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# How to be an Ayurvedic therapist

In this issue:

Clove Bud Oil	The Bowen Technique	Hand and Nail Products
<b>8</b> 	<b>28</b> 	<b>48</b> 

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# Ancient wisdom

## for modern post-partum care



**To any mother, there is nothing more precious than the birth of her baby. So much time and care is dedicated to nurturing the new arrival and many mothers can feel overwhelmed with the huge changes.**

**S**o much so that in the Western cultures we are all too often rushing to get back to some form of 'normality', focusing on our day-to-day house chores, shopping and social lives, so that we feel we are coping. Many new mothers do not take the time for proper rest that is so needed at this time, potentially risking the body and mind to health issues soon after birth or even later on in life.

The ancient science of life, Ayurveda, places an equal amount of importance if not more, on the care of the new mother as that of the baby. Around 40–45 days of special care has been indicated by ancient seers dating over 5,000 years in the Ayurvedic scriptures such as '*Charaka Samhita*' and '*Sushruta Samhita*'. So much of this wisdom is relevant and applicable today as it has been in the generations passed. In many Eastern cultures, families were and still are very much involved in the support of the mother and baby.

Ayurvedic principles are based on keeping the body and mind in balance through foods, herbs, yoga, breathing, and lifestyle. The five elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether combine to create the three doshas – the bio-physical forces that reside in the body and each one of us have varying combinations of these three doshas which make up our constitution, usually dominated by one or two doshas. Vata comprises of ether and air, governing all the movement in the body and mind. Vata has qualities that are dry, light, rough, subtle, mobile and cold. Pitta is made of the fire and water elements, governing all the digestion and metabolism that takes place in the body with qualities of heat, penetration, unctuousness and mobility. Kapha gives structure and lubrication to the body and is made of the earth and water elements with qualities that are heavy, cold, static, soft and sticky.

Even after a perfectly normal delivery of a healthy baby, the mothers' body, mind and

particularly the digestive fire (agni) becomes weakened and the vata dosha becomes temporarily and severely aggravated and various complications can prevail such as anxiety, depression, constipation, gas, disturbed digestion, sleep and more. Ayurvedic post-partum care would first and foremost aim to rekindle the digestive fire and balance the vata dosha. By opting for foods and a lifestyle with the opposite qualities to vata such as warmth, unctuousness, moisture and grounding, balance can be achieved.

### Food preparations

Fresh, hot, nutritious meals that are prepared with love are the key ingredient in Ayurvedic post-partum care. Food choices would consist of the sweet, salty, mildly bitter and pungent tastes as well as those foods that encourage lactation.

Foods to be avoided during the first 40-day period would be those that aggravate the vata dosha and upset the digestion of both mother and baby, particularly foods which are dry and cold. Ice cream, cold food and drinks out from the fridge, salads, raw vegetables, heavy meats, leftover and stale foods are strongly discouraged.

Even healthy salad options can be vata

Ayurvedic Post-partum Diet	
<b>Foods to avoid</b>	Raw foods, cold foods, dry foods including crackers, fast & convenience foods, meat, eggs, yeasted bread, garlic, onions, potatoes, tomatoes, caffeine, sugar, tofu, cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, beans, green peas, fermented foods (soy yoghurt, miso alcohol), butter, hard cheese, carbonated drinks
<b>Foods to favour</b>	<b>Fruits/Nuts:</b> berries, dates, raisins, stewed apples/pears, avocado, soaked & blanched almonds <b>Veggies:</b> carrots, beets, green beans, asparagus, corn, sweet potatoes, courgettes, kale, chard, spinach, aubergine <b>Grains:</b> whole grains cooked with ghee, quinoa, millet, amaranth, oatmeal, brown or basmati rice <b>Lentils:</b> yellow/green mung, red lentils. <b>Dairy:</b> freshly made paneer, organic boiled milk, ghee <b>Spices/herbs:</b> ajwain, cumin, black pepper, sea salt, turmeric, fenugreek, fennel, saffron, nutmeg, cardamom, cinnamon

provoking and gas forming due to their cold quality coupled with the low digestive fire of the mother. Butter is also considered to be cold in quality whereas ghee is balancing for all doshas. Sour foods such as yoghurts are also avoided as it can further hamper a weakened digestion and block the body channels due to its cold quality but a little freshly squeezed lemon or lime on foods can be balancing and cleansing for vata.

Generally, think warm, moist, and oily, externally and internally. It is best to prepare

vegetables that are fresh and organic. Food choices would include warm and unctuous foods that are easy to digest and strengthen the digestive fire. Fresh meals have more prana (life force) and support digestion. If the mother is non-vegetarian she can opt for chicken and fish cooked with extra moisture so it is not so taxing on the digestion and does not aggravate vata.

The mother is encouraged to eat nurturing foods that will help her recover from pregnancy and the exhaustion of labour and giving birth. The

main meal should be eaten at lunchtime when the digestive fire is naturally at its strongest. Portions sizes should be appropriate, neither over-eating nor under-eating. As the foods are healing and assist recovery, the mother is encouraged to eat whilst sitting in a comfortable and relaxed environment so that her senses are also nourished.

