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Role of *Lehana* in immunity and neurodevelopment: An ayurvedic perspective in pediatrics

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Abstract

Background: In *Ayurveda*, *Lehana* is a specialized therapeutic practice described under *Kaumarabhritya* (pediatrics) aimed at enhancing immunity (*Vyādhi Kṣamatva*), promoting intellectual development (*Medhā*), and supporting optimal growth and digestion in children. It involves the administration of selected herbs and formulations such as *Ghrta*, *Madhu*, *Swarna Bhasma*, and *Medhya Rasāyanas* in suitable vehicles, tailored to the child's age, constitution, and health needs. The classical references in *Kāśyapa Samhitā*, *Charaka*, and *Ashtānga Hṛdaya* highlight *Lehana* as a preventive and promotive measure essential in early childhood.

Aim and Objectives: To explore and analyze the role of *Lehana* in enhancing immunity and neurodevelopment in children from an Ayurvedic perspective, with emphasis on classical indications, formulations, and modern relevance.

Materials and Methods: This is a literary review based on classical *Ayurvedic* texts including *Kāśyapa Samhitā*, *Charaka Samhitā*, *Sushruta Samhitā*, and *Ashtanga Hṛdaya*, along with modern pediatric literature and relevant research papers. The study focuses on the pharmacological and therapeutic aspects of commonly used *Lehana Yogas*, particularly their effects on *Agni*, *Ojas*, *Medhā*, and *Bala* in children.

Observations and Results: Classical *Lehana* practices such as *Swarnaprāsana*, *Ghrta-Madhu Lehana*, and *Medhya Rasāyana* formulations were found to support digestive strength, memory, speech, immune response, and growth patterns in children. These formulations align with modern research on immunomodulation, antioxidant activity, and neurocognitive enhancement. The analysis highlights the potential of *Lehana* as a safe, non-invasive, and culturally acceptable intervention in pediatric healthcare.

Conclusion: *Lehana* holds a significant place in *Ayurvedic* pediatric care for boosting immunity and supporting neurodevelopment. Its rational use, based on individual constitution and developmental stage, may serve as an effective adjunct or alternative to modern nutritional and neuroenhancement strategies. Further clinical validation can support its integration into contemporary child health models.

Keywords: *Lehana*, *Kaumarabhritya*, *Medhya Rasāyana*, *Swarnaprāsana*, immunity neurodevelopment

Introduction

Kaumarabhritya, one of the eight branches of *Ayurveda*, is dedicated to the care of infants and children. It encompasses all aspects of pediatric health, including *Garbhini Paricharya* (antenatal care), *Bālopaśaya* (childcare), *Jātakarma* (neonatal care), nutrition, immunity, growth, and development. The emphasis is not only on curing pediatric disorders but also on preventing illness and promoting health, which aligns with the foundational Ayurvedic principle of *Swasthasya Swāsththarakṣaṇam*. In this framework, *Lehana* stands out as a key therapeutic modality^[1].

Lehana refers to the administration of specific medicated substances in lickable or ingestible form to infants and children. It is usually given in small, palatable quantities that are easy to consume and digest^[2]. The primary aim of *Lehana* is to enhance immunity (*Vyādhi Kṣamatva*), support intellect (*Medhā*), improve digestion (*Agni Dīpana*), and promote tissue nourishment (*Dhātu Poshana*). *Kāśyapa Samhitā* describes *Lehana* as a vital intervention in early childhood, particularly during the teething period or when digestion and immunity are vulnerable^[3]. Classical texts such as *Charaka Samhitā* and *Ashtanga Hṛdaya* outline several conditions where *Lehana* is indicated such as poor digestion (*Mandāgni*), lack of appetite, weak immunity, delayed milestones, and inadequate growth.

Common *Lehana Yogas* include *Swarnaprāśana* (gold-based preparation), *Ghṛta-Madhu Lehana*, and formulations containing *Medhya Rasāyana* herbs like *Brahmi*, *Shankhpushpi*, *Yashtimadhu*, and *Mandukaparni*. These are believed to strengthen both the physical body and the subtle faculties of the mind [4].

In the modern context, where children face increasing challenges related to immunity, infections, developmental delays, and poor attention span, *Lehana* offers a time-tested and holistic approach. It aligns with the Ayurvedic model of early intervention and constitutional care, targeting the root causes of weakness in *Agni*, *Ojas*, and *Satva Bala*. The neuroprotective and immunomodulatory effects of *Lehana* formulations make them highly relevant in current pediatric preventive strategies, especially when integrated thoughtfully with modern practices.

