

HEALTHY MENSTRUATION ACCORDING TO AYURVEDA SELF-CARE TIPS FOR THE FERTILE YEARS

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Reprinted April 2020

Introduction

Menarche signals the onset of menses at about the age of 12-16. Early onset is associated more with Vata dosha (chala guna), whereas late onset is more associated with Kapha dosha (manda guna). Tremendous preparation of endocrine intelligence is hidden behind the onset of the first menstrual cycle.

From birth, a baby girl contains all the immature ova within her ovaries that will, in due course, mature over the menstruating years, one by one each lunar cycle and occasionally two or three at a time, triggering the hormonal signals of fertility.

The new cycle may take some months or years to regularize itself according to either the full or new moon cycle, depending on how close one's birthday is to either phase. Healthy menstruation is characterized by a regular 28-day cycle, about 3-4 days of frank red colored flow, no pain or discomfort. Fatigue may be common and signal the woman to rest. Please do not ignore this important message.

To understand the female reproductive system according to Ayurveda, the Sanskrit term 'Artava Vaha Srotas' translates as the female reproduction-carrying channel system, and includes the uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, cervix, clitoris, vagina, labia, breasts, their contents and secretions.

The Artava tissues are the most protected in metabolism according to Ayurveda and represent the 'end of the line' in the tissue formation process. Imbalances or diseases occurring here have first manifested qualitatively and later quantitatively, in the prior tissues of plasma, blood, muscle, fat, bone and marrow (including endocrines).

If all of these seven tissues have robust metabolism (Agni), then the 'fault' or disturbed dosha may not be passed to subsequent dhatu levels. If the tissue agni however are insufficient, then the dosha can be passed to the deeper tissues, resulting in symptoms and eventually, a diagnosis.

Vata can influence the flow to be irregular, thin, brown in colour at time, scanty, stringy, intermittent and brings pre-menstrual cramping. Pitta can influence the flow to be sour or pungent in odor, frank red in color and bring irritability, nausea and first/second day piercing-type pain with increased hunger. On average, five days of flow can finish with spotting.

Kapha dosha can influence the flow to be thicker, slower, stickier and longer in duration, up to seven days, or longer in the case of K pathology affecting Artava. Clots, tender breasts and abdominal/breast bloating can go with increase of Kapha dosha.

For more information, please view my Free Downloadable article, 'Treatment of Uterine Fibroids in Ayurveda' at www.ayurveda-seminars.com. This paper was first presented at the 3rd annual NAMA professional development conference in Long Beach, CA on Nov. 4, 2004.

Fertility, Birth Control and Conception

A woman is fertile and receptive to conception from the mid-cycle release of the ovum, generally alternating right to left each month, until the flow ceases at menopause. Sperm life can be up to seven days, so her natural birth control measure should be in place from a week before ovulation until a week afterward the flow ceases.

Astrological fertility aligns when the sun-moon angle from the birthday re-aligns in the transiting sky. Body temperature and vaginal mucous secretions may be tracked and analyzed to recognize ovulation fertility signatures.

The same principles observed to avoid conception are the very ones to engage when conception is planned. Ayurveda suggests both parents undergo panchakarma to prepare to receive the child into the family. If only one parent can manage, it would be the mother. Panchakarma is the cleansing and rejuvenation science of Ayurveda.

For further information on Conception, please see 'Ayurveda for Pre-Conception', a paper presented at the 4th Annual National Ayurveda Medical Association professional development conference in Las Vegas, NV Oct. 22, 2005 and available in the public domain on my website under Free Downloads.

Pre-Menstrual Syndrome

Vata type of pre-menstrual syndrome is characterized by spasms, cramping prior to flow, constipation, anxiety, restlessness, scanty flow and irregularity. Pitta type of pre-menstrual syndrome shows more in irritability, rage, criticism, stabbing pain, diarrhea, cramping on the first and second flow days, cravings such as chocolate, sweating and midnight wakefulness. Kapha type of pre-menstrual syndrome is seen in lethargy, reclusiveness, sadness, heaviness, melancholy, cystic and later fibrotic changes, delayed and prolonged flow. Kapha dosha is also seen in mid-cycle cramping, bloating and even cramping toward the end of the flow, too.

