

Annaprashana Samaskar: The Right way to Start

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Abstract

Breast milk provides all of the nutrients, vitamins and minerals an infant needs for growth for the first six months, and no other liquids or food are needed. However, from the age of six months, breast milk is no longer sufficient by itself, however it continues to be an important source of energy, high quality nutrients and anti-infective factors beyond six months of age. First time feeding with the solid foods such as cereals to a child at six month of his life is an important part of life and celebrated as Annaprashan Samskara as described in Ayurveda. Evidence-based studies also indicate that early nutritional inadequacy can lead to long-term impairment in growth and health of the growing child. Therefore this period is a sensitive period and nutritional influences at this time can exert long-term effects on later development and health of a child. Iron and zinc has been found to be the problem nutrients since their concentration in human milk is much lesser than relative need. In our Ayurvedic text they had mention about the good health of child with different type of recipes are mention for child. At every contact point with the caregivers, doctors can assess child's growth and give age appropriate counselling on infant and young child feeding and care practices. The time invested in counselling mothers by medical personnel has shown to give returns in terms of improved nutritional status of the children.

Keywords: Nutrient, Growth, Samskara, Caregivers.

Introduction:

First two years of life is considered a “critical window” of opportunity for ensuring children's appropriate growth and development through optimal feeding. Appropriate nutrition during infancy and early childhood ensures growth, health, and development of a child to its full potential. [1] Evidence-based studies also indicate that early nutritional inadequacy can lead to long-term impairment in growth and health of the growing child.[2] Micronutrient deficiency leads to hidden hunger. Consequences of hidden hunger are serious. Micronutrient deficiencies lead to a cycle of poor health, poor educability, poor productivity and consequent economic losses. It can cause blindness and brain damage. It can induce stillbirths and abortions. It can make people fatigued and lethargic. Hidden hunger can aggravate ordinary

childhood diseases such as diarrhoea, malaria and measles. It often contributes to high rates of maternal and child deaths.[3]

Annaprashan samskar should be performed at the time when the child had gain strength to digest cereals and other types of food products i. e at six month of life. Parents who desire his child to be brilliant should cooked rice feed with ghee or rice with honey, curd and ghee. Our Acharyas have knowledge of introduction of weaning at six month of age in right way to ensure optimum growth.[4] A large body of evidence has shown that exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life has the single largest impact on child survival when compared to all preventive interventions. Breast milk provides all of the nutrients, vitamins and minerals an infant needs for growth for the first six months, and no other liquids or food are needed. However, from the age of six months, breast milk is no longer sufficient by itself, however it continues to be an important source of energy, high quality nutrients and anti-infective factors beyond six months of age.[5] After 6 months, the infant's need for energy and nutrients starts to increase than what is provided by breast milk. Multiple studies which have conducted chemical analysis of breast milk at various stages of lactation has shown that from 6 months to 11 months postpartum, the micronutrient content namely the iron and zinc is insufficient to meet the needs of older infants. Moreover, the nutrient requirements of infants through complementary foods are much higher in comparison to that fulfilled by an adult's diet. This is because infants consume small amounts of food other than breast milk. Hence, the food prepared for infants needs to be high in nutrient density i.e. the amount of each nutrient per 100 kcal of food. Iron and zinc has been found to be the problem nutrients since their concentration in human milk is much lesser than relative need. Therefore, infants should ideally be provided the most nutrient-rich foods available in the household, however often the infants from economically deprived families typically receive nutrient-poor, watery porridges.[6]

Also, undernutrition increases remarkably from 3 to 18-24 months of age. Global statistics identify 6–18 months as the time when stunting and malnutrition sets in, exactly during complementary feeding period. This is the period of complementary feeding that has been recognized as a sensitive period of high risk for developing stunting, protein-energy malnutrition, iron-deficiency anemia and rickets. This is because complementary feeding period is associated with changes in a child's dietary habits as well as rapid growth. Therefore this period is a sensitive period and nutritional influences at this time can exert long-term effects on later development and health of a child. [7]. Apart from fulfilling nutritional voids, complementary feeding also helps in establishing healthy eating habits. Exposure to different flavours begins early in life via amniotic fluid/breast milk and continues during late infancy when the infants are introduced to complementary foods. Therefore, mothers should be encouraged to introduce repeatedly a variety of nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables, both within and between meals. This will help infants to get accustomed to novel foods and experience a variety of flavours which promotes the willingness of an infant to eat varied foods later in life.[8]

In Ayurvedic text there are many references to start complementary feeding in infants at six months of age to have better growth. According to Ashvalayana Grihsutra(1/16), mentioned that to get Tejashvi(Intellect) child those food recipe should be given that are prepare from curd, honey and butter oil from 6 months of age.

AcharyaKashyap as mentioned about to prepare a Avleha (semi solid) by combination of old husk free and well washed sati or sashti rice, mixed with oleaginous substances and salt. The powders of wheat and barley also should be given, according to Prakriti (congeniality). Warm leha (electuary) cooked with vidanga, lavan (salt), oleaginous substances is beneficial Acharya Kashyap also mentioned to start Fruits juices in infants from 6 month of life.[4]

Providing these types of diet in children will make them nourish and keep them away from deficiencies. Ghee contains DHA along with fat-soluble vitamins, anti-oxidants, and conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), omega 3 acid could be responsible for health benefits in children.[9] Honey also provides energy (~3kcal/gm) has antimicrobial action, immune-enhancing and wound healing properties. Contains 0.3-25 mg/kg choline and 0.06-5 mg/kg acetylcholine. Choline is essential for cardiovascular and brain function as well as for cellular membrane composition and repairing, while acetylcholine acts as a neurotransmitter.[10]

So in today's era, Complementary feeding should have

- Appropriately thick homogenous complementary foods made from locally available foods should be introduced at six completed months to all babies.
- Breastfeeding should be actively supported during this time.
- Each meal must be made energy dense by adding sugar/jaggery and ghee/butter/oil.
- Thick in consistency: Thick enough to stay on the spoon without running off, when the spoon is tilted.
- Hygienic practices for food safety to be followed during all the involved steps viz. preparation, storage and feeding.
- Infant food should be a “balanced food” consisting of various (as diverse as possible) food groups / components in different combinations.
- As the babies show interest in complementary feeds, adding new foods in the staple food one by one should increase the variety.
- Iron-fortified foods, iodized salt, vitamin A enriched food etc. are to be encouraged.[11]

Conclusions

Micronutrient deficiency or hidden hunger is widespread among infants and young children. Micronutrient requirements during complementary feeding may be left unfulfilled. Nutritional influences during complementary feeding can exert long-term effects on development and health of a child. So Start Right at the right time and with right feed is need for the optimum growth and development of child. Annaprashan samakara described in our Ayurvedic text is focusing on the same issue for children growth. Providing complementary

feed containing Ghee, honey jaggery and others with right quantity keeps the optimum growth of child. The methodology given in our text is very important and helpful to find out food allergens as weaning of child is started gradually. The time invested in counselling mothers by medical personnel has shown to give returns in terms of improved nutritional status of the children.

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