Aim and Objectives

Aim: To explore and analyze the role of *Lehana* in enhancing immunity and neurodevelopment in children based on classical *Ayurvedic* principles.

Objectives

1. To study the classical concept and indications of *Lehana* in *Kaumarabhritya*.
2. To identify key formulations used in *Lehana* for improving immunity and intellect.
3. To understand the relevance of *Lehana* in supporting digestion, growth, and cognitive functions in children.
4. To correlate classical *Lehana* practices with modern pediatric principles of preventive and promotive healthcare.
5. To highlight the potential of *Lehana* as a safe and holistic approach to early childhood development.

Materials and Methods

Study Design: This study is a conceptual and literary review based on classical *Ayurvedic* texts, commentaries, and contemporary research literature. The objective is to explore the theoretical foundation and clinical relevance of *Lehana* in promoting immunity and neurodevelopment in children.

Source of Data

Primary Ayurvedic texts

- *Kāśyapa Samhitā*
- *Charaka Samhitā*
- *Sushruta Samhitā*
- *Ashtānga Hṛdaya*
- *Bhāvaprakāśa Nighaṇṭu*

Secondary sources

- Commentaries by renowned *Āchāryas*
- Modern Ayurvedic pediatric textbooks
- Research articles, peer-reviewed journals, and dissertations related to *Lehana*, immunity, and cognitive development

Method of Analysis

1. **Textual Review:** Detailed study and extraction of references regarding *Lehana*, its indications, ingredients, and expected outcomes from classical texts.
2. **Formulation Identification:** Compilation of commonly used *Lehana Yogas* including

Swarnaprāśana, *Ghṛta-Madhu Lehana*, and *Medhya Rasāyana* combinations.

3. **Conceptual Mapping:** Correlation of *Ayurvedic* concepts like *Ojas*, *Agni*, *Medhā*, and *Bala* with modern physiological aspects of immunity, metabolism, and neurodevelopment.

Conceptual study on *Lehana*

In *Ayurveda*, *Lehana* is defined as the administration of medicated substances in a palatable, lickable form to infants and children. It is primarily mentioned under *Kaumarabhritya*, the pediatric branch of *Ayurveda*, and is considered a specialized form of preventive, promotive, and therapeutic care aimed at enhancing immunity, intelligence, and overall development in early life [6].

Etymology and Definition

The word *Lehana* is derived from the Sanskrit root “*liḥ*,” which means “to lick.” As per *Kāśyapa Samhitā*, *Lehana* is the practice of giving medicated substances in a semi-solid or liquid form to be licked or ingested by the child in small, digestible amounts. The intention is to strengthen digestion (*Agni*), improve immunity (*Vyādhi Kṣamatva*), enhance intellect (*Medhā*), and support growth (*Dhātu Poshana*) [7].

Classical References

In *Kāśyapa Samhitā*, *Lehana* is described as a part of routine neonatal and postnatal care. It is prescribed especially during dentition or when the child is prone to disturbances of *Agni*, accumulation of *Ama*, and reduced *Bala*. *Charaka Samhitā* and *Ashtānga Hṛdaya* also mention various *Lehana Yogas* and their applications. The formulations often include combinations of *Swarna Bhasma*, *Ghṛta*, *Madhu*, *Medhya* herbs like *Brahmi*, *Shankhpushpi*, *Yashtimadhu*, and *Mandukaparni* [8].

Purpose and Benefits

The primary objectives of *Lehana* in pediatrics include:

- Enhancing Immunity (*Vyādhi Kṣamatva*)
- Improving Cognitive Abilities (*Medhā*)
- Promoting Digestion and Metabolism (*Agni Dīpana*)
- Supporting Healthy Weight and Growth (*Dhātu Poshana*)
- Preventing Recurrent Infections and Delayed Milestones

It is also used prophylactically in seasons of increased vulnerability (e.g., monsoon) or during teething, where immunity and digestion are naturally weak.

