



SWARNAPRASHANA: THE GOLDEN ELIXIR OF CHILDHOOD—A TIMELESS LEGACY OF AYURVEDA

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ABSTRACT

Background: Ayurveda emphasizes the preservation and promotion of health from early childhood and gives special importance to *Kaumarbhritya*, the branch concerned with child health and development. The term breaks down simply: *Swarna* means gold, and *Prashana* means the act of consuming or licking. *Swarnaprashana* is a distinctive Ayurvedic practice described in the classical Pediatric literature, particularly in *Kashyapa Samhita*. It involves the administration of processed gold, traditionally prepared with substances such as *Madhu* (honey) and *Ghrta* (ghee), with specific consideration of the method, dose, and duration of administration. Classical descriptions associate the practice with promotion of *Medha* (intellectual functions), *Agni* (digestive and metabolic capacity), *Bala* (strength), longevity and resistance to disease. *Swarna Prashana* is defined as one of the 16 *Samskaras* under *Jatakarma*. *Swarna Prashana* can be started from birth (day 0) and continued up to 16 years. **Aim:** To review the classical concept of *Swarnaprashana*, its role in *Kaumarbhritya*, methods of administration, traditionally attributed benefits. **Materials and Methods:** Classical sources including *Kashyapa Samhita*, *Charaka Samhita*, *Sushruta Samhita* and *Ashtanga Hridaya* were considered along with published literature available through biomedical databases concerning *Swarnaprashana*, gold-based Ayurvedic preparations, immunological effects and safety. **Discussion:** In *Kashyapa Samhita*, *Swarnaprashana* is described in the context of *Lehana*, with gold triturated with *Madhu* and *Ghrta* and administered to the infant. Subsequent classical literature describes different forms and combinations involving gold and medicinal substances. **Conclusion:** *Swarnaprashana* represents an important component of Classical Pediatric heritage and reflects the preventive and promotive orientation of *Kaumarbhritya*. Its continued exploration through rigorous pharmacological, clinical, and safety research may help clarify its role in contemporary Pediatric care while preserving its classical foundations.

KEYWORDS: Swarnaprashana, Ayurveda, Kaumarbhritya, Swarna Prashana, Lehana, Jatakarma, Kashyapa Samhita, Child Health, Gold-based Ayurvedic Preparation, Preventive Pediatrics.

INTRODUCTION

Swarnaprashana is an ancient Ayurvedic Practice for preparing gold for medicinal use. Different *Acharya* has explained the concept of *Swarnaprashana*. *Acharya Kashyapa* has coined the term *Swarnaprashana*. The term *Swarnaprashana* means administration of gold alone or along with other herbs in a *Leha* or *Prasha* form. *Acharya Kashyapa* had explained *Swarnaprashana* in the context of *Lehana*.

❖ Literature Review

🌸 *Kashyapa Samhita*

As described in the *Sutrasthana*, *Lehanadhyaya* of the *Kashyapa Samhita*, the chapter elaborates various medicinal preparations intended specifically for the promotion and preservation of child health. It emphasizes that the state of well-being (*Sukha*) or illness (*Duhkha*) in a child is closely influenced by the appropriate administration of *Lehana*. When administered properly, according to the prescribed method and principles, *Lehana* is considered conducive to the maintenance and promotion of health. Conversely, improper administration or negligence in its use may predispose the child to ill health and disease.

सुख (खं) दुःखं हि बालानां दृश्यते लेहनाश्रयम् । (का.सू.पृ. 1)^[1]

Swarnaprashana in children can be mainly implicated in two contexts

- *Jatakarma Samskara* (new born care)
- *Lehana*
- *Acharya Kashyapa*, in his treatise *Kashyapa Samhita*, had explained *Swarnaprashana* as the foremost *Lehana* (lickable formulation) for neonatal care. Facing the *Poorva Disha* (east), which is considered auspicious, the practitioner should take purified *Swarna* (gold) and rub it on a clean, washed stone (*Shila*) with a small amount of water.

‘द्रव्याणां लेहनीयानां विधिश्चैवोपदेक्ष्यते ।

विघृष्य धौते दृषदि प्राङ्मुखी लघुनाऽम्बुना ।।

आमथ्य मधुसर्पिर्थां लेहयेत् कनकं शिशुम् । (का.सू.पृ. 4-5)^[2]

A fine paste is then prepared by mixing this gold solution with *Madhu* (honey) and *Ghrita* (cow's ghee). This paste, or *Leha*, is to be administered to the newborn by the method of licking (*lehana*), marking it as an important *Samskara* and a means to promote immunity, intellect (*Medha*), strength (*Bala*) and longevity.

