11 Develop a trusting relationship with the midwife and/ or obstetrician. The midwife or birth attendant should be experienced, friendly, alert, expert, affectionate, concerned and caring. Once in labor it can be hard to absorb new information or make rational decisions so it is best to clarify your ideas beforehand. Discuss preferences regarding interventions such as inducement, forceps, suction, caesarian and pain relief possibilities such as gas, pethidine and epidurals. Also inform them of any special requests regarding the environment, support people, birth position and post-natal baby bonding.
- 12 Check chilbirth costs and medical insurance entitlements.

- 13 Prepare the baby's space at home complete with sleeping arrangement, change table, antiseptic hand wash, unbleached cotton nappies, pilchers, natural baby wipes, natural talcum powder, wondersuits, beanies, sea sponge for bathing, syringe to give baby medicine if needed, thermometer, bunny rugs and car capsule or seat.
- 14 Investigate a good nappy service.
- 15 Establish a "bosom buddy" who is happy to supply you with breast milk should something go wrong with breastfeeding.
- 16 Ayurveda recommends regular baths in rose petals and pounded castor leaves.
- 17 Read uplifting, enlightening material. Talking sweetly to the baby and playing relaxing music or specific classical tunes (ragas) has shown to benefit both mother and baby. Hearing is the first sense that the foetus develops. From ten to twelve weeks after conception any stimulation causes nerve cells in the baby's brain to transmit waves of neural activity forming permanent neural patterns. The type of stimuli determines which synapses are formed and become dominant and if connections are not forged at this formative phase the baby will not attain its full potential. Therefore it is important for the mother and father to talk or sing sweetly to the baby whilst in the womb as the neural pathways formed will allow the baby to recognize its mothers voice and respond to her touch. Vedic texts also say we start learning in the womb, giving examples of great Saints Prahlad Maharaj, Abhimanyu and Sukadeva Gosvami receiving spiritual knowledge while in utero. Ontario conductor Boris Brott confers with this realizing he knew certain pieces of music unseen which he later discovered his cellist mother played while pregnant with him.

Dr T. Mythily, Chief Music Therapist, Apollo Hospitals, Chennai, conducted a study using classical Indian Raga music therapy on 200 mothers. Her research led her to conclude that music stimulation to the foetus in the womb encourages the rapid development of the prefrontal lobe, which actually facilitates easy and efficient learning. "These babies are three weeks ahead of their counterparts in acquiring skills and knowledge and this tendency seems to continue well into their lives," she believes "if mothers refrained from playing the music all mothers reported agitated kicks by the foetus at these times. And as soon as the music was played, the foetus calmed down." All the women participating in her study also reported that the music helped them to relax during pregnancy and they all had normal deliveries. Numerous studies show that the use of music therapy successfully decreases anxiety levels, reduces negative expectations and relieves physical and mental tension in expectant mums. Music with guided imagery and in conjunction with such practiced breathing technique can be an extremely effective cue for correct breathing as it becomes an almost natural physical response to the rhythm and tempo of the music.

## Diet during pregnancy

The nutrient rich soil of the mother's body ensures the germinating seed receives optimal nourishment to develop into a strong and stable sapling. A well-fed mother will be able to feed her foetus all its requirements while accumulating reserves for abundant breast milk.

In general a pregnant woman should eat cooked, liquid, warm, fresh, organic meals containing all six tastes of sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent in the right proportion. In the latter phase of pregnancy the stomach is squashed hence small, frequent meals are usually more digestible. She should avoid skipping meals, fasting and eating on the run or in stressful circumstances. A mother will also instinctually crave tastes to balance her and the baby. This especially manifests during the fourth month when the child's heart develops and the mother becomes known as 'the one with two hearts' (dauhrudini). It is said that the child's desires are expressed through the mother's cravings and the baby will be healthy if their desires are fulfilled with judicious moderation. Healthy alternatives may be substituted for unhealthy desires. For example a craving for chocolate which is acidic may be substituted for alkalising carob. Sugar cravings can be managed with maple or rice syrup.

