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## Advice and Restrictions During Pregnancy

*S. Mira*

What a woman eats and what *she does* directly affects the well-being of her child-to-be.

This idea underlies traditional care during pregnancy. It may be true that in pregnancy a woman has more access to food and other things. But, communities have ways to oversee foetal growth and development. They subject women to restrictions and recommendations regarding diet and activities. Much of the time such advice help to improve the health of the woman, too. But this is not always so, particularly when the health of a woman is already compromised by poverty, over-work and gender-discrimination.

When pregnancies are frequent, food too little, and work heavy, women don't get enough time for their health to recoup. Nutritional stress leads to loss of iron, protein and fat stores entailing numerous problems and complications. Not enough food throughout childhood and youth leaves women stunted, putting them at risk of obstructed child-birth. For fear of this, food is further restricted during pregnancy. People hope that a smaller baby will make birth easier, or possible. Food restrictions may not be adequate, however, to slim the foetus enough to drop the risk of obstructed labor. But, they will certainly worsen the nutritional status of the woman.

The 'triple burden of work' - work (at home and outside), under-nutrition and child-bearing - is a fact of most women's lives. Violence, sex abuse and gender discrimination are additional factors that hamper mental, physical, emotional and social health of the woman.

In pregnancy because of the changes in her body, a woman is more sensitive-and vulnerable to conditions of work inside and outside of home. Strenuous work

that involves hours of poor posture gives women muscle pains, backaches and skeletal problems. It may lead to deformity and disability. Then there are accidents. And, various hazards in the work environment lead to foetal growth retardation, malformation, abortion, premature birth, still-birth.

Today, women involved in agricultural work are exposed to increased risk from pesticides, inorganic fertilizers and polluted dust and water. In factories, women inhale nauseating and toxic vapors and their skin is coated with industrial grime. It may seem that most women today are not able to avoid hazards at work like these. Still, communities impose their traditional restrictions and recommendations.

### **What do women say about diet-restrictions?**

Women who were pregnant and who were wise and experienced, were asked to talk about what to avoid and what to eat during pregnancy, and why. All eleven states sent back information of over sixty food items. We must keep in mind that dietary advice would vary greatly between the many sub-caste and tribal communities involved in the survey. In the same way, advice would vary with local conditions of climate, water and modern development. In this respect, as we pointed out earlier, our data is mixed.

The maximum number of restricted food substances was from Gujarat (21) and the minimum was from Kerala (4).

Women in Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan also reported numerous restricted foods.

In the interviews, women were asked about the factors in choice of foods in pregnancy, about the qualities of the foods, and about their influence on woman or foetus. This is what they said.

In pregnancy, a woman's digestion weakens. This is why we advise light and easily digested food.

Foods are allowed or restricted during pregnancy according to \* our local eating habits \* the food available in our area \* the guna (properties, nature) of the foods.

In Maharashtra, Gujarat and Rajasthan, women said that 'sticky' substances are restricted in pregnancy, like \* banana okhra (bhendi) \* butter, ghee \* coconut.

The child shares the woman's stomach (paet) with the food she eats.

Naturally, we are worried about sticky foods.

With this view, it is easy to imagine sticky foods-making labor and child-birth difficult! Yet, some of these foods are highly nutritive. The high cost must also be a factor among the various communities surveyed.

In Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala, women are asked to keep to a regular basic diet of easily digestible food available at home.

In Uttar Pradesh, to enable an easy childbirth, a pregnant woman is asked to eat whatever she desires.

In Tamil Nadu, for fear of miscarriage, a woman is asked to avoid hot and pungent foods.

It is important to keep in mind that the women did not speak of foods according to 'food groups'. It is we who have classified the foods into categories like 'cereals', 'vegetables' and so on.

### **Foods eaten or avoided during pregnancy**

**Cereals:** The choice of cereal seems to correspond to the staple diet of the region or community. For example, in the rice-eating areas, wheat is perceived to be heavy to digest and so is restricted. Alternately, among wheat-eating people, rice is believed to cause 'vaayu' and hence restricted. In Bihar, some women restrict wheat and some do not. Consider Table 1

**Table 1:** Cereals products eaten or avoided

(Key: 3 = eat, 6 = don't eat, \* = text-mentioned, &127; = not text-mentioned)