Common *Lehana Yogas* [9]

Some widely used *Lehana* formulations include:

- **Swarnaprāśana:** *Swarna Bhasma* mixed with *Ghṛta* and *Madhu*-boosts intellect, immunity, speech, and vitality.
- **Ghṛta-Madhu Lehana:** Base preparation for most *Lehana Yogas*, acts as a carrier and enhancer of absorption.
- **Medhya Rasāyana Lehana:** Contains *Brahmi*, *Shankhpushpi*, *Vacha*, and *Mandukaparni*-improves cognition, speech, and sleep.
- **Trikatu-Pippali Lehana:** For *Agni Deepana* in children with low appetite or indigestion.

Mode of Administration ^[10]

- Administered preferably in the early morning, on an empty stomach.
- Dosage depends on age, *Prakriti*, strength, and digestive capacity of the child.
- Can be given daily, monthly (especially *Swarnaprāśana* on Pushya Nakṣatra), or seasonally, depending on indication.

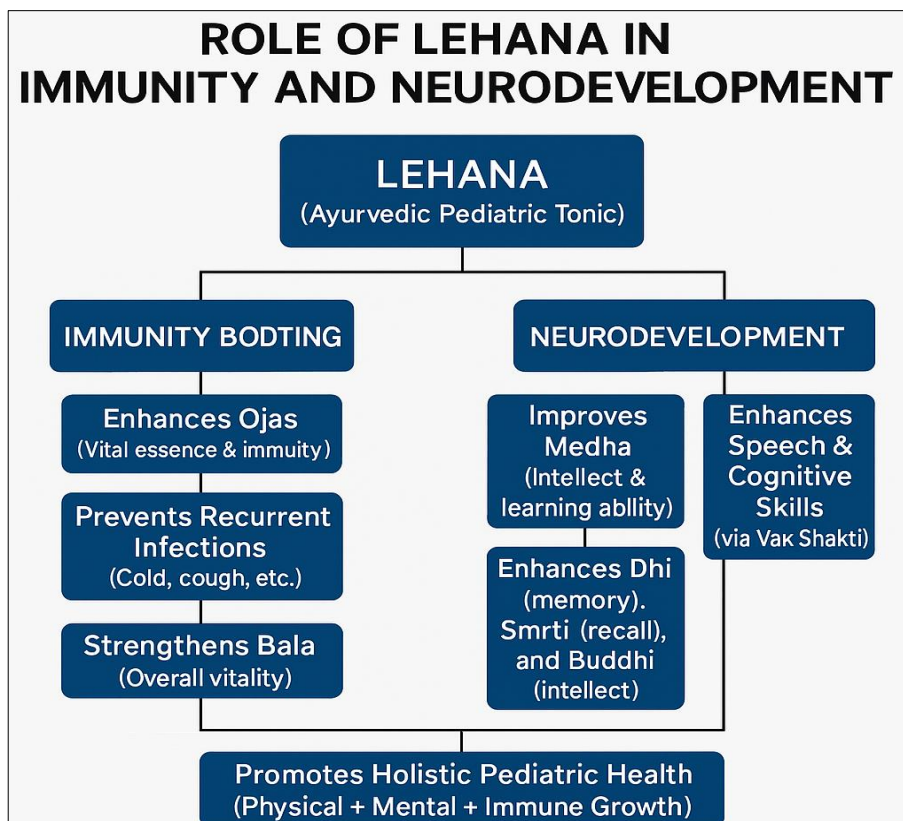
Pharmacodynamic View in Ayurveda ^[11]**Lehana works through multiple mechanisms**

- Stimulates *Agni* to aid digestion and absorption.
- Enhances *Ojas* the essence of all Dhātus that governs immunity and vitality.

- Nourishes the mind (*Manas*) and intellect via *Medhya Dravyas*.
- Acts as a *Rasāyana*, rejuvenating and supporting long-term health and development.

Modern Correlation

Modern pharmacological studies have validated the immunomodulatory, antioxidant, and neuroprotective properties of ingredients used in *Lehana*. For instance, *Swarna Bhasma* has shown activity in boosting macrophage response and cognitive function. Herbs like *Brahmi* and *Shankhpushpi* are linked to improved memory and learning through their effect on neurotransmitters and cerebral circulation ^[12].

