



Review Article

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ROLE OF MATERNAL DIET, LIFESTYLE, AND MENTAL STATE IN THE PHYSIOLOGY OF STANYA AND ITS DUSHTI

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Abstract

Background: *Stanya* (breast milk) is considered the prime nourishment for the newborn, serving as the first and most natural food that supports growth, immunity, and development. Ayurveda emphasizes that the quality and quantity of *Stanya* are influenced by the mother's *Ahara* (diet), *Vihara* (lifestyle), and *Manasika Bhava* (mental state). An imbalance in these factors can lead to *Stanya Dushti* (vitiation of breast milk), which affects the infant's health and may result in disorders such as *Jwara*, *Chhardi*, *Kasa*, and *Atisara* in the child. **Objectives:** To evaluate the physiological role of maternal diet, lifestyle, and mental state in maintaining the purity and function of *Stanya*, and to understand their contribution to *Stanya Dushti* and its effects on neonatal health. **Materials and Methods:** A literary and conceptual study was conducted by reviewing classical Ayurvedic texts (*Brihatrayi* and *Laghutrayi*), commentaries, and modern scientific literature. Relevant *Stanya*-related references were collected from *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, *Ashtanga Hridaya*, and contemporary research databases. The parameters of *Ahara*, *Vihara*, and *Manasika Bhava* were critically analyzed concerning maternal lactation physiology. **Observations:** Texts reveal that *Satmya Ahara*, rich in *Snigdha* and *Poshaka* qualities, enhances *Stanya* formation and sustains its *Shuddhata*. Irregular diet, stress, anger, grief, and sleep deprivation are key etiological factors

of *Stanya Dushti*. Modern studies parallel these findings, linking maternal nutrition, stress hormones, and lifestyle to alterations in milk composition and lactation patterns. **Results:** Ayurvedic and modern perspectives converge in identifying maternal diet, psychological well-being, and daily regimen as decisive for milk secretion and quality. Specific *Stanya Dushta Lakshanas* such as *Ruksha*, *Puti*, or *Pichhila Stanya* correspond with metabolic, infectious, or stress-induced alterations in modern terms. **Conclusion:** Balanced *Ahara*, disciplined *Vihara*, and stable *Manasika Avastha* are vital for the maintenance of healthy *Stanya*. Preventing *Stanya Dushti* through maternal care, counseling, and appropriate dietary guidelines can ensure better neonatal health and prevent early childhood morbidities. Integration of Ayurvedic dietary principles with modern maternal health protocols can provide a holistic approach to lactation wellness.

Keywords: *Stanya*, *Stanya Dushti*, *Ahara*, *Vihara*, *Manasika Bhava*, Maternal Health

Introduction

Stanya (breast milk) is considered one of the most vital physiological secretions in a woman's body, serving as the natural sustenance for a newborn. Ayurveda regards *Stanya* as an upadhatu (subsidiary tissue) of *Rasa Dhatu*, indicating that its quality depends directly on the nourishment and balance of maternal *Rasa Dhatu*. The health of the infant, therefore, is a reflection of the mother's internal harmony—her diet, lifestyle, and emotional stability. In modern science, breast milk is known to contain all essential nutrients, immunoglobulins, and bioactive compounds required for the infant's growth, immune protection, and neurodevelopment, paralleling the Ayurvedic emphasis on its purity and vitality.¹

The concept of *Stanya Dushti* (vitiation of breast milk) is well documented in classical texts such as *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita*, and *Ashtanga Hridaya*. According to Ayurveda, when the mother's *Ahara* (diet), *Vihara* (lifestyle), and *Manasika Bhava* (mental state) are improper, the *Doshas* become aggravated and contaminate the *Stanya*. Such vitiation manifests in different forms like *Ruksha*, *Puti*, *Pichhila*, or *Harita Stanya*, each producing corresponding disorders in the child, such as *Kasa*, *Jwara*, *Atisara*, and *Murcha*. These correlations highlight the interconnectedness of maternal health and neonatal outcomes, a concept now recognized in maternal-fetal medicine and lactation science²

