



From Childbirth To Recovery: Ayurvedic Methods For Managing Postpartum Stress

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Abstract: Postpartum stress is a common yet often under-addressed issue faced by new mothers, manifesting in physical, emotional, and psychological challenges after childbirth. These stressors can include fatigue, anxiety, mood swings, and depression, significantly impacting the health and well-being of the mother and her bond with the newborn. In modern medical settings, postpartum care predominantly focuses on physical recovery, but Ayurveda offers a more holistic approach, emphasizing the restoration of balance in the mind, body, and spirit. According to Ayurveda, this phase is marked by an imbalance in **Vata dosha**—the element of movement and change—which becomes aggravated due to the physical strain of childbirth. The disturbance of Vata can lead to emotional instability, anxiety, and overall fatigue. To manage postpartum stress through Ayurveda, Ayurveda texts were reviewed to manage the postpartum stress. Databases such as PubMed, Shodhganga, and Ayush Research Portal, were searched using keywords like Stress, *Sutika Paricharya*, Postpartum Ayurveda. Ayurvedic understanding of postpartum stress and highlights how its holistic approaches offer significant benefits in managing this challenging period.

Keywords: *Sutika Paricharya*, Ayurveda, postpartum stress.

Introduction: The journey of motherhood is often depicted as a period of unparalleled joy and fulfillment. However, the transition into this new phase of life also brings a multitude of challenges, both expected and unforeseen. Among these challenges, postpartum stress and depression are significant issues that can profoundly affect new mothers. Postpartum depression is NOT the baby blues. Baby blues is considered a normal part of postpartum adjustment, requiring no medical or psychological intervention. Childbirth, though a joyous occasion, can be a physically and emotionally taxing experience for women. Postpartum stress manifests in various forms, including physical exhaustion, mood swings, anxiety, and sometimes, more severe conditions such as postpartum depression. Postpartum depression (PPD) is an umbrella term that refers to various mood or anxiety disorders which can follow childbirth. A meta-analysis of 78 studies found that the prevalence of postpartum PTSD was **3.1%** in community populations and 15.7% in at-risk populations.ⁱ Ayurveda perspective on Postpartum stress: Ayurveda has always given importance to care the female at every phase of her life in respect of *Rajaswala Paricharya*, *Garbhini Paricharya* and *Sutika Paricharya*. *Sutika* refers to a woman's condition immediately after birth and the expulsion of the placenta. After delivery, a woman may become emaciated and experience *Shunyashareera* due to *Garbhaviddhi*, *Shithilasarvashariradhatu*, *Pravahanavedana*, *Kledarakta-nisruti*, and *Agnimandya*.ⁱⁱ These factors can lead to *Dhatukshaya*. Therefore, extra care is essential during this period to prevent complications like *Sutika Unamada* or postpartum psychosis i.e. the condition associated with insomnia occurring in women who have recently delivered a baby.ⁱⁱⁱ and avoid the onset of 74 types of diseases.^{iv} Ayurveda has advised a specific diet and lifestyle regimen called *Sutika Paricharya* to prevent further complications and restore the health of mother. Disruption of Vata dosha occurs due to the physical strain of childbirth leading to anxiety, fear, emotional disturbances. Disruption of Pitta dosha occurs due to intense physical exertion, prolong labor, hot

and crowded labor room, leading to anger, frustration, irritability. Disruption of Kapha dosha leading to emotional turmoil, lethargy, attachment issues.

Aims and Objective: Review of *Sutika paricharya* as Ayurvedic methods for managing postpartum stress.

Material and methods: This study is based on a literature review of Ayurveda texts. Databases such as PubMed, Shodhganga and Ayush Research Portal, were searched using keywords like *Sutika*, Postpartum stress, *Sutika Paricharya*.

