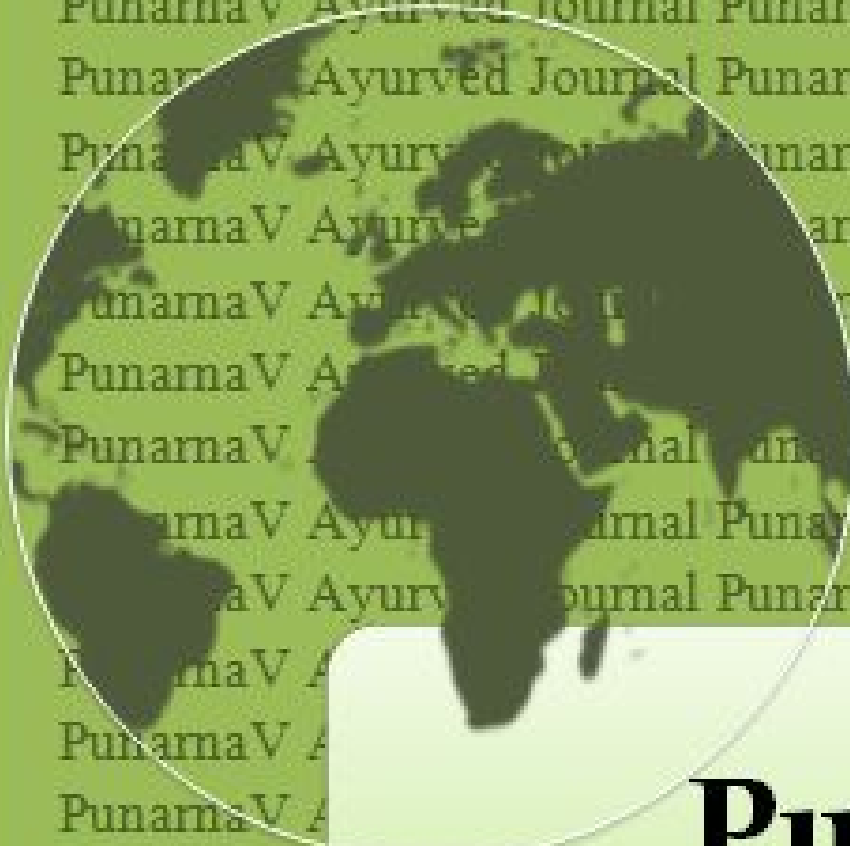


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*ROLE OF AYURVEDA IN MENSTRUAL HEALTH: FROM MENARCHE TO
MENOPAUSE*

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**ROLE OF AYURVEDA IN MENSTRUAL HEALTH: FROM MENARCHE TO
MENOPAUSE**

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ABSTRACT:

Ayurveda has always given importance to care of woman at every phase of her life in respect of Rajaswala paricharya (menstrual care), Garbhini paricharya (Antenatal care) and Sutika paricharya (postnatal care). In Ayurveda the menstrual cycle is called as Rituchakra. Menstruation can be the first indication of puberty and in Indian society restrictions that emphasize a negative attitude towards this phenomenon. A major indicator of a woman's health within Ayurveda is her Rituchakra (Menstrual cycle). In Ayurveda framework of menstrual cycle is seem as a purification process, in which impurities from the female body are expelled in the form of blood. All the Acharyas have mentioned 12 year as the age for menarche and 50 year as the age of menopause for the female. During menstruation period shedding of the blood leaves, the genital tract moist and lowered acidity of the vagina making at risk for infections by bacteria and organisms in reproductive tract. Due to this infection in reproductive tract, it leads to some menstrual disorders. Menstruation disorders are responsible for emotional, physical, behavioral and dietary practice changes. There always remains lack of updated information concerning the knowledge and attitudes of urban adolescents regarding menstruation. Reviving and reforming the practices which were long held in India along with some orientation towards Ayurvedic approaches will be an absolute answer to the burning issues of women's health. Mainstreaming the Ayurvedic methods in women health care appears to be the most promising remedial measure to promote maternal health.

KEY WORDS: Ayurveda, Garbhini, Paricharya, Rajaswala, Ritu Chakra.