General additions to the diet include wholegrains, butter, ricotta cheese, paneer, ghee, mung dal, blanched almonds, honey, banana, dates, jackfruit, gooseberry, grapes, apples, raisins, fresh vegetables such as asparagus, okra, squash and milk. Milk is strongly advised but it should be unhomogenised, organic and boiled with a little ginger, turmeric, and cardamom to reduce mucus.

Foods to avoid include fish, meat, alcohol, carbonated drinks, caffeine, onions, garlic, mushrooms, fermented foods, leftovers, heavily processed and artificial foods.

Keep in mind however that these general guidelines should be adjusted according to the individual's digestion and health.

Ayurvedic obstetrics (Prasuti Tantra) recognised the different phases of foetal development thousands of years before modern imaging techniques existed. In order to support each developmental phase of the baby Ayurvedic doctors devised certain herbs and foods to be taken each month of pregnancy. This includes a different monthly milk decoction recorded in the Sahasrayoga text which is made by combining 15gms of the monthly herb with 200mls milk and 800mls water then reducing it to one fourth the quantity and drinking daily before bed.

The monthly therapeutic regime recommended is as follows:

### First Month

In this initial phase the foetus is stabilised and fed through direct nourishment from digested liquids and blood. At this time more liquid substances such as sweet and ripe fruits, coconut water and milk are advocated. A traditional practice to ensure a healthy

child immediately after conception involves taking 8 fig leaf buds (*Ficus bengalensis*) boiled in milk and strained for three consecutive mornings on an empty stomach. For the rest of the month the milk decoction is with Bala (*Sida rhombifolia*.)

### **Second Month**

During this time the baby starts to assume a shape with its limbs and head. The milk decoction taken at this time is with the herb Lakshmana (*Ipomeoa spear*). A tonic jam called Sonitamrtam for energy can also be started from the 2nd month onwards at a dose of half a teaspoon twice daily.

### **Third Month**

The placenta is established by now and the baby's motor and sensory faculties start to develop. The heartbeat can be perceived towards the end of the month and this is when the child lets its desires be known through the mother's cravings. The mother can take more milk with honey, ghee and Shashtika shaali (rice grown in 60 days) cooked in milk. In Bengal they observe a ceremony called svada-bhaksana where after the first trimester and on the seventh month a woman eats with all her favourite neighbouring children to maintain her enthusiasm regarding the child's arrival. The milk decoction taken this month is made with the herb *Solanum melenginum* (Bruhati).

### **Fourth Month**

Ayurveda advises the mother take more butter, milk, solid foods and shashtika rice with yoghurt at this time. Also yellow or orange coloured fruits are advocated such as mangoes, apples, carrots and gooseberries. The child's tissues are growing now so the mother's appetite often increases over the entire second trimester. To help prevent intrauterine growth retardation (IUGR) the milk decoction is made with *Desmodium gangeticum* (Shaliparni).

### **Fifth Month**

Blood, muscles, the mind and five senses develop at this time. Ghee, milk and rice soup is to be taken along with split mung dal or a preferred protein source. Milk with Amrita (*Tinospora cordifolia*) decoction is taken during the fifth month.

### **Sixth Month**

According to the scripture the Srimad Bhagavatam at the end of the sixth month the male moves to the right side of the abdomen and the female to the left. It is also during the sixth month that the fatty tissue is formed. *Tribulus Terrestris* may be given if water retention is a problem and the milk decoction is made with *Solanum xanthocarpum* (Kantakari).

## Seventh Month

In the seventh month most of the foetal growth is complete and the skin, hair and nails are forming. Fat, salt and water is reduced in the diet from the seventh month onwards. Rice soup with ghee can be a regular easily digested dish. Small amounts of basil can also be taken as an anti-spasmodic. *Hordeum vulgare* (Yava) and milk decoction is taken during this month. In addition a classical compound called Sukha-prasava Ghee may be given to ease the delivery.

## Eighth Month

The child is well developed at this stage and the mother must be careful not to overeat as her digestion is weak and the stomach small. Sour buttermilk is added to the special diet as a digestive enzyme stimulant. A small dose of internal oil concentrates Dhanwantaram 101 or Ksheerabala 101 may be given after dinner to lubricate the reproductive channels in preparation for childbirth. The herb *Maerua oblongifolia* (Morata) and milk is taken as the eighth month decoction.