Ayurveda emphasizes *Ahara* as a major determinant of *Stanya* quality. Foods that are *Snigdha*, *Laghu*, *Poshaka*, and *Satmya* are advised during lactation to promote *Stanya Vriddhi* (enhancement of milk). Conversely, consumption of *Amla*, *Lavana*, *Katu*, *Ruksha*, or

incompatible food combinations (*Viruddha Ahara*) can impair *Rasa Dhatu* and in turn vitiate *Stanya*. In modern terms, nutritional imbalances such as micronutrient deficiencies, dehydration, or high-fat diets can alter the composition of breast milk, affecting its immunological and biochemical properties. Thus, the Ayurvedic dietary principles find strong support in modern nutritional science.³

Equally significant is *Vihara*—the daily regimen and habits of the mother. Irregular sleep, lack of physical rest, excessive exertion, and neglect of postpartum care can disturb *Vata Dosha*, leading to diminished milk secretion or *Stanya Kshaya*. Proper rest, timely nourishment, and gentle physical activity maintain *Dosha Samya* and ensure the normal physiology of lactation. Modern evidence also supports that maternal fatigue and poor postpartum practices are linked with reduced milk output, mastitis, and altered hormonal balance, underscoring the timelessness of Ayurvedic recommendations.⁴

The *Manasika Bhava* (mental state) of the mother holds profound influence over the secretion and quality of *Stanya*. Ayurveda acknowledges that emotions such as anger, grief, anxiety, or fear vitiate *Rasa Dhatu* and hence disturb milk quality. Modern research aligns with this, showing that psychological stress elevates cortisol and catecholamine levels, which inhibit oxytocin release and suppress the milk ejection reflex. Therefore, nurturing maternal mental health through relaxation, emotional support, and *Satvika Ahara* becomes essential in maintaining the purity of *Stanya*. Understanding this integrated relationship between maternal diet, lifestyle, and mental state provides a holistic framework for preventing *Stanya Dushti* and ensuring the optimal growth and health of the child.⁵

Aim and Objectives

Aim:

To explore the influence of maternal diet, lifestyle, and mental state on the physiology of *Stanya* and the causative factors leading to *Stanya Dushti*.

Objectives:

1. To study the physiology and formation of *Stanya* according to Ayurvedic principles.
2. To analyze the role of *Ahara* (maternal diet) in the quality and quantity of *Stanya*.
3. To evaluate the effect of *Vihara* (lifestyle) on *Stanya Nirman* and secretion.
4. To assess the impact of *Manasika Bhava* (mental state) on *Stanya* and its vitiation.
5. To correlate Ayurvedic concepts of *Stanya Dushti* with modern lactation physiology and neonatal outcomes.

Physiology of *Stanya*

In Ayurveda, *Stanya* (breast milk) is described as the natural and essential nourishment for the newborn, symbolizing the continuity of *Rasa Dhatu* from mother to child. It is considered an *Upadhatu* of *Rasa Dhatu*, produced after the initial digestion and transformation of food. *Charaka Samhita* states that when *Rasa Dhatu* is well-nourished, a portion of it transforms into *Stanya* in lactating women. This emphasizes the concept that the health and nutrition of the mother directly influence the quality and quantity of *Stanya*. In modern physiology, breast milk is recognized as a dynamic biological fluid containing proteins, fats, carbohydrates, hormones, enzymes, and immune factors that adapt to the infant's developmental needs.⁶

Formation of *Stanya* (*Stanya Utpatti*)

According to Ayurvedic physiology, *Stanya* originates in the *Stanya Vaha Srotas*, whose *Mula Sthana* is described as *Stana* (breasts) and *Hridaya* (heart). *Charaka Samhita* mentions that the *Rasa Dhatu*, after *Paka* (metabolic transformation), nourishes the entire body and produces *Upadhatu*s like *Stanya* and *Artava*. The process is governed by *Ahara Rasa*, which, after digestion, circulates and nourishes the *Stanya Vaha Srotas*. *Snehana* (unctuousness), *Poshana* (nourishment), and *Sravana* (secretion) are the key physiological stages of *Stanya* formation. In modern understanding, this correlates with the endocrine regulation of lactation involving prolactin (milk synthesis) and oxytocin (milk ejection).⁷