INTRODUCTION

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The menstruation is the cyclic physiological uterine bleeding out of shedding of the endometrium due to invisible interplay of the hormones mainly through Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Ovarian-Uterine axis.¹ For this phenomenon to occur in normalcy, the axis must be actively coordinated and there should be positive response of the endometrium towards the ovarian hormones i.e. estrogen and progesterone with patent outflow tract. Menstruation can be the first indication of puberty and in Indian society restrictions that emphasize a negative attitude towards this phenomenon. During menstruation period shedding of the blood leaves, the genital tract moist and lowered acidity of the vagina making at risk for infections by bacteria and organisms in reproductive tract. Due to this infection in reproductive tract, it

leads to some menstrual disorders. Now days, the menstrual disorders have become a very challenging problem for working class ladies or common housewives. They may involve the structural or functional disturbances and are mostly associated with the complaint of sterility, obesity etc. In modern science, scanty & infrequent menstruation is treated by hormonal therapy & long term use of those drugs produces many side effects. In *Ayurveda*, there is description of many herbal single drugs and diet which are used in menstrual disorder. The menstrual cycle occurring in females has been termed in *Ayurveda* as *Rituchakra*. The word '*Chakra*' signifies its regular onset at regular intervals, just like a cycle. Also it shows a periodicity of one *Chandramasa* (28 days).²

Age of Menarche and Menopause:

Twelve and fifty years is the age of menarche and menopause respectively which are described in classics.³

Stages of *Rituchakra*:

The entire period of one month of *Ritu Chakra* is divided into three phases⁴:-

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Table no. 1

Stage	Duration	Predominance <i>Dosha</i>
<i>Rajahsrava Kala</i>	3 or 5 days	<i>Vata</i>
<i>Ritu Kala</i>	12 or 16 days	<i>Kapha</i>
<i>Rituvyatita Kala</i>	Days between <i>Ritukala</i> and next <i>Rajasrava kala</i>	<i>Pitta</i>

1. Rajahsrava kala

The *Rajahsrava kala* (menstrual phase) comes at an interval of one month by all the *Acharya*, however, there is difference of opinion regarding duration of menstruation as three days (*Yagbhata*), five days (*Charak*) and seven days (*Harita and Bhela*).⁵ The blood collected for whole month by both the *Dhamanis* (uterine vessels and their endometrial capillaries) assuming slight black color and specific odor is brought downwards to vaginal orifice by *Vayu* for excretion.⁶

Table no. 2. Showing the activities avoided by female during *Rajahsrava kala* (menstrual period) and its ill effect⁷

Sr. no.	Activities avoided during Menstrual Period	Effect on the Imminent Fetus.
1	Day Sleep (<i>Diwaswapna</i>)	Sleepy (<i>Swapasheela</i>)
2	Collyrium (<i>Anjana</i>)	Blind (<i>Andha</i>)
3	Weeping (<i>Rodan</i>)	Ophthalmic disorders (<i>Vikrit drishti</i>)
4	Bath and after paste (<i>Snananulepana</i>)	Unhappy (<i>Dukhasheela</i>)
5	Oily massage (<i>Tailabhyanga</i>)	Laprotic (<i>Kushthi</i>)
6	Cutting nails (<i>Nakha apakrtana</i>)	Bad nails (<i>Kunakhi</i>)
7	Running (<i>Pradhavana</i>)	Unsteady (<i>Chanchala</i>)
8	Laughing (<i>Hasana</i>)	Teeth, lips, palate, tongue blackish (<i>Shyav dashana aushth talu jihva</i>)

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9	Talking too much (<i>Pralapi</i>)	Talkative (<i>Atikathan</i>)
10	Excessive hearing (<i>Atishabda shravana</i>)	Deaf (<i>Badhir</i>)
11	Combing (<i>Avalekhan</i>)	Bald (<i>Khalati</i>)
12	Exposure to wind and exertion (<i>Marut ayas sevan</i>)	Insane (<i>Unmatta</i>)

Table No. 3. Shows effect of the coitus with menstruating woman on upcoming fetus.⁸

Sr. No.	<i>Rajhsravakala</i> (Menstruation Day)	Effect on the Upcoming Foetus.
1	1 st day	The foetus dies during delivery
2	2 nd day	Death of the child in labour room
3	3 rd day	The child would be with incomplete body parts or short-lived
4	4 th day	The child would be with complete body parts and long lived

- Coitus specially has been contraindicated by all the *Acharyas* during this phase of *Rituchakra*
- The woman sleeping on mat of *Darbha* and taking food of rice with ghee by palm, earthen saucer or leaf should be kept aloof from the husband for three days. Thereafter, on the fourth day, having taken purificatory bath, having worn new and attractive cloth having chanted auspicious hymns, she should be brought before the husband. The woman having taken bath after menstruation sees whomever man first, she gives birth to the son similar to that.

2. *Ritukala*: *Ritukala* is that phase of *Rituchakra* which comes after the *Rajhsrava kala*. The duration of this phase is twelve days.⁹ The duration of this phase is twelve days according to *Acharya Sushruta*. *Acharya Vagbhat* considers this duration as twelve days or sixteen days or it may also be of one month.¹⁰ *Acharya Kashyap* has given a different concept depending upon different races of the society.¹¹ It is called *Ritukala* because during this phase of a woman's menstrual

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cycle, if her *Garbhashaya* receives the seeds (sperms), there are chances of conception (just like the breeding season). The reason for conception during *Ritukala* has been explained very well as follows as the lotus flower closes itself after sunset, in the same way the *Yoni* of women gets constricted after *Ritukala* and does not accept *Shukra* or permit the entry of *Beeja* (sperms) into its inner components i.e. uterus, fallopian tubes etc.