## Ninth Month

In this last crucial stage lighter food is advised such as rice soup with ghee, split mung bean soup, stewed fruit and steamed vegetables. Oil enema is sometimes given every 10 days to promote a smooth delivery along with daily dhara where warm herbalised oil is poured all over the body and forehead to relax the nervous system and open and soften the body for delivery. The perineum is massaged and stretched to prepare for labour and to reduce the risk of tearing. Another way to do this is with the new clinically tested Epi-No inflatable device. This birth and pelvic floor trainer is designed to gently stretch and train the perineum for the physical strain of delivery. A Melbourne study found it reduced the risk of tears and made women feel more confident about childbirth according to Professor Gab Kovacs, medical director of Monash IVF.

Thanka-shree Ghee is sometimes given in the last month of pregnancy to aid complete foetal development and to ensure the pregnancy is a full term normal delivery. The milk decoction is made with *Asparagus racemosus* (Shatavari) during this month. For those who cannot follow all these monthly observances, a simple solution is to take *Sida rhombifolia* with milk before bed and 1 tsp Mahakalyanaka Ghee before breakfast for the whole pregnancy. These assist the child's physical and mental development as well as preventing congenital abnormalities.

## Labour of Love

If you want to make god laugh- tell him your plans, the saying goes but could be changed to "tell him your birth plans" in many cases. As anyone who has been present at a delivery can testify -it literally takes on an unexpected life of its own. However, when a pregnant woman expects the best whilst preparing for all possibilities, the journey will

prove an empowering and enriching experience. With information and understanding she can take a responsible role in protecting the miracle inside her, knowing her input is vital whilst serenely surrendering the outcome to mother nature.

As with any life challenge, mentally and physically preparing for labour will bolster a mother's confidence and capabilities. Though an amazing event, it isn't called 'labour' for nothing. Bearing in mind that woman have been having babies since time-immemorial and that they are purpose-built for the honour can make the process more bearable. The toil of labour can seem more tolerable if the mother keeps in mind the sweet fruit of her sweaty labour- a cherubic child. Many times I've witnessed the trial of agony turn to ecstasy as a mother first holds her bundle of bliss, tears of pain transforming into tears of joy.

Though Ayurveda ideally promotes natural labour it also recognises the role of a caesarean and modern obstetric support where necessary. With thousands of expert midwives in India called dais, natural childbirth remains common in village areas but in cities the rate of intervention has risen alarmingly over the past decade. Dr. P.L.T. Girija advocates a return to Ayurveda after seeing the increase in complications due to the often unnecessary medical interventions including caesarian and episiotomies which have become standard practice in India. She says "with minimal resources, and with locally available material, mid-wives provided the optimum ante and post-natal care to the mother-to-be and prepared her for natural, easy and painless childbirth. They knew how to manipulate and handle abnormal foetal presentations and to resuscitate and revive the baby when necessary. They performed deliveries leaving the perineum intact and, in most cases, massaged and bathed the mother with medicinal oils and hot water which reduced her body pain, gave her a sense of well-being and hastened her recovery. They would massage the woman's abdomen and tie up the loose abdominal muscles."

There is a growing trend in the western world to have independent midwives also called doulas supervise women through their pregnancy, delivery and post-natal period. Research compiled from 15 studies highlighted the value of this, concluding that women with continuous care through pregnancy and birth needed less pain relief, less intervention and were more satisfied with the birth. Another study by H.M. Klaus and J.H. Kennel found that having supportive, experienced, female help made labour easier including 50% less caesarians, 25%, shorter labour time, 40% less oxytocin and forceps use, 60% less request for epidurals and a lower rate of post-partum depression.