🌸 *Sushruta Samhita*

In the *Sushruta Samhita*, *Swarna* with *Ghrita* and *Madhu* is described as part of the *Jatakarma Samskara* at birth.^[3] The preparation includes powdered *Ananta* root and is administered with *Anamika* finger. The classical regimen describes one dose on the first day of life, followed by administration three times daily thereafter during the neonatal period up to 2 days and resumption of breastfeeding from 4th day onwards.

‘अथ कुमारं शीताभिरद्भिराश्वस्य जातकर्मणि कृते मधुसर्पिरनन्तचूर्णमङ्गुल्या-ऽनामिकया लेहयेत्’ । (सु.शा. 10/15)^[4]

🌸 *Ashtanga Samgraha*

A Pediatric *Lehana Yoga* is described comprising *Vacha* (*Acorus calamus*) and *Swarna* (gold), administered in combination with *Madhu* (honey) and *Ghrita* (ghee) in the *Uttarsthana*.^[5]

🌸 *Ashtanga Hridaya*

Swarnaprashana is described as a component of newborn care associated with the *Jatakarma Samskara*. The administration of *Swarna Bhasma* is traditionally described for a few months, with the classical text comparing its protective effect to the inability of water to adhere to a lotus leaf.^[6] In Pediatric practice, small quantities of *Swarna* and *Vacha* (*Acorus calamus*) are administered in combination with *Ghrita* and *Madhu* for children up to one year of age. The *Ashtanga Hridaya* further describes several formulations containing *Swarna* in combination with other medicinal substances, including *Vacha*, *Kustha*, *Arkapushi*, *Matsyakṣaka*, *Sankha*, and *Kaidarya*. These formulations reflect the diverse therapeutic applications attributed to gold-containing preparations in Ayurvedic Pediatric care.

🌸 *The Role of Gold Across Life Stages in Ayurveda*

The application of *Swarna* (gold) in Ayurveda extends beyond its use in Pediatric practice. Classical Ayurvedic literature describes its incorporation into various health-promoting practices across different stages of life, suggesting a broader conceptual role in preventive and promotive healthcare. In the **preconception period**, *Swarna* is mentioned in selected *Vajikarana* and *Rasayana* formulations associated with reproductive health and parental well-being. During **pregnancy**, its use is described in certain formulations and procedures associated with *Pumsavana Karma*, traditionally intended to support healthy foetal development. At **birth**, *Swarna* is mentioned in the context of *Jatakarma Samskara*, among the traditional neonatal practices. During **childhood**, its application is prominently described as *Swarnaprashana*, a Pediatric practice discussed within the domain of *Kaumarbhritya* and traditionally associated with the promotion of *Medha*, *Bala*, and resistance to disease.

Thus, the classical references to *Swarna* demonstrate that its therapeutic and promotive applications in Ayurveda are not confined to childhood but are described across the continuum of life, with *Swarnaprashana* representing its distinctive application during early childhood.

🌸 *Why Honey and Ghee Together?*

Ayurveda generally cautions against mixing honey and ghee in *equal* proportions, considering it *Viruddha Ahara* (incompatible combination). In *Swarna Prashana*, they are deliberately used in **unequal quantities** — typically more honey than ghee which is considered safe and

therapeutically synergistic. Honey acts as a *Yogavahi* (catalytic carrier) that enhances bioavailability, while ghee carries fat-soluble compounds across the blood-brain barrier.

✚ Modes of Action

❖ Immunomodulatory Action

- Stimulates innate and adaptive immunity.
- Enhances phagocytic activity and increases antibody response.
- Increases resistance to infections and diseases.

❖ Anti-oxidant and cytoprotective Action

- Scavenges free radical.
- Reduces oxidative stress.

❖ Nutritional and Bioavailability enhancer

- Inhibits pro-inflammatory mediators.
- Modulates cytokines
- Helps in tissue repairing and healing.

❖ Neuroprotective and Cognitive Enhancement

- Supports neuronal growth and synaptic development.
- Improves memory, attention and learning.

❖ Rasayana and Growth promoting action

- Promotes healthy tissue regeneration
- Supports physical, mental and intellectual growth.
- Increases vitality and overall well-being.

✚ Systemic Effects

- Stronger immunity.
- Better Cognitive development.