Characteristics features of *Ritumati stri*¹²

The woman whose face is corpulent and cheerful; body, mouth and gums excessively moistened; who has longing for man, likes talks, has belly, eyes and hairs loosened, develops twitching in arms, breasts, pelvis, umbilicus, thighs, pelvic region and buttocks and has excessive desire for sexual intercourse should be known as ‘*Ritumati*’.

Effect on the child conceived after *Ritukala*-¹³

Life span of child shortens gradually with the impregnation occurring after *Ritukala*. As the paddy sown after its appropriate season possesses less properties, is weak, unstable, unsteady, thin and fragile, similar is the case with the child.

3. *Rituvyatita kala*

As lotus flower closes positively when the day is over, woman’s uterus (external os) contracts after the period of conception is over and does not receive the seed any more.¹⁴

Status of *Doshas* during phases of menstrual cycle-¹⁵

Table no. 4.

Specific stage	Duration	Condition of reproductive system	Dominant <i>Dosha</i>
1. <i>Rajahkala</i> (menstrual phase)	3-5 or 7 days	Menstrual blood loss	<i>Vata</i>
2. <i>Ritukala</i> (proliferative phase including ovulation)	12 or 16 days or whole month, even without menstruation	Establishment of <i>Navina raja</i> (new cycle), optimum chances of fertilization, increased sexual desire, etc.	<i>Kapha</i>
3. <i>Rituvyatita kala</i> (secretory phase)	9-13 days	Presence of <i>Purana raja</i> and constriction of <i>Yoni</i> , less chances of conception, raised body temperature.	<i>Pitta</i>

Role of Ayurveda in menstrual health

Ayurveda, the ancient Indian herbal system of medicine has many important and useful herbs for women. The age old texts describe these unique herbs and medicinal plants and their compound formulations that can enhance the health of women.

Ayurveda has best natural health supplements and products to deal with the changes in the body right from menarche to menopause. *Ayurveda* medicine is very useful to treating menstrual disorders and normalizes the healthy menstrual cycle.

Balancing the Vata dosha

- *Vata* pacifying diet and lifestyle - One should eat *Snigdha* (unctuous), *Ushna* (hot), mushy foods cooked in spices and take *Panchakarma* procedures like *Snehan*, *Swedan* etc.
- Castor oil will not only nourish and ground *Apana Vayu* and the tissues, but also can break stagnation and blockages caused by dried up *Vata*, is there happens constipation in this time.
- Due to *Vata*, there is depletion of the nourishing *Rasa Dhatu* during menstrual cycle. One should drink plenty of water

which will help bring to moisten body tissues.

- *Pranayama* that will pacify the lightness and erratic nature of *Vata* are *Anuloma Viloma*, and *Bhramari*.

Balancing the Pitta Dosha

- Hot spices, garlic, ginger and chillies and hot beverages such tea, coffee, and alcohol should be avoided. One should avoid spicy and oily foods. Be careful, however, not to aggravate *Vata* in the process.
- For *Pitta* type premenstrual symptoms one should practice of *Nasya* that has a balancing affect to the energy in the head. Avoid this practice while menstruating.
- Use of Coconut oil pack - It is especially balancing to *Pitta* because it has cooling quality and sweet taste.
- Follow a *Pitta* friendly yoga practice. *Sheetali* and *Sheetkari Pranayamas* are ideal for bringing coolness to the *Pitta* individual.

Balancing the Kapha Dosha

- *Kapha* brings heaviness, thickness, oiliness, dullness and slowness into *Rasa Dhatu*, which goes directly to the female

system. By inviting lightness, thinness, and more fluidity, much of the stagnation in the system can be relieved.

- Throughout the day, keep warm and dry. Stimulate *Agni* with spices such as ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, black pepper. One should avoid daytime sleeping.
- By exercising, we stimulate the movement of blood and lymph throughout the body.
- With castor oil's warm and penetrating qualities, we can really break up quite a bit of stagnation latent in the pelvis. At this time, first flow is heavier than normal. This is a sign of blockage release and generally subsides after the first cycle or two. This practice should not be done while menstruating.
- In addition to a *Kapha Yoga* program, *Pranayama* is greatly beneficial because it facilitates the proper movement to *Prana*. Releasing stagnation in this subtle layer can have profound effects on the grosser, physical layer. Further, *Pranayama*, especially *Bhastrika* and *Kapalabhati*, directly activate muscles that massage the lower abdomen and pelvis. By increasing *Agni*, *Bhastrika* and *Kapalabhati* bring warmth and helps relieve stagnation.