Ayurvedic advice on delivery (Prasava Kala Paricharya) emphasises the benefit of having the support of an attendant who has many children, is good hearted, hard working, service oriented, experienced in conducting a delivery, affectionate, cheerful, has good endurance and is able to keep a pregnant woman happy. Whether the husband is also present is a matter of individual preference. Many men would like to be a useful support at this time but are clueless about ways to assist. Most men want to be more than sperm donors in this miraculous event so rather than being a hindrance they can

offer enormous help to their partner if they learn how to beforehand. Most women want their husbands present and see the delivery as a dual duty, as one woman expressed “he put it in there, he can help get it out!” And then there’s the joke about the husband who asks the doctor “is there any reason I have to be in the room while my wife is in labour?” The doctor replying, “not unless the word ‘divorce’ means anything to you.” To get informed and involved in a positive way they can gain valuable insights from a resource called The Pink Kit as well as from many other prenatal courses and books available. The Pink Kit Method for birthing better offers straight forward techniques for the mother and support team to facilitate a smooth delivery with reduced pain, tension, confusion and complications. Available from [www.birthingbetter.com](http://www.birthingbetter.com), it covers methods for managing the mind, breath, body position and effective communication.

The place where you choose to deliver should ideally be easily accessible, hygienic, comfortable, peaceful, gently lit, well ventilated, spacious and have a bath. Studies have proven that women having water births have less pain and fewer epidurals so it may be an option to have handy. The positions chosen for each stage of labour will vary according to the position of the baby and the mother’s instincts. Squatting and resting on all fours enlists the help of gravity for the foetus’ downward movement. The Charaka Samhita suggests “during delivery the mother should be gently massaged with warm water on her waist, sides and chest, back, and thighs. As a result of this, the fetus is brought downwards.”

Once labour has started the mother can visualise a smooth delivery or the yantra in fig 1 (often drawn with red paste on a metal plate.) This transports the mother’s focus to her inner power as she traces it with her mind from the centre to the periphery.

Music is also a useful distraction from the pain, relieving anxiety, triggering breathing techniques and relaxing the mother. Mothers in a study by Hanser et al. (1983), found, that music took their minds off pain and also helped to focus attention more than Lamaze-practiced visual focal point techniques. Relaxation is crucial to insure adequate oxygenation through the body and to minimise physical and psychological fatigue, conversely a tense mother releases more stress hormones, making labour difficult. Hanser et al. (1983) produced a report on the relaxing effect of music on women experiencing labour where 70% of participants felt the music aided relaxation and 100% displayed fewer pain responses during labour while music was playing than when it was not. Ayurveda recommends certain sedating classical ragas to be played at a low volume in the background during labour including Ragas Kalavati, Nayakikanada, Malkauns, Jayjaywanti, Jaunpuri, Asawari and Kalawati.

Synchronizing the breath with contractions is a technique emphasized by all midwives. As Frederick Leboyer, author of ‘Birth Without Violence’ says “In childbirth breathing and contraction get completely attuned. It is a matter of becoming aware that breath and contraction are one and the same movement, in time with the cosmic breath, the breath of the universe.” He also advocates breathing deeply into the belly and

chanting any Sanskrit mantra on the exhalation, waiting at the outbreath for the contraction to complete before inhaling. This method of chanting with contractions is consistent with Ayurvedic advice. As Leboyer says “With Sanskrit mantra you can touch absolute perfection. You need to let the sounds open and awaken within yourself. If women can connect with this level of themselves, the experience of childbirth has another dimension.”

If the cervix is slow to dilate Ayurveda suggests that one massage the area with sesame oil. A herbal enema is also given to promote the downward flow and make more space for the baby. Traditional remedies to hasten the delivery include giving a warm bath with a few drops of clary sage essential oil, taking a milk and garlic drink, inducing vomiting, a decoction of palm sugar with ajwain and milk and massaging castor oil over the naval. Another tribal ritual to encourage the foetal descent is to pound grain with a big pestle- not particularly practical in a hospital labour ward!