Role of *Dosha* and *Dhatu* in *Stanya Nirman*

The *Tridosha* play an integral role in the physiology of *Stanya*. *Vata* governs the movement and ejection of milk, *Pitta* maintains the metabolic transformation and quality of nutrients, while *Kapha* provides the unctuous and nourishing properties. Balanced *Doshas* ensure proper secretion and sustenance of *Stanya*, whereas their vitiation leads to *Stanya Dushti*. Among *Dhatu*s, *Rasa* serves as the base material for milk formation, and its depletion or *Dushti* directly affects milk production. This Ayurvedic view closely aligns with modern lactation science, which highlights that hormonal equilibrium and maternal nutrition are vital for sustained milk output.⁸

Functional Aspects of *Stanya*

Ayurveda describes *Stanya* as *Jeevaniya* (life-sustaining), *Brimhaniya* (nourishing), and *Balya* (strength-promoting). It supports physical growth, immunity (*Vyadhikshamatva*), and

mental stability (*Manobala*) of the infant. Modern physiology confirms that breast milk provides complete nutrition, immune protection through antibodies (especially IgA), and fosters gut microbiota essential for digestion and immunity. The first milk (*Piyusha* or colostrum) is especially valued for its immune-boosting qualities, which Ayurveda associates with *Ojasvardhana*—enhancing vitality and resistance.⁹

Factors Affecting *Stanya* Physiology

Ayurveda clearly states that the quantity and quality of *Stanya* depend on maternal factors such as *Ahara* (diet), *Vihara* (lifestyle), and *Manasika Bhava* (mental state). A wholesome diet rich in *Snigdha* and *Satmya* foods promotes *Stanya Vridhhi*, while irregular lifestyle and mental stress vitiate *Doshas*, leading to *Stanya Kshaya* (depletion) or *Stanya Dushti*. Modern findings corroborate that maternal nutrition, hydration, rest, and psychological well-being significantly influence lactation hormones and milk composition.¹⁰

Stanya Dushti

Stanya Dushti refers to the vitiation or impurity of *Stanya* (breast milk) due to the imbalance of *Doshas* in the lactating mother. Ayurveda describes *Stanya* as an *Upadhatu* of *Rasa Dhatu*; hence, any disturbance in *Rasa Dhatu* or *Dosha* equilibrium directly affects the milk's quality and function. When *Vata*, *Pitta*, or *Kapha* become aggravated, they vitiate *Stanya* and produce different kinds of milk impurities that harm the child's health. The child, dependent solely on *Stanya*, manifests symptoms corresponding to the type of *Dushti*, emphasizing the vital role of maternal health in infant well-being.¹¹

Types of *Stanya Dushti*

Classical Ayurvedic texts describe several types of *Stanya Dushti*:

- **Vataja *Stanya Dushti*** – milk becomes *Ruksha* (dry), *Tanuka* (thin), and *Sheeta* (cold). It causes colicky pain, flatulence, and irregular feeding in the child.
- **Pittaja *Stanya Dushti*** – milk appears *Pita Varna* (yellowish), *Tikshna*, and produces *Daha*, *Chhardi*, or *Jwara* in the infant.
- **Kaphaja *Stanya Dushti*** – milk becomes *Guru*, *Picchila*, *Snigdha*, and leads to heaviness, *Kasa*, and *Shwasa* in the child.
- **Sannipataja *Stanya Dushti*** – all *Doshas* are involved, causing mixed symptoms and severe illness in the child.

- Some texts also mention *Rakta Dushti* and *Amaja* forms, where contamination arises from impure blood or undigested food residues, resulting in putrid or discolored milk.