Herbal medicine

The herbs mentioned in *Ayurveda* are also very helpful to target a specific menstrual flow. In addition to those, the following herbs can be useful-

Ashoka (Saraca indica) - *Ashoka* is the queen of herbs for the female reproductive system, as a uterine tonic and aiding in heavy bleeding and pain. Literally meaning, "remover of sorrow", this herb will aid in physical as well as psychological pain. Its astringent taste also aids in removing excess tissue and wastes and helps tone the uterus, aiding in heavy cycles. *Ashoka* is a key ingredient in Women's Cycle Ease. In another study saracin seems to be an interesting immunomodulator for the mammalian immune system.

Shatavari (Asparagus recemosus) - *Shatavari* has been translated as the "women who has a hundred husbands." This is *Pitta* reducing, and has a particular affinity to the female reproductive tract and urinary system. As such, it is seen as an adaptive during times of stress and over taxation of the body.

Ashwagandha (Withania somnifera) - *Withania somnifera* is found effective in combination with other rejuvenating drugs

like licorice in menopausal syndrome in many studies. It increases levels of estrogen and helps reduce the symptoms like hot flashes, fatigue, and depression because of its antioxidant.^{16,} ¹⁷It also has immunomodulatory, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, and adaptogenic effects.

Kanchanar guggulu - This *Guggulu* formulation contains heating and cleansing herbs in addition to *Kanchanar*. It is great for scraping and moving out wastes, particularly in gynecologic imbalances involving stagnation and congestion.

Ghrithkumari (Aloe vera) - In *Sanskrit*, this herb is called *Kumari*, meaning “young maiden.” Aloe vera is widely respected as being highly supportive of a woman’s reproductive system. In such a way, the classic *Ayurvedic* texts have referred to this herb repeatedly for gynecological disturbances. Aloe vera can be found in Women’s Support tablets.

Manjista (Rubia cordifolia) - Foremost, *Manjista* is an excellent blood cleanser; removing *Pitta*, while also building the blood gently. As it cleanses the blood, it also is able to remove stagnation and constriction within the reproductive tract.

Triphala - *Triphala* is most known for its ability to aid in elimination of wastes, particularly from the gastrointestinal tract, and removing toxins from the body. In addition, it is a great rejuvenative.

Haridra (Curcuma longa) - It has been proven that this herb has antibacterial, anticancerous, antihemorrhagic, and anti-inflammatory properties and hence can be effective in menstrual difficulties like menorrhagia or abnormal uterine bleeding.³⁹

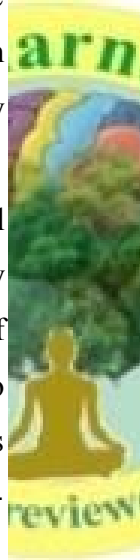
Healthy diet

- Wheat, Great millet, Rice, Soyabean.
- Green leafy vegetables and the salad like Beet and Carrot should take in regular diet.
- Cow's milk, Butter, Ghee and Butter milk.
- All kind of sweet fruit. One fruit should be eaten regularly.
- For the snacks the roasted Ground nut, Barley flakes, Rice flakes, Popped rice.
- Intake of Dates, Black Resin, and Almonds is useful.
- The Edible Gum Laddu is beneficial.
- The Date soaked in the Ghee is also helps.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Women's health is a topic of concern in the medical field, as women are an important factor in the reproduction of healthy progeny. The environmental factors, fast-changing lifestyles, and various addictions (drug abuse) as well as excess use of drugs (like steroids) have endangered their health.

- *Ayurveda* is human life science which deals with information regarding anatomy and physiology with respect to various stages of life.
- Menstruation is physiological condition in which female body excretes blood in the form of shedding of the endometrium due to invisible interplay of the hormones mainly through Hypothalamus-Pituitary-Ovarian-Uterine axis.
- In the context of *Ayurveda*, *Rutuchakra* is classified in to three stages like *Rajahsrava kala*, *Ritukala* and *Rituvyatit kala* which are



controlled by *Vata*, *Kapha*, and *Pitta* respectively.

- Proper balancing of these three *Dosha* is very important for normal menstruation cycle and females day today's activity.
- In *Ayurveda*, there is description of many herbal single drugs which are used as uterine tonic.
- *Saraca indica* (saracin) is a good uterine tonic, which is effective in normalizing menstruation and reducing associated symptoms. A formulation of *Ashoka*, *Ashokarishta* is very popular formulation for gynaecological disorders. It gives relief from excessive bleeding and pain during menstruation.
- In treating menopausal syndrome, *Mulethi* is found an effective source of estrogens.

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