Sutika Kala: Modern science defines puerperium as the period spanning 2 to 6 weeks after childbirth. Sushruta and Vaghbhata describe the *Sutika* period as lasting 1 month and 15 days, or until a woman begins to menstruate following labor.^{v, vi} This approach is considered more scientifically reliable because the onset of menstruation indicates the stabilization of the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian axis. Beyond regulating menstruation, this process plays a crucial role in bone formation, electrolyte balance, cholesterol control, body temperature regulation, and fat absorption. All of these functions are compromised in the absence of menstruation. Kashyapa, on the other hand, suggests a 6-month *Sutika* period to restore a normal dietary regimen based on *Dosha-Dhatu-Bala*, helping women regain their vitality and strength, which may be diminished during labor.^{vii}

Management strategies for Postpartum stress by Ayurveda:

Aashwasana: Severe pain, stress, and anxiety experienced by the newborn can lead to lethargy and even psychosis. Additionally, sudden and extreme hormonal fluctuations after childbirth can significantly impact mental stability. According to Ayurveda, the vitiation of *Vata dosha* and the depletion of *Rasa* and *Rakta* during childbirth (*Prasava*) can result in a condition known as *Satwa Heenata*, or a diminished state of mental and emotional well-being. This imbalance negatively affects the mother's mental strength and stability. In Ayurvedic texts, *Aashwasana* (reassurance, comfort, or psychological support) is considered crucial for the emotional and mental recovery of both the mother and the newborn. Offering appropriate emotional support, comfort, and soothing words plays a vital role in restoring mental balance, promoting emotional stability, and ensuring a sound mind. Providing this psychological support is essential for the mother's overall well-being, as it helps in the healing process and the restoration of mental harmony, which is often disrupted due to the physical and emotional challenges of childbirth.

Abhyanga: Massage, especially targeting pressure points similar to lymph node locations, boosts lymphatic flow and enhances immune function. It improves blood circulation, helping white blood cells reach damaged tissues for faster healing and reduces edema by promoting fluid excretion. Massage also releases endorphins (feel good hormones), lowering stress and promoting overall well-being during postpartum recovery. It strengthens muscles, improves skin tone, and supports nerve function. Increases the availability of serotonin which regulates behaviour allowing us to do the appropriate thing at the appropriate time. Increased oxytocin is a neurohormone that affects both couple and parental bonding by supporting feeling of attachment and care taking. Reduces the cortisol, a stress related neurohormone produced by adrenal glands. Increases the level of Dopamine which influence fine motor activity. It affects intuition, inspiration, joy and enthusiasm.^{viii} Ayurvedic treatments like *Abhyanga* with *Bala Tail* and *Yoni Abhyanga* help balance *Vata dosha* and tone the birth canal muscles, preventing laxity and prolapse.^{ix}

Ushnodaka Snana: Snana acts as *shramahara*, *vatahara*, *oorjaskara*. It alleviates pain, stress, and strain from delivery, leaving one feeling refreshed and happy. It also helps to calm aggravated *Vata*.^x

Vishrantee - Since the body is fatigued after delivery, it is recommended to rest after taking a bath.^{xi}

Saubhagya Sunthi pak^{xii}: *Saubhagya Sunthi Pak* has been claimed by several researchers to alleviate anxiety, stress and is a natural pain reliever.

Manidharan^{xiii}: The *Sutika* should fix *Trivruta* over her head. It gives psychological support to her.

Mamsa rasa: *Mamsa rasa* (meat) is a rich source of iron, vitamins, essential amino acids, and trace elements. *Madhura* and *brimhaniya* substances are anabolic, aiding in the recovery of the maternal system from the stress of labor. They also support galactogenesis and enhance the quality of maternal milk.^{xiv}

Vyaayama: Postpartum exercise is recommended after the *Sutika Kala* (the first six weeks following delivery) once the body has recovered and the dhatus (tissues) are restored. Postpartum stress can manifest physically and emotionally as the body recovers from the intense experience of childbirth. The exercises mentioned — *Vyaayama* — help not only in physical recovery but also in managing and reducing postpartum stress by promoting overall well-being.