Any combination of symptoms reveals the doshic causes and therefore the remedy. For example, if both Vata and Pitta symptoms present, the woman is wise to follow Vata and Pitta management strategies for food choices, lifestyle choices and herbal support for chronic symptoms.

Expert pulse assessment will reveal the full picture of the qualitative and quantitative imbalances and lead to the comprehensive, holistic, individualized healing program. The upcoming NADI PARIKSHA program is planned for Sept. 2-6 and Oct. 19-23 in Surrey, BC. Pulse reading skills are best learned in person in the oral tradition of Ayurveda..

Tips for Healthy Self-Care

Rest is the single most important influence toward healthy, normal menstruation is simply RESTING on the flow days, especially if symptoms present. Many later diseases of the reproductive system can be avoided by honouring the importance of resting at least the first day or two of flow, depending on when pain/fatigue/discomfort may occur.

If the flow is heavy and prolonged, rest is advised to help re-set the monthly bio-rhythms. Spotting days do count as flow days and rest may still be needed. Rest does not mean daytime sleeping. It means to rest, read and relax. Light tasks can be OK and walking may help, but generally standing is not encouraged, such as for cooking.

In prior times, a woman would retreat to the 'red tent' or 'moon lodge' and be cared for by other women, who would cook and care for the children, etc. Nowadays, it is our own responsibility to replicate this as closely as feasible, to help support fertility, emotional and physical strength in later years, as well as the assurance of gestational and newborn health. Overwork during the menstrual cycle has no place in the healthy Ayurveda lifestyle. Cause and effect is defined as equal and inexorable. No herbs can compensate for rest.

The use of pads is preferable to tampons, because tampons impede the flow of waste material out of the body and retain it in the vaginal pathway, where it can be re-absorbed by the specialized skin of the walls. If a tampon is needed for very heavy flow, then it can be changed every couple of hours while resting. Menstrual products should be unbleached, as bleached products are known carcinogens.

Avoid synthetic hormones such as birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy, estrogen patches, IUD's emitting synthetic hormones and favour phyto-hormones. Increased risk of cardio-vascular diseases and cancer, the two biggest killers of women today, are associated in medical studies of these synthetic, laboratory made pills and patches. Your lifestyle may be different from your mother's and grandmother's, engaging the law of cause and effect for healthier outcomes. Genetics can be modified with panchakarma.

Phyto-Hormones

To help the body 'remember' its correct endocrine and hormonal function, herbs and herbal preparations are used in Ayurveda. The first line of management for imbalances lies in right food and lifestyle choices, while herbs can be used as medicine as needed. Healing herbs contain the full chemistry and psycho-biology of the whole plant – extracts, titrations and distillations are processes that influence the plant's cellular structure and digestibility.

Avoid active ingredient products that concentrate one component of the plant as compared to using the whole plant, and preferably choose fresh and local. If imported herbs are used, let them undergo the least processing to make their plant constituents bio-available to the patient. Standardization is not from Ayurveda, rather individualization is called for.

One of four classifications of substances, including medicinal herbs, is 'virya' or the thermal effect of a substance, whether it is heating, cooling or neutral on assimilation into the plasma and in due course, subsequent tissue cells. The thermal effect of herbal substances must be carefully evaluated to ensure the metabolism normalizes its relationship to temperature. Excess heat can lead to inflammations, while excess cold can lead to congestions, accumulations.

Other classifications of substances include 'rasa' or the taste on the tongue, which can be any and all of the six tastes of sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent and astringent. Many herbs render more than one taste on the tongue.

Also, 'vipak' or post-digestive taste at the cellular level on assimilation, is critical to understand which herbal combinations will be most potent for the individual. Vipak involves the chemical and thermal effects at the post-digestive level and interfaces with the mind and consciousness. Western science has not come to this understanding as yet.

Prabhau is the fourth classification to describe and define the qualities and actions of substances. Prabhau means exception to the rule, special potency and unexpected effect. Prabhau of each medicinal herb or substance needs to be taken into account to ensure right action at a right time for removing the cause of disease.

Estrogen dominance is rampant in our society, not only from synthetic hormones found in carton milk containers, plastic food packaging and preservatives, but also in the widespread use of synthetic hormones and chemical hormone disruptors that are not recognized by our cellular intelligence. They become indigestible or difficult to digest, therefore can bring side effects.