✚ Dosage

S.No	Classical Texts	Drugs	Sahapana	Dose	Duration
1	<i>Kashyapa Samhita</i> ^[8]	<i>Shuddha Swarna</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	Not given	Birth to 1 or 6 months.
2	<i>Sushruta Samhita</i> ^{[9][10]}	<i>Swarna, Bala, Vacha, kushtha, Brahmi, Shankpushpi, Arkapushpi, Kaidarya, Durva</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	Not given	Up to 1 year of age.
		<i>Swarna</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	<i>1 Gunja (Acharya Dallhan)</i>	Single dose at birth.
3	<i>Ashtanga Samgraha</i> ^[11]	<i>Swarna, Brahmi, Shankpushpi, Indri/ Indravaruni, Vacha, Bala, Shatavari</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	<i>1 Harenu</i>	Single dose at birth.
4	<i>Ashtanga Hridaya</i> ^{[12][13]}	<i>Amalaki Swarna,</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	<i>1 Harenu</i>	Single dose at birth.
		<i>Swarna, Vacha, Brahmi, Haritaki, Tapy</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	<i>1 Harenu</i>	Single dose at birth.
		<i>Swarna, Svetavacha, kushtha, Arkapushpi, Matsyakshaka,</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	Not given	Up to 1 year of age.

- Optimal growth and development.
- Healthy development of the child.

✚ Benefits (Acharya Kashyapa)

सुवर्णप्राशनं होतन्मेधाग्निबलवर्धनम् ।

आयुष्यं मङ्गलं पुण्यं वृष्यं वर्ण्यं ग्रहापहम् ॥

मासात् परममेधावी व्याधिभिर्न च धृष्यते ।

षट्दिर्मासैः श्रुतधरः सुवर्णप्राशनाद्भवेत् ॥ (का.सू.पृ. 4-5)^[7]

- *Medhavardhanam* (improvement of intellect)
- *Agni vardhanam* (improves digestion and metabolism)
- *Bala vardhanam* (physical strength and immunity enhancer)
- *Ayushayam* (promoting longevity of lifespan)
- *Punyam* (righteous)
- *Mangalam* (auspicious)
- *Vrushyam* (aphrodisiac)
- *Varanyam* (colour and complexion enhancement)
- *Grahapaham* (protection from evil spirits and micro-organisms)

❖ Specific Benefits

- If administered for one month, the baby will become *Parammedhavi* (highly intelligent) and *Vayadhibirna cha drushyate* (will not be affected by any disease).
- If administered for a period of six months, the baby will become *Shrutadhara* (excellent memory).

		<i>Sankha, Kaidarya.</i>			
5	<i>Sharangdhar Samhita.</i> ^[14]	<i>Swarnabhasma</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	Not given	Single dose at birth.
6	<i>Bhavaprakash</i> ^[15]	<i>Swarnabhasma, Kustha, Vachachurna, Swarnabhasma, Kayaphala and Shveta Durva</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	Not given	Daily
7	<i>Rasa Ratana Samucchaya</i> ^[16]	<i>Swarna and Pippali</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	¼ Ratti	Single dose at birth
8	<i>Bhaishajya Ratnavali</i> ^[17]	<i>Swarna, Haritaki, Brahmi, Kustha, Vacha</i>	<i>Madhu, Ghrita</i>	1 Ratti	Daily

✚ Dosage by Age group^[18]

Age group	Typical dose	Frequency
Newborn-1 year	1-2 drops	Once daily or on <i>Pushya Nakshatra</i> days
1-5 years	3-5 drops	Once daily or on <i>Pushya Nakshatra</i> days
5-16 years	5-10 drops	Once daily or on <i>Pushya Nakshatra</i> days

✚ How to Administer

- Give on an empty stomach in the morning, at least 30 minutes before food or breastfeeding.
- Place drops directly on the child's tongue using a clean dropper.
- For newborns, the mother can apply drops on a clean fingertip and gently place on the baby's tongue.
- Avoid giving with water immediately after let the formulation absorb sublingually.

✚ Time of Administration

Pushya Nakshatra is considered the most auspicious among the 27 *Nakshatras* (lunar constellations) for nourishment, growth, and healing. The word "Pushya" itself means "to nourish." *Pushya Nakshatra* recurs approximately every 27 days, creating a natural monthly dosing schedule. However there is no description of time of administration in the Ayurvedic literature.

✚ Forms of Swarna

Acharya Kashyapa does not explicitly specify the pharmaceutical form of gold to be used in *Swarnaprashana*; however, the classical method describes gold being rubbed on a clean stone before administration. The references in *Ayurveda* about the form of gold to be used internally are as given below.