Nidana (Etiological Factors)

The causative factors for *Stanya Dushti* are related to improper *Ahara* (diet), *Vihara* (lifestyle), and *Manasika Bhava* (mental state) of the mother. Excessive intake of *Amla*, *Lavana*, *Katu*, and *Ruksha* foods, consumption of *Viruddha Ahara*, irregular meal timings, or unwholesome diet disturb *Rasa Dhatu*. Irregular sleep, overexertion, suppression of natural urges, and emotional disturbances like anger, grief, or fear lead to *Dosha Prakopa*, contaminating *Stanya Vaha Srotas*. Modern science parallels this with evidence that stress, poor diet, infections, and hormonal imbalances alter breast milk composition and secretion.¹²

Lakshana (Clinical Features)

The features of *Stanya Dushti* are evident both in the mother's milk and in the child's health. Alterations in color, taste, smell, and consistency are diagnostic signs. The infant may present with symptoms such as diarrhea (*Atisara*), vomiting (*Chhardi*), fever (*Jwara*), respiratory discomfort (*Kasa*, *Shwasa*), or skin eruptions. *Charaka Samhita* and *Kashyapa Samhita* detail these manifestations to guide identification and management. In modern correlation, these represent metabolic intolerance, allergic reactions, or infections arising from contaminated or biochemically imbalanced milk.¹³

Samprapti and Pathophysiology

The pathogenesis begins with *Ahara-Vihara Hetu Sevana*, leading to *Dosha Prakopa*. The aggravated *Doshas* enter the *Rasa Dhatu* and affect *Stanya Vaha Srotas*. Vitiating *Rasa Dhatu* produces impure milk, which when ingested by the child, manifests disorders according to the dominant *Dosha*. Thus, the process reflects a dual-pathology—maternal (vitiating *Stanya*) and infantile (resultant disease). Modern lactation physiology supports this, recognizing maternal systemic imbalances as determinants of milk composition, affecting the infant's digestion, metabolism, and immunity.¹⁴

Chikitsa (Management Principles)

The management of *Stanya Dushti* involves treating the mother through *Shodhana* (purification) and *Shamana* (pacification) therapies aimed at restoring *Dosha Samya*. Use of *Stanya Shodhana Dravyas* such as *Shatavari*, *Vidari*, *Yashtimadhu*, *Trikatu*, and *Ghrita* is recommended to purify and enhance milk. Maternal counseling on *Pathya Ahara*, adequate

rest, and emotional balance forms the preventive aspect. From a modern viewpoint, balanced nutrition, hydration, infection control, and stress management serve as key measures in maintaining milk purity.¹⁵

Role of Maternal Diet (*Ahara*)

Ayurveda emphasizes that *Ahara* (diet) is the foundation of *Stanya Nirman* because *Stanya* originates as an *Upadhatu* of *Rasa Dhatu*, which itself is nourished by food. The quality, quantity, and purity of breast milk depend largely on the mother's dietary intake. A wholesome, *Satmya*, *Snigdha*, and *Poshaka Ahara* enhances *Stanya Vriddhi* (milk production) and maintains its *Shuddhata* (purity). Texts recommend *Ksheera* (milk), *Ghrita* (clarified butter), *Shashtika Shali* (red rice), *Mudga* (green gram), *Draksha* (grapes), and *Yashtimadhu* as *Stanya Vardhaka Dravyas*. Conversely, excessive intake of *Amla*, *Lavana*, *Katu*, *Ruksha*, or *Viruddha Ahara* leads to *Dosha Prakopa* and *Stanya Dushti*.¹⁶

In modern context, malnutrition, dehydration, and high-fat or spicy diets alter the biochemical composition of breast milk, reducing essential fatty acids and immunoglobulins. Balanced maternal nutrition rich in proteins, micronutrients, and hydration supports optimal lactation physiology and immune protection for the newborn.¹⁷

Role of Maternal Lifestyle (*Vihara*)

Vihara—the daily regimen and habits of the mother—plays a crucial role in maintaining *Stanya Samya* (normal lactation). Proper sleep, rest, moderate physical activity, and adherence to *Dinacharya* and *Ritucharya* sustain *Dosha balance* and healthy *Rasa Dhatu*. Irregular routines, excessive exertion, night awakenings, and suppression of natural urges aggravate *Vata Dosha*, leading to *Stanya Kshaya* (reduced secretion) or *Stanya Dushti*. Postpartum care involving *Abhyanga* (oil massage), *Svedana* (mild fomentation), and adequate nutrition restores maternal strength and supports lactation.¹⁸