Estrogen dominance may be responsible for many inflammatory conditions seen in the public health profile of women, from learning disabilities to fertility concerns to birth conditions of mother and child. Avoid all non-recyclable plastics until more is known about their effect on our reproductive statistics.

A few important hormone-balancing Ayurveda herbs having affinity for Artava are selected here to use in appropriate conditions only:

<u>Shatavari (Asparagus Racemosus)</u>	Root
Rasa	sweet, astringent
Virya	cooling
Vipak	sweet
Prabhau (unique characteristics)	estrogen-precursor action, anabolic
<u>Ashoka (Saraca Indica)</u>	Bark
Rasa	sweet astringent
Virya	heating
Vipak	pungent, removes grief
Prabhau	catabolic, progesterone precursor
<u>Kumari (Aloe Barbadensis)</u>	Inner Filet
Rasa	bitter, astringent, sweet, pungent
Virya	cooling
Vipak	sweet
Prabhau	catabolic, liver hormonal balancer, rejuvenative
<u>Vidhari (Ipomoea Digitata)</u>	Root
Rasa	sweet, astringent
Virya	warming
Vipak	sweet
Prabhau	anabolic, affinity for mamsa, artava progesterone precursor

Breast Care

Specialized breast care is important, especially for Kapha women who tend to more dense, fibro-cystic changes in Artava Vaha Strotas. Breast self-massage using pure castor oil or if needed for greater potentization, a mixture of equal flax, castor and corn (organically grown) oils can be used to help metabolize over-stored Kapha molecules in the breast tissues.

Massage from the mid-line to the axilla area with outward strokes, avoiding moving the breast tissue toward the midline, which can help increase breast volume, whereas lateral movements support reduction of breast mass. Warm the oil in your right palm.

Micro-calcification can be detected if consistent breast massage is practised. If undetected, micro-calcification may lead to cystic and later fibrotic changes of the breast tissue. Massaging with castor oil helps prevent accumulation of micro-calcification. Western women have been led astray to consume excessive synthetic calcium, resulting in unassimilated, chalky particles.

Avoidance of bras and synthetic deodorants are important measures to help protect the energies and meridians of the chest zone. Avoid mammograms which can cause spread of some cancer conditions and favour thermography, which is much less invasive and misogynistic.

Menopause

Cessation of menstrual flow occurs only after the ova are spent from both ovaries, moving toward the peri-menopausal years. This is a specialized care discussion, not suited to this paper. Menopause may have no symptoms in the woman who has cared for her fertility and menstrual process consistently.

Panchakarma

Panchakarma is the science of the five actions of Ayurveda cleansing and rejuvenation, including their pre- and post-operative treatment measures. These are: Basti (enema therapy), Virechan (laxative therapy), Vmana (emesis therapy), Rakta Moksha (therapeutic blood letting using specialized leeches), and Nasya (nasal administration therapy). Panchakarma is best supervised by a senior practitioner only, fully trained in the advanced and subtle therapies of Ayurveda.

If a candidate is suited to this procedure after considering indications and contra-indications, panchakarma can be performed in a right way at a right time, and can bring positive reversal of symptoms, while conveying how to maintain life-long health. Panchakarma science is capable of genetic healing of telomeres along the RNA and DNA chains.

Prior to undergoing panchakarma, an amazing process of self-learning and reform, the person completes the palliation phase of pacification of the dosha. The practitioner will advise when the palliation phase is sufficient for the person to benefit from classical panchakarma. PK is always followed by at least an equal number of days of rejuvenation, called the 'Rasayana' phase. PK is to be any odd number of days.

Panchakarma is not performed on the menstrual flow cycle or on spotting days. The program is suspended if the flow begins early during treatment, and rest is favoured over cleansing, which takes a lot of energy and attention.

Conclusion

The menstruating years in a woman's life represent her cyclical association with the moon (soma, mind, tides of life, etc.), the potential for childbirth and family planning, along the journey of self-realization.

Through the menstruating years, a woman comes to understand her power of creativity, authority, wisdom and community support. The flow days bring a more open aura, therefore the woman has heightened spiritual perception and receptivity. Please rest during the flow, setting an example for your daughters and nieces for self-care according to Ayurveda, the world's oldest holistic health science.

For seminars, classes, online learning, case management support and individual consultations, please contact me at jaisri@ayurveda-seminars.com or call 604-290-8201.