When the grand entrance occurs the time the baby’s head appears should be noted as this is the accurate moment of birth used by jyotish astrologers to calculate the horoscope. Directly after delivery the child’s respiratory response is triggered by either flicking water on its face, ringing a low pitch bell, hitting two stones together by its ear or fanning it with a natural reed fan rather than the western custom of smacking it’s tender behind. Mucus can be cleared from the baby’s mouth by swabbing it with a corner of unbleached cotton and wiping the inside using a finger dipped in ghee and fine sea salt. Waiting until it has stopped pulsating, the umbilical cord can be tied 8 fingers length from the belly button, looping the other end of the string around the baby’s neck then severing it above the tie. If it is comfortable the baby may be placed on the mothers left breast to be reassured by the mother’s smell and heartbeat. The child is then washed in a purificatory bath and wrapped in pure silk or cotton. A cotton pad soaked in ghee, Brahmi ghee or Bala oil can be dabbed on the baby’s crown fontanelle, keeping it in place with a hat or tie. This can be left on daily for an hour over six weeks to help the baby recover from the delivery, promote brain development, strengthen the hair and prevent cradle cap. In Kerala they then recommend a pre-lacteal feed to provide extra nutrition and boost immunity. There are many tonic combinations but a common one is a mix of ghee, honey, powdered gold, brahmi, calamus and Clitoria ternata (shankapushpi). The father administers this on the tongue with a gold object such as a ring then gives the baby to the mother to suckle first her right breast, then her left.

### **Post Natal Pampering**

“A new mother should be treated with massage, warm baths, a specific diet and herbal drinks that prevent infection, promote vitality and alleviate vata.”- Charaka Samhita-sarira sthanam

India has a wonderful tradition where a pregnant woman stays with her parents three months before and after having the baby to ensure that she gets abundant rest,

support and nurturing. This enables a woman to recover from the extraordinary mental and physical stresses placed on her through childbearing, allowing her the relaxed time and assistance needed to bond with the baby.

The ninety days after delivery are considered a vital cleansing, recuperative period during which the mother should take complete rest to regain the strength and health of her pre-pregnancy state. This will give her the mental, emotional and spiritual resources to cope with the demands of motherhood as well as protecting her and her baby from common health disorders associated with this time such as colic, insomnia, irritability and postpartum depression. Even modern medicine acknowledges that it takes a woman's body at least six weeks to return to normal after childbirth, hence the standard six week post-partum check up. Mothers who aren't able to recover properly run the risk of suffering long term depletion and chronic childbearing related weaknesses. Many times in my practice I've encountered women who trace their complaints back to this pivotal phase. Women are particularly vulnerable to post partum depression if they lack proper rest and support at this time. The many challenges they face may include fatigue, sleep deprivation, pain, anxiety, breastfeeding, worries about weight gain and general overwhelm regarding the responsibilities of motherhood. It's issues such as these that contribute to the post-natal depression suffered by 80% of American women.

Childbirth and new motherhood tends to unbalance the elements of air and ether (vata) due to mental and physical strain, sleep deprivation, irregular eating and weak digestion after delivery. Vata is cold, dry and active hence the approach to rebalance it is with warm, unctuous and restful therapies. If the mother is unhappy or unhealthy this affects the baby and their developing relationship. Conversely a nurtured mother overflowing with joy and health showers that energy onto her child.

Ways to restore the mother's balance and reduce her stress are as follows:

- 1 The mother should rest as much as possible for at least one month. Having a baby may be the beginning of the greatest love affair but the end of sufficient sleep. To guard against exhaustion she can try to go to bed by 9pm or earlier and do minimal exercise. Practicing yoga nidra is also very rejuvenating.
- 2 To promote a peaceful lifestyle and reduce stimulation she can restrict the number of visitors, reduce talking, remain in a warm, quiet environment sheltered from the cold and wind, avoid travel and delegate domestic and work duties to caring helpers. Soliciting someone's help with the shopping, laundry, cooking and cleaning for at least a month will allow mum time to focus on her recovery and the baby's needs without feeling swamped and depleted.
- 3 The mother's digestion will reflect the baby's digestion so special care should be taken to provide food that is lovingly prepared, light to digest and rich in nutrition. Meals should be regular, warm, cooked, organic, liquid and gently spiced. Foods to favour include wholegrains, stewed fruits, non-gassy vegetables, mung dal,

basmati rice, milk, ghee, almonds, raisins, dates, figs, palm sugar and plenty of warm fluids such as chamomile or fennel tea.

Digestive spices such as basil, bay leaf, caraway, cardamon, cinnamon, clove, coriander, cumin, fennel, fenugreek, ginger, hing, mustard seeds, pepper and turmeric are good to stoke the digestive fire. Foods to be avoided as they can disturb the mother's digestion and make breast milk more gas-forming include cold, raw or fermented food, leftovers, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cabbage, capsicum, cauliflower, eggplant, garlic, onions, green peas, potatoes, sprouts and most legumes except for mung dal.