- **Moola Bandha (Kegel's Pelvic Exercises):** This exercise focuses on strengthening the pelvic floor, which can be weakened during delivery, especially after vaginal childbirth. Strengthening these muscles helps alleviate pelvic discomfort and urinary issues that may contribute to postpartum stress. The physical relief from these issues also has a positive emotional impact, reducing feelings of frustration or stress associated with bodily changes after birth.
- **Udhyana Bandha (Abdominal Tightening):** After delivery, the abdominal muscles often feel weak and stretched. *Udhyana Bandha* helps tighten and tone these muscles, restoring core strength. The improvement in muscle tone can reduce discomfort and promote a sense of physical control, which can help alleviate feelings of helplessness or stress during the postpartum period.
- **Kati Parivartana (Pelvic Tilting or Rocking):** Lower back pain and discomfort are common after childbirth, contributing to postpartum stress. Pelvic tilting helps relieve tension in the lower back and improves flexibility in the pelvic region. This promotes physical comfort and reduces pain, thus relieving a significant source of postpartum stress and contributing to a sense of well-being.
- **Abdominal Toning/Ease Crunches:** These exercises gently engage the abdominal muscles, strengthening the core without overstraining the body. Strengthening the abdominal region helps reduce feelings of physical weakness and fatigue, which can be stress-inducing in the postpartum period. The ability to regain strength and tone can improve self-esteem and help reduce emotional stress.
- **Back Bridging, Foot, and Leg Exercises:** These exercises target the lower body and help promote circulation, reduce fatigue, and alleviate tension in the legs and lower back. As new mothers are often physically exhausted, especially if they are caring for an infant, these exercises help boost energy levels and reduce feelings of physical stress or discomfort, contributing to a more positive emotional state.

Discussion: The Ayurvedic approach to managing postpartum stress emphasizes a holistic and individualized care plan, addressing both the physical and emotional needs of the mother. Ayurveda recognizes that the postpartum period, or *Sutika Kala*, is a time of significant physical and emotional transformation, requiring targeted interventions to restore balance. The core concept of Ayurveda, the three doshas—*Vata*, *Pitta*, and *Kapha*—guides the understanding of postpartum stress. Disruptions in these doshas during and after childbirth can lead to various physical and emotional imbalances, including anxiety, exhaustion, and emotional instability. Postpartum depression, as per Ayurvedic texts, is often attributed to the vitiation of *Vata dosha*, leading to mental instability and emotional turmoil, which can be alleviated by specific interventions. *Aashwasana* plays a pivotal role in the Ayurvedic management of postpartum stress. This psychological intervention helps stabilize the mental and emotional state of the mother, preventing further complications such as postpartum depression. The importance of *Abhyanga* (massage) is well-documented in Ayurveda as a physical therapy that not only helps with muscle relaxation and circulation but also promotes the release of endorphins and oxytocin, which are critical for emotional well-being. These practices align with modern findings that suggest the positive impact of touch and massage on reducing cortisol levels, thus lowering stress. *Ushnodaya Snana* (warm baths) help alleviate pain and reduce aggravated *Vata*, promoting relaxation and physical rejuvenation. The practices of *Vishrantee*, *Saubhagya Sunthi Pak*, and *Manidharan* emphasize holistic postpartum care. Rest after bathing aids physical recovery, while *Saubhagya Sunthi Pak* offers relief from pain, anxiety, and stress. Additionally, placing *Trivruta* over the head provides psychological support, helping the new mother cope emotionally and mentally. Furthermore, Ayurvedic dietary recommendations, such as the consumption of *Mamsa Rasa* (meat), provide essential nutrients to support recovery. The restoration of vital energy and the enhancement of milk production are critical for both the physical and emotional recovery of the new mother. *Vyaayama* (exercise) post-*Sutika Kaala*, when practiced cautiously,

supports the restoration of physical strength, while also reducing the emotional strain associated with postpartum recovery. Exercises like Moola Bandha (Kegel exercises), Udhyaana *Bandha*, and *Kati Parivartana* target specific areas of discomfort, promoting core strength, flexibility, and emotional resilience.

Conclusion: Ayurveda offers a multifaceted approach to postpartum stress, with a balance of emotional, physical, and nutritional interventions that align with modern scientific understanding of stress reduction and postpartum recovery.

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