Modern physiology also confirms that maternal fatigue, stress, and poor rest disturb hormonal rhythms (prolactin and oxytocin), impairing milk ejection and quantity. Hence, a balanced lifestyle with adequate rest, hydration, and emotional support is essential for sustaining milk flow and composition.¹⁹

Role of Maternal Mental State (*Manasika Bhava*)

Ayurveda considers *Manasika Bhava*—the emotional and psychological condition of the mother—as a powerful determinant of *Stanya Shuddhi*. Emotions like anger (*Krodha*), fear

(*Bhaya*), grief (*Shoka*), and anxiety (*Chinta*) vitiate *Rasa Dhatu* and disturb *Hridaya*, the *Mula Sthana* of *Stanya Vaha Srotas*. This leads to impaired secretion or altered quality of milk, manifesting as *Stanya Dushti*. Calmness, affection, and happiness (*Satvika Bhava*) promote healthy lactation.²⁰

From a modern view, stress activates the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis, raising cortisol and catecholamine levels that inhibit oxytocin, the hormone responsible for milk let-down. Depression and anxiety in lactating mothers are linked to reduced milk yield and early cessation of breastfeeding. Thus, emotional stability and mental relaxation are critical for effective lactation and neonatal nourishment.²¹

Interrelationship of *Ahara*, *Vihara*, and *Manasika Bhava*

Ayurveda views *Ahara*, *Vihara*, and *Manasika Bhava* as interdependent pillars of health. Disturbance in one inevitably affects the others. An unwholesome diet influences mental stability; poor lifestyle habits increase psychological stress; and emotional imbalance leads to dietary irregularities—together culminating in *Dosha Prakopa* and *Stanya Dushti*. A holistic postpartum regimen that integrates wholesome diet, rest, positive environment, and mental peace ensures balanced *Stanya Nirman*. Modern integrative medicine also supports this psychosomatic approach, acknowledging that diet, lifestyle, and emotional wellness jointly regulate hormonal and metabolic functions of lactation.²²

Result and Objectives

- Mothers consuming *Snigdha*, *Poshaka*, and *Satmya Ahara* showed improved *Stanya Nirman* and secretion, while unwholesome diets rich in *Amla*, *Lavana*, *Katu*, and *Ruksha* substances were directly associated with *Stanya Dushti* and infant problems like *Kasa*, *Atisara*, and *Jwara*.
- Intake of *Stanya Vardhaka Dravyas* such as *Shatavari*, *Yashtimadhu*, *Draksha*, and *Ksheera* promoted better lactation and maintained the natural color and consistency of milk.
- Mothers following regular *Dinacharya* and *Ritucharya*, with adequate rest, sleep, and mild exercise, maintained balanced *Stanya Samya*, whereas irregular sleep, overexertion, and postpartum neglect led to *Vata Prakopa* and *Stanya Kshaya*.
- Emotional stability and *Satvika Bhava* were found to sustain *Shuddha Stanya*, while negative emotions like *Krodha*, *Shoka*, and *Bhaya* altered *Stanya* properties and caused irritability and feeding issues in infants.

- Modern studies parallel these findings, showing that maternal stress and anxiety elevate cortisol levels, inhibit oxytocin reflex, and reduce milk ejection, validating Ayurvedic concepts of *Manasika Bhava Dushti*.
- *Vataja Dushti* presented *Ruksha* and *Sheeta* milk causing colic in infants; *Pittaja Dushti* produced *Pita Varna* milk leading to *Jwara* and *Chhardi*; *Kaphaja Dushti* caused *Guru* and *Picchila* milk resulting in *Kasa* and *Shwasa* in infants.
- Mothers maintaining wholesome diet, proper rest, and mental peace exhibited pure, nourishing milk and healthier infants, whereas improper *Ahara-Vihara-Manasika Bhava* were responsible for most *Stanya Dushti* cases.
- A holistic maternal regimen integrating balanced diet, disciplined lifestyle, and emotional stability proved most effective in maintaining *Stanya Shuddhi* and preventing neonatal disorders.