- 1 The new mother is massaged daily with warm herbal oils and then left to sleep for an hour. She then takes a bath with the therapeutic leaves of tamarind, jackfruit, castor and neem. All these have anti-microbial, anti-viral properties. An aromatherapy bath alternative employs an elixir of rose, rosemary, lavender, cypress, and geranium essential oils. Jasmine is also good to prevent post-natal depression. Her tummy is then bound with a cotton cloth to support the abdomen and uterus' return to normal. Post-natal massage helps the mother's body to reorganise itself, relaxes, promotes circulation, boosts immunity, conditions skin, soothes the nervous system and returns muscles, ligaments and bones back to normal. Another specialty treatment given after the normal massage daily for the first week is a herbal leaf poultice massage (Ila kizhi). The poultice containing the leaves of the castor plant, tamarind, Vitex nigundo, lime and rock salt reduces body aches and improves muscle tone.
- 2 Herbal tonics given at this time to restore the mothers energy, immunity and promote quality breast milk may include Chyavanaprasham jam, Asparagus racemosus (Shatavari) and Withania somnifera (Ashwagandha). Other classical preparations given to ease vata and promote digestion include Dhanwantaram decoction plus tablets, Dasamoolarishtam or Jeerakarishtam.
- 3 Many women suffer from constipation after delivery for which castor oil may be taken before bed to lubricate the bowels and encourage complete evacuation.
- 4 Intercourse can be avoided for at least three months to allow the reproductive system recovery time. Pelvic floor exercises and yogic Moola bandha can assist vaginal elasticity. To shrink the size of the vagina a douche of Gooseberry (Amalaki) decoction or fig leaf paste is used
- 5 Ayurveda considers the milk from the breast best, custom-made for the baby's specific needs. As soon as possible the baby should be put on the breast as the initial colostrum, though heavy, is considered to be nectar. To increase milk production the mother can think tender thoughts of the baby and take fenugreek, fennel, shatavari, milk, drumsticks and ghee. If the baby is reluctant to drink breast milk honey is put on the nipple to encourage it.

For mastitis warm cabbage leaves can be put in the bra and cracked nipples are eased with calendula and turmeric ointment.

The baby may be weaned off breast milk after the teeth appear or continued according to the mother's preference. To dry up milk the mother can apply neem or jasmine leaf paste to her breasts externally.

Though it may seem unrealistically idyllic to practice these mother care rituals since 1985 hundreds of mothers in the west have benefited from the Mother and Baby Program offered by Maharishi Ayurveda. American obstetrician Rebecca Douglas who experienced the Mother and Baby program after the birth of her third child now recommends it to clients believing it is "for the baby's well-being; it's not indulgence," having observed that for new mothers who follow the recommendations "enthusiasm seems much more predominant and the fatigue seems to be much less." Former Mother and Baby Program director Sharon Thomas saw the benefits to hundreds of mothers- "I never saw an instance of postpartum depression in all of the years I worked with this program.... Mothers looked healthier, more supported, more rested. Their ongoing good health seemed to continue for years." Research conducted by psychologist Ragnhild Boes supports the effectiveness of the Mother and Baby program who found that the mothers in the program had better overall health, more confidence and happiness in new motherhood, enriched family relationships, better physical and emotional stability than women in the control group. It may seem an unnecessary expense to have someone come and cook and massage but mothers should see it as an investment for their future and their child's relationship.

### **Blissful Bubs**

A child is a curly dimpled lunatic. ~Ralph Waldo Emerson

The initial six months of a baby's life are considered a crucial phase during which the foundation of mental and physical fortitude is established. The transition from the womb to the world should be as gentle and tender as possible. The situation babies have been in could be likened to spending nine months in dark solitary confinement, hence they need time to adapt to sensory input. The Srimad Bhagavatam text also describes the discomfort suffered by the baby in the womb who, likened to a bird trapped in a cage, appeals to the Lord, "I, the pure soul, appearing now bound by my activities, am lying in the womb of my mother by the arrangement of maya (illusion). O my Lord, when shall I be released from this confinement?"

