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Postpartum Depression-An Extensive Approach to Evaluation and Treatment

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ABSTRACT

For every new mother life is challenging and hard. But for some of them there is an added scuffle facing the Post-partum depression. This condition can be serious and may have deleterious effects in women and child. However, this term is often applicable to all instances of psychological suffering after the childbirth. Therefore it is important to screen and to manage Post-partum depression. Symptoms may include unhappiness, low energy levels, changing sleeping and eating pattern, anxiety, rage etc. Practising *yoga* and *pranayama* and *Ayurvedic* therapies can help to eliminate the disorder.

KEYWORDS

Postpartum depression, Sutika roga, Mood swings, EPDS, Yoga



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INTRODUCTION

Postpartum period is the period following the birth of baby. During this period many new mothers experience many physical and psychological changes. Post-partum depression is a depressive condition that affects around 10-15 women among every 100 women after childbirth. During post-partum period some women begin to feel anxious and sad. They may feel irritated and get angry with baby, husband or any other family members. Woman has extreme feeling of downheartedness, anxiety and distress due to which she is not able to do her daily routine activities¹. Post-partum depression may persist in more than 25-50% of women after delivery². Many women experience baby blues after parturition. They might be suffering from mood swings, feel disheartened, having crying spells, sleeplessness etc. often these baby blues diminish after 5-6 days whereas signs and symptoms of post-partum depression stay for longer duration and are more severe in nature. Postpartum depression usually starts within 25-30 days after child birth, but depression can also happen during pregnancy or up to one or two years after delivery³. As per *Ayurveda*, *Sutika* is a lady who has either just given birth or is in the period of up to 6 weeks post giving birth. At this period, congenial diet

and tender loving care should be given to the women⁴. Acharyas have mentioned 64 types of *sutika roga* along with their management. Among these diseases psychological disorders also have been mentioned e.g. *Pralapa, unmada, bhrama*⁵. These disorders can be indirectly related to Post-partum depression.

CAUSES OF POST-PARTUM DEPRESSION

Following possible reasons can be made for this condition

1. Physical factors- Inadequate diet, sleep deprivation, alcohol or drug abuse.
2. Hormonal factors- During pregnancy levels of hormones like progesterone and oestrogen are increased. After delivery these levels revert back to normal. These hormonal variations may give rise to this clinical condition⁶.
3. Psychological factors- Emotional exhaustion which could be due to strain from pregnancy illness, isolation and social rituals during post-partum period (e.g. Prohibition to go outside, stay at home only).
4. Family factors- History of any mental health illness in the family.

RISK FACTORS FOR POST-PARTUM DEPRESSION-

1. Women having previous history of depression



2. Not having support from husband, family and friends

3. Having financial problems

4. Unwanted pregnancies

5. Difficulty in breast feeding

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

1. Sleeplessness

2. Anorexia- loss of appetite

3. Having repeated crying spells

4. Feeling of loneliness, anxious

5. Mood swings

6. Irritability

7. Negative thoughts for self and baby

8. Unable to bond with new born

9. Feeling unhappy

10. Suicidal thoughts

DIAGNOSIS

Diagnosis of post-partum depression is based on the signs and symptoms.

Physicians may also use some specifically designed tools as screening tests such as EPDS- Edinburg Post natal Depression Scale⁷. This self-rating scale has been proven as an effective tool to diagnose and screen out such depressive condition.

TREATMENT

Treatment of post-partum depression depends upon the presenting signs and symptoms. There are various ways to treat post-partum depression such as psychological counselling, drugs, life style changes etc.

1. Psychotherapy – it includes

a) Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) – It is the combination of psychotherapy and behavioural therapy. It works on the principal that any thought may trigger the state of depression. The patient is taught how to manage the relationship between her problem, behaviour, thoughts and state of mind. The aim of this therapy is to alter the negative thoughts patterns so that they become more and more positive.

b) Interpersonal therapy (IPT) - It is a form of psychotherapy in which there is a direct interaction between the physician and patient affected by depression. In this therapy four major problem areas of patient are focussed. These are interpersonal conflict, grief, life stage transitions and deficits. It has been recognized as an effective mode of treatment.

c) Antidepressants- Wide range of antidepressants is used in the treatment of depression. However, these may have related side effects and also alter breast milk.

2. Life style modification-

a) Avoid isolation and share feelings – She should avoid being isolated and discuss feelings with her friends, family or partner. By sharing the feelings she gets the perspective to handle the situation.

3. Follow *sutika paricharya*- General principles explained for *sutika* should be followed. Some of these are-



a) *Nidana parivarjana* (Avoiding causing factors)

b) *Snehapana* (consumption of fats), *abhyanga* (massage), *udara-veshtana* (abdominal strapping), *parishechana* (hot water pouring etc.)⁸. *Snehapan* alleviates the *vata dosha* in *sutika*. *Snehapana* alleviates the *vata dosha* in *sutika* and increases the appetite. It also soothes the mind and reduces the stress. *Abhyanga* tones up the pelvic floor muscles and relieves the muscular spasm. Also improves the blood circulation and thereby have a soothing effect on the nervous system and endocrine system of the body. Moreover, it releases the endorphins which improve the physical as well as mental well-being, so it reduces the stress and depression.

c) Rice gruel medicated with group of drugs like *vidarigandhadi gana*, *snigdha jangal rasa* etc. (non-veg soup)⁹.

d) Administration of *ghrita* along with *jivaneeya* (life prolonging), *brimhaniya* (anabolic), *madhura* (sweet) and *vatahara* herbs¹⁰.

4. Yoga and pranayama for post-partum depression –

Yoga acts as a powerful tool in relieving stress, anxiety and depression. It helps by enhancing the sleep quality as well as mental health in women. *Yoga asanas* improves the circulation and increase the energy levels¹¹. In a study, women with

post-partum depression attended the *yoga* classes for 2 months. Among these 78% experienced a marked and clinically significant improvement in the symptoms of depression and anxiety¹².

Beneficial *Yoga asanas* are – *shavasana*, *sukhasana*, *utanapadasana*. *Pranayama* (breathing exercises) - *anuloma*, *viloma* has also a great impact over the neurological and mental distress. It is excellent for cleansing and detoxification and it compliments *yoga* for the management of depression and anxiety. *Bhramari pranayama* is the one which is also helpful in treating depression. In this breathing style, a humming sound of a bumble bee is made. It also has a near instant calming effect on the mind.

CONCLUSION

Post-partum depression is a serious condition affecting the maternal mortality and morbidity rate. There is also decreased mother infant bonding. Post-partum screening helps in the early recognition of the depression. Diagnosis and treatment depends upon the presenting clinical signs and symptoms. Improving lifestyle and embracing *Ayurveda* will be efficacious for this condition. Life style modification, family support and *sutika paricharya* might prove effective. This regimen helps the patient to fight against the depression and



regain the strength that helps her body to revert back to approximate pre-pregnant state. It also restores the vitality and relieves the mental stress and anxiety.



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