

Vaccines of Traditional Healthcare

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Prevention is better than cure; the statement, although clichéd, categorically holds true. In our own little ways, although we try to keep ourselves safe, healthy and protected from infections and diseases, yet we never actually know where and when we might catch them. Some of these infections tend to render us unhealthy for the rest of our lives, while some could even prove fatal. Being cautious is advisable, but it may not always prevent us from catching certain harmful infections. Vaccination happens to be one of the most preventive approaches ever developed by mankind.

It is believed that the concept of vaccination was adopted centuries ago, when the Buddhist monks would drink down the venom of a snake in order to immunize themselves from the dangers of a potential snake bite. Edward Jenner, an English physician, once scratched the arms of a little boy using the pus from cowpox sore in one of the milkmaids over there. He also added small amount of smallpox into it, and amazingly, the boy was immunized from smallpox for the rest of his life. This experiment happened in the 18th century, and it is said that by 1977, smallpox had almost been eradicated from world over [1]. Few decades later, an anti-rabies vaccine was developed by Louis Pasteur, an MD, who proved that infections could indeed be prevented by infecting humans with weakened germs [2]. The invention of polio-vaccine by Jonas Salk and Albert Sabin was a blessing that still continues to offer prevention from a lifetime of physical dependency [3,4]. Mumps, measles, rubella and tetanus are just some of the other harmful infections that are being cured, by proper and timely vaccination. Thanks to the concept of vaccination, children the world over are leading much healthier lives.

Ayurveda gives well established concepts for the immunity and resistance boosting methods. Immunity is the balanced state of having adequate biological defences to fight infection, disease, or other unwanted biological invasion, while having adequate tolerance to avoid allergy, and autoimmune diseases. This particular science of immunity is explained in 'Vyadhikshamatva' (Resistance against disease) in the ancient Ayurveda texts. The process of strengthening the immune system was brought about by using the Rasayana and Vajikarana therapies. The immune power varies from person to person and no two persons are believed to have same level of immune strength. Immunity is broadly classified in two types i.e., Natural immunity and Passive immunity. Natural immunity is usually inherited immune power that a person gets genetically whereas passive or acquired immunity is developed after birth based on exposure to various infective organisms [5].

The principles of vaccines for improving the immunity was also described thousands of years ago in Ayurveda in the form of countless formulations for adults and children. "Lehana" (means intake of medicine by licking) is one such traditional special formulation, mentioned in Ayurvedic manuscripts that have been used to boost immunity in the

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children [6]. Powdered mixtures of herbs, gold bhasma, with honey and ghee were given to children. Some of the traditionally used lehana in Ayurveda for boosting immunity in infants are:-

1. Suvaran bhasm with kustha (Saussurea lappa), vacha (Acorus calamus), honey & cow ghee
2. Suvaran bhasm with paste of brahmi, shankpushpi, with honey and cow's ghee
3. Suvaran bhasm, arpushpi, vacha, honey and cow's ghee
4. Suvaran bhasm, khaidarya, sweta durva, etc.

Suvarnaprashan: This was believed to be the first immunization given immediately after birth even before umbilical cord was cut and the baby was breast-fed by the mother. Gold powder was rubbed with honey and ghee and given to the baby to lick. This has been regarded to as to increase immunity (against bacterial as well as viral infections), boost intelligence, digestive fire & physical power in the children.

Panchagavya prashana: It is practiced once every year during July and August during which the vaccine Viraemia is alleged to be at its peak in cow. It works as an oral vaccination and every year a repeat dose can work as a booster dose.

Fresh Cow Dung- Enteric organisms plus vaccinia virus

Urine-Acidic, antitoxic attenuation of microbes

Milk -Medium to protect attenuated organisms

Curd -Medium to protect attenuated organisms

Ghee -Enteric coating

Copper Vessel -Isolation Attenuation

Recently a US patent has been awarded to Serum Institute of India and University of Pune for using Ashwagandha as a vaccine adjuvant. An adjuvant is a substance increases the efficacy of vaccination.

Ayurveda, the great Indian science of traditional healthcare and wellbeing, strongly supports the whole idea of immunization [7]. Its prophylactic (preventive) approach advocates maintaining optimum health by adopting some rather practical techniques. Nidan parivarjan suggests avoiding the very carriers of infection, for example, polluted water in order to stay safe from any kind of water-borne disease. Dinacharya, as the name suggests, refers to a healthy morning regimen. Ritucharya talks about adapting our lifestyles according to the seasons. Avoiding viruddha ahaar or the incompatible diet is another idea suggested by Ayurveda in order to stay healthy by avoiding unhealthy food, etc. As it can be observed, the approach of Ayurveda towards prevention is not limited to vaccination alone. This, in fact, is one of the most realistic approaches to

guard ourselves against diseases, besides taking regular vaccination. From the scientific point of view, ayurvedic products are rich in antioxidants. Antioxidants in turn serve as vaccines [8].

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