When preparing Ayurvedic meals, specific herbs and spices can be used to enhance lactation and aid digestion, such herbs include

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saffron, fennel, dill, basil, caraway and fenugreek. Gas-relieving spices such as cinnamon, cardamom, cumin, ginger, turmeric and fennel can also be used so that foods become more digestible and the baby less likely to need external forms of gas relief. Other useful herbs and spices include basil, thyme, marjoram, tarragon, nutmeg, and coriander all have healing benefits. A special herbal drink is prepared with five seeds that are cleansing to the womb as well as strengthening for digestive fire.

## Body care

For the first few days the mother is encouraged to wrap her abdomen a few times with a long piece of cotton or muslin so it is snug but not too tight, to encourage the organs and muscles to restore back to normality. Keep the belly and lower back warm with a hot water bottle as opposed to a fan heater in the room, which can be too drying for vata.

A daily (if possible) or weekly massage (abhyanga) with warm cured sesame oil is balancing and warming for vata. Other options can be warmed herbal oil of ashwagandha, bala or maharanyana, all good choices. This massage should use a light pressure with particular focus on the abdomen followed by a steamy shower or bath. Post-partum abhyanga helps the body to eliminate stagnant toxins from the body tissues especially since the mother is relatively inactive. It also calms the nervous system and encourages lactation. The baby can also have a massage daily in the morning before a bath once the cord has fallen off, it can help induce restful sleep, improved immune function, circulation and strengthen the body tissue.

It is advised that the mother stay out of cold, windy environments and keep herself warm by wearing socks and a scarf. In addition, the new mother should avoid travelling, sex, exertion that

can all aggravate vata and avoid contact with anyone who has a contagious condition.

## Rest and recovery

Maximum rest should be observed during the first 40 days after giving birth. Family members can help with household chores, shopping, food preparation and care of any other children. While the mother is able to focus on self care and care for the baby. This is a special time where stress should be avoided and the new mother can focus on breast-feeding and bonding with the baby. In traditional Eastern cultures, post-partum depression rates were low as the new mothers were rarely left alone to deal with the anxieties of motherhood and were encouraged to focus of baby-led breast-feeding.

When the baby is sleeping, the mother should also take full advantage and rest at that time so she is able to stay calm, focused and energised while the baby is awake, contributing to fruitful bonding. Proper rest in these first 40 days after birth is a great investment for the mothers' long-term health.

## Herbal help

In India, edible resins known as acacia gum resin or gum arabica is cooked in ghee, jaggery and wheat flour and given with raisins and almonds or made into healthy energy bars with digestive seeds. This is known to assist the reproductive organs to go back to a normal state. This is usually given at the start of the day with a small glass of boiled milk.

Shatavari, a member of the asparagus family, is a perfect and easily available herbal choice for rejuvenating the reproductive organs. Other herbal medicines such as Satavarikalpa, Ashwagandha and Satavarigrita (herbal ghee) can be given as rejuvenating tonics. Milk can be given with laghupanchamula (the 5 smaller roots) from the 2nd to the 10th day. If the mother finds herself constipated she can be administered, 1 tbsp of castor oil. Traditionally in Ayurveda, the vulva is douches with plain or warm herbal water and then exposed to the smoke of Ajamoda and Satahva (dill).

An Ayurvedic doula is able to assist from the day of birth, the beauty of this is that she will know how and when to start changing herbal preparations and foods as the body slowly progresses in healing. **CHW**

© As a member of the APA, Geeta Vara is a fully qualified Ayurvedic Practitioner working in London & the South-East providing consultations, treatments and corporate workshops.

For more information about Ayurvedic post-partum care, dosha types, treatment or specific health concerns, please email: [geetavara@gmail.com](mailto:geetavara@gmail.com) or call: 07956 521601. [www.geetavara.co.uk](http://www.geetavara.co.uk)

## Recipe: Healing Energy Bars

### Ingredients:

- 200g finely chopped jaggery
- 250g wheat flour
- 200g ghee
- 1 tsp white poppy seeds
- 1 tsp fennel seeds
- 1 tsp dill seeds
- 1/2 tsp fenugreek seeds
- 1 tsp ground ginger (dry powder)
- 1/2 tsp ground cardamom
- 2 tbsp chopped almonds
- 2 tbsp chopped pistachios
- 2 tbsp gum arabica finely crushed
- 1 tbsp desiccated coconut (optional)

### Method:

- ① Coarsely grind the fenugreek, dill and fennel seeds.
- ② In a medium saucepan add half of the ghee and roast the wheat flour over a medium flame until dark golden brown then add the gum arabica, after a couple of minutes add the chopped nuts and roast for a further 5 minutes.
- ③ Add the ground seeds, desiccated coconut, ground ginger and ground cardamom and mix well.
- ④ In a separate saucepan heat the remaining of the ghee and jaggery until melted.
- ⑤ Add the melted jaggery into the wheat flour, nuts and seeds mixture and combine until mixed well. Now transfer into a baking tin and flatten.
- ⑥ Leave to cool for half an hour and then cut into squares.



## Cleansing & nourishing herbal drink

- ① In a saucepan add 1 level tsp each of fennel, dill, coriander, fenugreek, ajwain seeds
- ② Bring to boil in a litre of water, sweeten with a little jaggery to taste
- ③ Store in a flask and drink whilst warm throughout the day