To make the adjustment as easy as possible the newborn is protected from any intense sensory stimuli. This includes wind, strong sunlight, rain, loud or jarring noises, strong scents, hard surfaces and sudden or excessive movement. Everything should be soft, warm and nurturing. According to vedic tradition the child doesn't even go outside until it is fourteen days old- a ritual known as Niskramana samskara, where the father takes the child out under the sun and recites a mantra for its wellbeing. Also at three months

old the child may be placed briefly at the feet of the temple deity for divine protection while receiving the priest's blessings and a sprinkle of holy water.

Three practices to enhance bonding with the baby include breastfeeding, massage and baby wearing. Modern medical research has established the benefits of breastfeeding over bottle-feeding. Scores of studies conclude that breastfed babies have a lower mortality rate than bottle fed babies, develop physical and mental milestones faster and are less prone to dental decay and infections. Breast milk has seventy ingredients not found in formula and is an important source of immune building antibodies. The baby is weened onto solids once the first teeth appear. The first grains are given to the baby by a priest in a ceremony called Annaprasana. After 56 days the baby can eat semolina soup which is prepared by soaking semolina in water overnight, draining the water the next morning and cooking it with palm sugar and milk. Dried, seeded and powdered green banana is also given with buttermilk as a stomachic digestive aid. Ragi or red millet water, rice and cow or goats milk are also administered but salt is withheld for the first six months.

Massage is an integral to the mother/ baby daily routine in India. It is particularly advantageous for premature babies who have shown to gain weight and leave hospital stronger than those who weren't massaged. Ayurveda advises that due to the delicate newborn's skin, a small dough ball should be used for massage in the first month. This can be made from atta flour and water then rolled in a little boiled organic coconut milk or sesame oil and turmeric. Baby massage enhances circulation, expels toxins, sharpens reflexes, aids digestion, reduces colic and most importantly gives the baby a deep sense of security. By the second month massage in a warm, quiet room with boiled organic coconut milk or Lakshadi oil is used, applying gentle hand strokes and incorporating some sensory-motor co-ordination exercises. Use light long strokes on the long bones, circular motions on the joints and gentle pressure in a clockwise direction on the abdomen to help expel gas. At two months oil such as Brahmi oil may be applied to the scalp, stopping the initial ghee pad placed on the crown fontanelle from birth. This acts as a brain, neuromuscular and hair tonic as well as preventing cradle cap. The massage can last from ten to twenty minutes and is best done at least thirty minutes away from a feed. If the baby suffers from colic a washer dipped in warm water and a pinch of hing can be placed over its abdomen for a few minutes at the end of the session. The massage may be followed by a bath and a sleep. Massage should be avoided if there are signs of a fever or cold. Babies thrive from this tender touch and relaxing time with their parent. The ancient paediatric text Kashyapa Samhita says massage is very important for the baby's neuromuscular and central nervous system development as well as for weight gain, pain relief, improving skin tone, sleep, vision and digestion. Massage sessions also provide a mother or father with a unique opportunity for quality time with her baby. Though you can learn good techniques from Ayurvedic baby Massage videos the best massage flows from love rather than logic.

The saying “I slept like a baby” must have been coined by a parent fortunate enough to have mastered the art of baby whispering. Indian’s have always used hammocks to lull their babies into a deep, cocooned slumber. These hammocks, now available in Western designs, are simple constructions of a spring hanging from the ceiling attached to a strong triangular frame from which a folded cloth hangs. The hammock is very comforting for the baby as it is like the womb environment with the snugly secure shape and the range of movements similar to sensations in utero. The baby’s slightly slanted position also prevents reflux and colic. Conventional cribs being firm and flat don’t provide the same swaddling comfort and can also lead to the baby developing a flat head. Babies also wake more peacefully in a hammock as its own movements initiate a reassuring bouncing action.

Another aid to sleep is music. Special songs act as sleep signals to the baby, triggering the relaxation response. A very effective style of music has been developed from womb sounds by

Dr. Schwartz, an intensive care doctor in Georgia, who found that the sound of blood flow in the placenta plus the mother’s breath and heartbeat in the womb reaches the noise level of around 80 — 95 decibels —almost as loud as a nightclub, and suddenly stopping this music can be stressful to the child. So using sensitive microphones, Dr. Schwartz recorded the sounds in his pregnant wife’s womb and added gentle music and women’s voices. After seeing that this composition put his child to sleep immediately and for longer he played it to neonates who then spent an average of three days less in intensive care.

