

POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION (PPD) AND AYURVEDA: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO MENTAL WELL-BEING: A REVIEW ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a significant mental health concern affecting new mothers worldwide. It manifests as mood swings, anxiety, irritability, and depressive symptoms, impacting both the mother and the newborn. Ayurveda, the ancient Indian system of medicine, provides a holistic approach to managing PPD through dietary modifications, lifestyle changes, herbal remedies, and psychological support. This article explores the Ayurvedic perspective on PPD, including *Sutika Paricharya* (postpartum care), *Medhya Rasayana* (nootropic herbs), and *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* (psychotherapy), comparing them with modern therapeutic approaches.

KEYWORDS: Postpartum Depression, Ayurveda, *Sutika Paricharya*, *Medhya Rasayana*, *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa*, Mental Well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Postpartum depression (PPD) is a prevalent condition characterized by emotional distress following childbirth. The incidence rate varies across populations, with factors such as hormonal changes, psychological stress, and socio-

cultural influences playing a role.^[1] While modern medicine offers pharmacological and psychological interventions, Ayurveda presents a more holistic, individualized, and preventive approach that emphasizes *Sutika Paricharya*, diet, and mental wellness techniques.^[2]

Understanding PPD: Modern and Ayurvedic Perspectives

Modern Medical Perspective

PPD is classified under major depressive disorders in modern medicine, primarily attributed to hormonal fluctuations post-delivery, including a decline in oestrogen and progesterone levels. Other contributing factors include:

- Sleep deprivation
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Psychological stress
- Personal and family history of depression^[3]

Treatment strategies include antidepressants, hormone therapy, and psychotherapy.^[4] However, these interventions may have side effects and limited efficacy in addressing the root cause.

Ayurvedic Perspective on PPD

Ayurveda categorizes PPD under *Manas Roga* (mental disorders) caused by an imbalance in *Vata dosha* and depletion of *Ojas* (vital essence) post-delivery. Ayurveda focuses on the restoration of physical and mental health through:

1. *Sutika Paricharya* (postpartum care)
2. *Medhya Rasayana* (intellect-promoting herbs)
3. *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa* (psychotherapy)
4. Lifestyle and dietary modifications^[5]

Sutika Paricharya: Ayurvedic Postpartum Care

Ayurveda emphasizes a comprehensive postpartum regimen known as *Sutika Paricharya*, which includes dietary, lifestyle, and herbal interventions aimed at restoring the mother's health.^[6]

Dietary Guidelines

- Easily digestible, warm, and nourishing food (*laghu, ushna, and sneha yukta ahara*)
- Ghee, milk, and herbal decoctions for replenishing *Ojas*
- Avoidance of cold, dry, and heavy-to-digest foods that may aggravate *Vata dosha*.^[7]

Herbal Support (*Medhya Rasayana*)

Certain Ayurvedic herbs, known as *Medhya Rasayana*, are effective in managing PPD:

- *Brahmi (Bacopa monnieri)* – Enhances cognitive function and reduces anxiety.^[8]
- *Shankhapushpi (Convolvulus pluricaulis)* – Acts as a natural mood stabilizer.^[9]
- *Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera)* – Helps in reducing stress and balancing hormones.^[10]
- *Guduchi (Tinospora cordifolia)* – Supports immunity and mental resilience.^[11]

Sattvavajaya Chikitsa: Ayurvedic Psychotherapy

Sattvavajaya Chikitsa is a unique Ayurvedic psychotherapy approach that focuses on enhancing mental strength through positive reinforcement and lifestyle modifications.^[12]

Techniques include:

- **Yoga and Pranayama:** *Anulom Vilom, Bhramari Pranayama* to regulate mood and stress levels.^[13]
- **Meditation and Mantra Therapy:** Chanting of *Omkara* and *Gayatri Mantra* for mental stability.^[14]
- **Counselling and Emotional Support:** Encouragement of positive social interactions and emotional well-being.^[15]

Comparative Analysis: Ayurveda vs. Modern Medicine

Modern Medicine

- Addresses symptoms with pharmacotherapy (SSRIs, anxiolytics).
- Psychotherapy sessions for cognitive restructuring.
- Potential side effects like dependency, drowsiness, and hormonal disturbances.^[16]

Ayurveda

- Targets the root cause (*Vata* imbalance, *Ojas* depletion).
- Restores hormonal balance naturally through diet and herbs.
- Emphasizes holistic healing with minimal side effects.^[17]

Integrative Approach: Ayurveda and Modern Science

Recent research indicates that Ayurvedic interventions like *Ashwagandha* and *Brahmi* show neuroprotective effects by modulating neurotransmitter levels, which align with modern antidepressants.^[18] Integrating Ayurvedic practices with contemporary medicine can offer a comprehensive approach to managing PPD.^[19]

CONCLUSION

Postpartum depression significantly affects new mothers' mental health, requiring a multifaceted approach for effective management. Ayurveda, through *Sutika Paricharya*, *Medhya Rasayana*, and *Sattvavajaya Chikitsa*, provides a holistic, individualized solution that aligns with modern scientific principles. Future clinical studies on Ayurvedic interventions can further establish their efficacy in managing PPD.

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