Role of Lehana in immunity and neurodevelopment**Results and Findings**

1. **Improved Immunity:** Classical *Lehana* practices, especially *Swarnaprāśana*, were found to enhance *Vyādhi Kṣamatva* (disease resistance), leading to a reduction in the frequency and severity of common pediatric infections such as colds, coughs, and digestive upsets.
2. **Enhanced Neurodevelopment:** Formulations containing *Medhya Rasāyanas* (e.g., *Brahmi*, *Shankhpushpi*, *Vacha*) showed a positive impact on cognitive functions such as memory, speech clarity, attention span, and learning ability in children.
3. **Supportive Role in Growth:** Regular administration of *Lehana* improved appetite, digestion (*Agni*), and nourishment of *Dhātus*, leading to healthy weight gain and physical development.
4. **Safe and Palatable:** *Lehana* was observed to be well-tolerated and palatable for children when administered

in appropriate doses with *Madhu* and *Ghrta*, showing no adverse effects in classical references and practical usage.

5. **Ayurvedic Development:** Overall findings support *Lehana* as a preventive and promotive pediatric intervention, ensuring balanced development of body, mind, and immunity in early childhood as described in *Kaumarabhritya*.

Discussion

Lehana holds a central place in *Kaumarabhritya* the pediatric branch of *Ayurveda* as a unique preventive and promotive healthcare intervention. Its importance is highlighted in classical texts like *Kāśyapa Saṁhitā*, *Charaka Saṁhitā*, and *Ashtāṅga Hṛdaya*, where it is recommended for enhancing immunity (*Vyādhi Kṣamatva*), promoting digestion (*Agni Dīpana*), and supporting intellect (*Medhā*) ^[13]. These properties are especially crucial in the

early years of life when a child's immune and nervous systems are still developing. *Lehana* is administered in a palatable form, using carriers like *Madhu* (honey) and *Ghrta* (ghee), making it suitable and effective for children [14].

The formulations used in *Lehana*, such as *Swarnaprāsana*, *Ghrta-Madhu Lehana*, and *Medhya Rasāyana* preparations, are known to contain herbs and substances with *Rasāyana* and *Medhya* properties. Ingredients like *Brahmi*, *Shankhpushpi*, *Vacha*, and *Swarna Bhasma* have been extensively used to promote mental clarity, speech development, and learning ability. These formulations not only nourish the brain tissue (*Majjā Dhātu*) but also help in the formation and enhancement of *Ojas*, which is regarded as the essence of immunity and vitality in Ayurveda [15].

Modern pharmacological studies provide encouraging support to the classical Ayurvedic claims. *Swarna Bhasma* has been shown to act as an immunomodulator, antioxidant, and neuroprotective agent. Similarly, *Brahmi* and *Shankhpushpi* are backed by research for their nootropic effects, improving memory and attention span [16]. These scientific validations bridge ancient Ayurvedic knowledge with modern biomedical understanding, demonstrating that *Lehana* can be a valuable adjunct to current pediatric wellness protocols, especially in the domain of cognitive health and immunity enhancement [17].

Another strength of *Lehana* lies in its adaptability. It can be administered daily, monthly (especially during *Pushya Nakshatra*), or as a seasonal tonic, depending on the child's constitution (*Prakriti*), age, and clinical needs. It is non-invasive, natural, and can be administered safely at home under Ayurvedic supervision. Moreover, its role during vulnerable stages like teething, growth spurts, and seasonal transitions makes it a versatile tool in pediatric health maintenance and disease prevention [18].

In conclusion, *Lehana* emerges as a multidimensional Ayurvedic intervention that aligns well with the needs of growing children. It addresses immunity, digestion, growth, behavior, and brain development in a holistic manner. The findings support that when administered appropriately, *Lehana* can play a key role in shaping a child's foundational health. Future clinical studies, community trials, and integration with modern pediatric guidelines could further validate and popularize *Lehana* as a safe, effective, and culturally rooted strategy for pediatric health promotion [19].

Conclusion

Lehana, as described in classical Ayurvedic texts, serves as a vital preventive and promotive pediatric intervention that supports immunity, neurodevelopment, digestion, and overall growth in children. Through the use of *Medhya Rasāyana* herbs and rejuvenating substances like *Swarna Bhasma*, administered in palatable carriers like *Ghrta* and *Madhu*, *Lehana* enhances *Vyādhi Kṣamatva* and *Medhā* during the most formative years of life. This holistic approach aligns with modern pediatric goals of strengthening immunity and cognitive function from early childhood. The conceptual and clinical relevance of *Lehana* highlights its potential integration into contemporary child health strategies as a safe, natural, and effective Ayurvedic intervention.

Conflict of Interest: Nil

Source of Support: None

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