Baby’s can also be soothed if carried close and moved. Rather than straining the carers arms and back a carrier can be positioned so it gives the mother good symmetrical back support and so the baby is positioned diagonally or horizontally rather than vertically inside. The trend for vertical baby carriers is contrary to the Ayurvedic ideal that a baby should be kept horizontal or with its weight evenly supported along its spine whilst the back bones and muscles are developing. If the head is unsupported the sudden jerking position of the head whipping back when made to sit upright can cause neurological and muscular weakness, possibly linked to kyphosis, a weak back and some osteopaths even suspect a connection with Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). Carriers that put pressure on the sacrum and force the baby’s legs apart create an unnatural, stressful posture and are detrimental to the infant’s musculo-skeletal development. A baby sling holds the baby in a natural foetal position just as they were inside the womb. If comfortable it is also the perfect position for breastfeeding and at other times allows the mother to carry out two-handed tasks while still comforting the baby. Slings are also helpful for babies who are slow to gain weight as they have been shown to gain more rapidly if carried in a sling for several hours a day, the proximity to mum encouraging more regular feeds. Carrying a baby also reduces restlessness, colic, promotes cognitive development, motor skills, speech and builds a solid sense of security

and self-esteem. The belief that infants will become dependant and clingy later is unfounded as it has been noted that babies that are carried more feel confident to explore by themselves at a younger age and as adults display less aggression and better relating skills. There are some good slings available or you can make your own from a length of soft cotton approximately 5 meters long and 30 inches wide. See photos....

The vedic culture has prescribed rituals and rites of passage at various phases of an infant's development. When the child has lived for a full lunar phase (28 days) this is celebrated by tying a protective yantra or blessed charm (tali) around the child's waist with a string which may be changed to a gold chain after six months. Another auspicious item that may be used is an ornament which comprises of 5 metals (pancha-loha) that protect the child from malefic planetary influences. Also from the 28th to the 56th day after delivery a special ceremony called Dasandhya uzhiyal is conducted for the child. The simple procedure is that at sunset the grandmother or mother offers a flame first to a lit lamp three times clockwise chanting 'om namahshivaya' then to the baby three times. She then places the wick in tumeric and lime water, touching the water to the baby three times. Finally the baby is fed a paste of calamus, triphala, gold, butter, rudrakasham, chandana and brahmi water to boost physical and mental wellbeing.

The name giving ceremony, Nama-Karana, isn't conducted until some time after the baby's birth. In some castes the formal name isn't given until the child is six months. In the meantime cute pet names like "little goddess" and "little jewel" are used. This gives the parents time to observe the child's character in order to select a name that's really apt. In choosing the name an astrologer, priest or guru may be consulted to ensure it has a beneficial sound vibration. An auspicious sounding name which is constantly repeated over the person's life then acts as a mantra, attracting positive energy into their life. The astrologer calculates the best first syllable and the family agrees on a name they like starting with that. For the three ways of ascertaining a name through astrology consult the do-it-yourself web page <http://jyotisha.00it.com/bhava.htm>. Once the name is selected the uncle or father whispers it into the child's right ear first if it is a boy and the left ear for a girl. Only then may the name be spoken aloud.

The ear piercing ceremony called Karna vedhana samskara is performed by some castes on the sixth, seventh or eighth month. A jeweller generally performs this nowadays. The right ear is pierced first for a boy and the left ear if a female. This immediately induces a cell-mediated response to boost the child's immunity though the earrings may be taken out after a week if desired.

Because a baby's hair is considered too fine it is generally shaved off before six months to promote healthy thick regrowth. This ceremony called Mundana may be conducted by a priest or barber. After shaving the hair a soothing balm of sandalwood and saffron paste is smeared over the head. This protects against infection and adds to the world's most sublime scent- babies head!

May we all appreciate these precious souls and the loving parents who hold the future in their hands.

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