Churna (powder)^{[19][20][21][22]}

Patala/Mandala (leaf/foil)^[23]

Bhasma (ash)^[24]

Lavana (Gold salt)^[25]

✚ Formulations (containing Gold)

सौवर्णं सुकृतं चूर्णं कुष्ठं मधु घृतं वचा ।

'मत्स्याक्षकः शङ्खपुष्पी मधु सर्पिः सकाञ्चनम् ॥

अर्कपुष्पी मधु घृतं चूर्णितं कनकं वचा ।

हेमचूर्णानि कैडर्यः श्वेता दूर्वा धृतं मधु ॥

चत्वारोऽभिहिताः प्राशाः श्लोकार्थेषु चतुष्पदि ।

कुमाराणां वपुर्मधुबलबुद्धिविवर्धनाः' ॥ (सु.शा. 10/ 72-74)^[26]

- सुवर्ण चूर्ण, कुष्ठ, मधु, घृत एवं वचा
 - मत्स्याक्षक, शंखपुष्पी, मधु, घृत एवं सुवर्ण
 - अर्कपुष्पी, मधु, घृत, सुवर्ण एवं वचा
 - सुवर्ण चूर्ण, कैडर्य, श्वेतदूर्वा और घी
- लेहन करने पर ये शिशु के शरीर, मेधा, शक्ति एवं बुद्धि को बढ़ाने वाले हैं ।
- इनमें से किसी एक योग का प्रयोग करना चाहिए ।

हेम श्वेतवचा कुष्ठमर्कपुष्पी सकाञ्चना ।

हेम मत्स्याक्षकः शङ्खः कैडर्यः कनकं वचा ॥

चत्वार एते पादोक्ताः प्राशा मधुघृतप्लुताः ।

वर्षं लीढा वपुर्मधुबलवर्णकराः शुभाः ॥ (अ.ह.उ. 1:47-48)^[27]

1. स्वर्ण, श्वेत वच एवं कूठ ।
 2. स्वर्ण एवं अर्कपुष्पी ।
 3. स्वर्ण, मत्स्याक्षक एवं शंखपुष्पी ।
 4. स्वर्ण, कैडर्य (पर्वतीय निम्ब) एवं वचा ।
- वाग्भट के मतानुसार 4 योग जो स्वर्णयुक्त होते हैं, इनका वर्ष पर्यन्त लेहन कराने से शरीर, मेधा, बल एवं वर्ण की वृद्धि होती है ।

Kalyanakarak

गव्यमेवनवनीतघृतं वा हेमचूर्णसहितवचयात्र ।

पाययेच्छिशुमिहाग्निबलेनात्यल्पमल्पमधिकं च यथावत् ॥

(कल्याणकारक 11/77)^[28]

- A small quantity of *Swarna* with *Vacha churna* (according to digestive power of the baby) is mixed with butter and *Ghrita* is taken to increase strength of body, longevity and complexion.

Ras Ratana Samucchya

गर्भनिर्गतबालस्यकणास्वर्णप्रदापयेत् । (र.र.स 22/136)^[29]

- *Swarnabhasma* and *Pippali choorna* mixed with *Madhu* and *Ghrita* is licked by the baby after proper cleaning of his mouth.

DISCUSSION

Swarnaprashana is a distinctive preventive and promotive practice of *Kaumarbhritya*, primarily described for the maintenance and promotion of health in early childhood. *Kashyapa Samhita* provides a detailed description of its preparation using triturated gold with water, honey and *Ghrita*, and attributes benefits such as enhancement of *Medha*, *Agni*, *Bala*, longevity and disease resistance. Other classical texts describe variations in ingredients, dosage, pharmaceutical form and duration, indicating that *Swarnaprashana* was not a standardized single formulation. Contemporary studies have explored its possible immunological, antioxidant and safety effects; however, the available evidence remains preliminary and heterogeneous. Experimental findings cannot be directly translated into clinical benefits, while animal studies provide only limited safety information. Therefore, standardized pharmaceutical preparation, quality control, toxicological assessment and well-designed clinical trials with validated developmental, growth, immunological and safety outcomes are required to establish its clinical relevance.

CONCLUSION

The review demonstrates considerable variation among classical gold-containing formulations with respect to ingredients, pharmaceutical form, dosage and duration. The available contemporary literature provides preliminary evidence regarding the possible immunological, antioxidant and safety-related effects of specific *Swarna Bhasma*-containing preparations. However, the evidence remains limited and heterogeneous, and therefore does not conclusively establish the broader therapeutic claims described in classical texts. Thus, the objective of reviewing the classical concept, methods of administration and traditionally attributed benefits of *Swarnaprashana* was achieved. The main takeaway is that *Swarnaprashana* has a strong classical basis but requires further scientific validation. Future studies should emphasize standardized preparations, quality control, safety assessment and well-designed Pediatric clinical trials with clinically relevant outcomes and long-term follow-up. This may help determine its practical clinical significance while preserving its classical foundations.

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