Discussion

In Ayurveda, *Stanya* is considered the primary nourishment for the newborn and is directly derived from the mother's *Rasa Dhatu*. Hence, the mother's physical and mental state plays a crucial role in determining the purity and nutritive quality of *Stanya*. The present conceptual study highlights that the maternal *Ahara* (diet), *Vihara* (lifestyle), and *Manasika Bhava* (mental state) collectively influence the physiology of *Stanya* and are the key factors responsible for *Stanya Dushti* when vitiated. Classical texts such as *Charaka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samhita* clearly mention that any derangement in *Doshas*—whether through improper diet, habits, or emotions—leads to vitiation of *Stanya Vaha Srotas*, producing impure milk that adversely affects the infant.²³

Dietary factors play a central role in the formation and maintenance of *Stanya*. Wholesome and *Satmya Ahara*, rich in *Snigdha* and *Poshaka* qualities, ensures the nourishment of *Rasa Dhatu* and, in turn, pure *Stanya*. Unwholesome foods such as *Amla*, *Lavana*, *Katu*, and *Ruksha* substances aggravate *Doshas*, causing qualitative and quantitative disturbances in milk. Modern research supports this by showing that malnutrition, dehydration, and micronutrient deficiencies in mothers alter milk composition, reducing its immunological and nutritive value. Thus, Ayurveda's emphasis on *Pathya Ahara* aligns with current nutritional science that underscores the need for balanced maternal diets during lactation.²⁴

Lifestyle or *Vihara* contributes significantly to the regulation of *Doshas* and maintenance of *Stanya Samya*. Regular sleep, rest, and postpartum care restore maternal strength and balance *Vata Dosha*, facilitating proper milk secretion. In contrast, irregular sleep, excessive physical exertion, and suppression of natural urges disturb *Vata* and lead to *Stanya Kshaya* or *Dushti*. This Ayurvedic observation parallels modern evidence where maternal fatigue and poor postpartum care reduce prolactin secretion and delay milk ejection. Therefore, appropriate rest, physical relaxation, and adherence to Ayurvedic postpartum regimens like *Abhyanga* and *Snehapana* are vital for ensuring healthy lactation.²⁵

The mental state or *Manasika Bhava* of the mother exerts a profound influence on *Stanya Nirman*. Ayurveda recognizes that emotions such as anger (*Krodha*), grief (*Shoka*), and fear (*Bhaya*) vitiate *Rasa Dhatu* and consequently impair milk quality. Modern endocrinology also confirms that stress and anxiety elevate cortisol and adrenaline levels, suppressing oxytocin and hindering the milk let-down reflex. Hence, a calm, positive, and emotionally stable environment is essential for maintaining *Stanya Shuddhi*. This correlation between Ayurveda and modern science reflects a deep psychosomatic understanding of maternal health, emphasizing that a balanced combination of *Ahara*, *Vihara*, and *Manasika Bhava* ensures not only pure *Stanya* but also the overall well-being of both mother and child.²⁶

Conclusion

The physiology and purity of *Stanya* are profoundly influenced by the mother's *Ahara* (diet), *Vihara* (lifestyle), and *Manasika Bhava* (mental state). A wholesome, *Snigdha* and *Satmya Ahara*, along with adequate rest and a calm, positive mental outlook, promotes the formation of *Shuddha Stanya* and ensures proper nourishment of the infant. Conversely, unwholesome food habits, irregular routines, and emotional disturbances lead to *Dosha Prakopa* and *Stanya Dushti*, resulting in various disorders in the child. Both Ayurvedic and modern perspectives agree that maternal nutrition, rest, and psychological well-being are interdependent and essential for healthy lactation. Therefore, maintaining equilibrium through proper diet, lifestyle discipline, and emotional stability serves as the most effective preventive and promotive approach for sustaining pure, nourishing, and disease-free *Stanya*.

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