| Cereals   |                              | B I<br>H | G<br>U J | K<br>A<br>R | K<br>E<br>R | M<br>A<br>H | M<br>P | O<br>R I | R<br>A J | T<br>N | U<br>P | W<br>B | T<br>O<br>T |
|-----------|------------------------------|----------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|----------|----------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| *         | Rice                         | 3        | 3        | -           | -           | -           | -      | -        | 3        | -      | 63     | 3      | 5           |
| *         | Wheat                        | 36       | 3        | -           | -           | -           | -      | -        | 3        | -      | -      | -      | 3           |
| *         | Maize                        | 3        | 3        | -           | -           | -           | -      | -        | 3        | -      | -      | -      | 3           |
| &127<br>; | Fried rice`                  | -        | -        | -           | -           | -           | -      | 6        | -        | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| &127<br>; | Ragi balls                   | -        | -        | 3           | -           | -           | -      | -        | -        | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| &127<br>; | Maize dalia                  | -        | -        | -           | -           | -           | -      | -        | -        | -      | 3      | -      | 1           |
| &127<br>; | Moori (puffed<br>rice)       | -        | -        | -           | -           | -           | -      | -        | -        | -      | -      | 3      | 1           |
| *         | Beaten rice                  | -        | -        | -           | -           | -           | -      | 6        | -        | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| &127<br>; | Puffed corn                  | 6        | -        | -           | -           | -           | -      | -        | -        | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| *         | Bajri (Pearl<br>millet)      | -        | 6        | -           | -           | -           | -      | -        | -        | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| &127<br>; | Katera (a local<br>miller ?) | -        | 6        | -           | -           | -           | -      | -        | -        | -      | -      | -      | 1           |

Among the six cereals preferred in pregnancy \* rice was the most common (5 states) \* wheat and, baajri (pearl) are next; \* raagi is regional to Tamil Nadu and Karnataka \* makai (maize) is from Bihar, Gujarat and Raiasthan \* katera (a local millet) is from tribal Gujarat.

The shaatra's describe die cereals as \* easily digestible (laghu) sweet to taste (madhura) \* cooling (sheeta) \* nourishing (bruhaneeya). Hence, cereals are appropriate for a woman during pregnancy. But, certain cereals have other specific qualities.

For example, baajri is dry (ruksha) and heat-producing (ushna) and rightly discouraged by women in Gujarat. However, the texts also advise consuming one is accustomed, and if a woman is used to eating bawjri daily then she is not

advised to stop eating it. Perhaps katera is a local millet of the Panchmahal area of Gujarat. If it is part of the daily diet, the woman should continue eating it.

It is known that there are many local varieties of cereals in all parts of our country - like kutaki and saama in Madhya Pradesh, naachani in Maharashtra which are considered easily digestible and nutritious. Yet they were not mentioned by the women. This may be due to limitations of the interviewers, or to the disappear of many indigenous crops.

**Pulses:** Pulses have been mentioned in some in states and not in others, according to their routine place in the diet of the community it seems.

**Table 2:** Pluses eaten or avoided (Key: 3 = eat, 6 = don't eat, \* = text-mentioned, &127; = not text-mentioned)

| Pulses      |                     | B<br>I<br>H | G<br>U<br>J | K<br>A<br>R | K<br>E<br>R | M<br>A<br>H | M<br>P | O<br>R<br>I | R<br>A<br>J | T<br>N | U<br>P | W<br>B | T<br>O<br>T |
|-------------|---------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|-------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| *           | Daal                | 3           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | 3           | -           | -      | -      | 3      | 3           |
| *           | All pulses          | -           | -           | 3           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | -      | -      | 3      | 2           |
| *           | Dalia of green gram | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | -      | 3      | -      | 1           |
| &127;<br>7; | Bengal gram         | 6           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | -      | -      | -      | 1           |

Pulses were said to be part of woman s routine diet in several northern states (Bihar, Guiarat, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan).

Elsewhere, pulses (daals, lentils, beans, peas) were not mentioned and often they cannot be imagined in the routine diet because of high prices. Commonly, the routine diet consists of a cereal combined with watery vegetable/potato and red or green chillies.

In ayurveda, the pulses are ascribed the properties of \* creating dryness (ruksha) in the body \* increasing gases (vaayu-vardhak) \* heavy to digest, leading to stomach upsets.

Hence, pulses in general should be avoided during pregnancy or eaten in small quantity, after adding herbs and spices that would reduce the heating and gaseous effect. Adding methi seeds (fenugreek) or seasoning it with garlic or hing (asafoetida) would help reducing the gaseous effect.

Most legumes and pulses, except green gram, cause gas in the body and flatulence, and so they are restricted. Among the various pulses, used whole or as daal, black gram (urad or urid) is nutritious but heavy to digest and should be avoided in pregnancy, except during winter or if eaten in small quantities; green gram (moong) is nutritious and easy to digest, and is recommended during pregnancy; bengal gram (chana, or chick-pea) is hard to digest and causes stomach and intestinal upsets; its use should be limited in pregnancy. As labor approaches chana especially is to be avoided as it brings increase in gases (vaayu) after child-birth.

If pulses are used in pregnancy, the texts caution that they should first be soaked overnight and the water drained off, then boiled, and again excess water drained before consuming them.

However, in a person of kafa-predominant nature, and in an area of extreme climate, pulses can be consumed more freely. This prescription of ayurveda seems to be substantiated by women in the northern states who recommend pulses in pregnancy, while in the southern states pulses are not mentioned.

**Milk and milk products:** Women from six mostly northern states recommended milk during pregnancy. In no state was milk restricted. Not mentioning milk may be because it is simply not available or ordinarily accessible to women. Milk curds (yogurt) are restricted in three states.

In adjacent Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, women say curds can cause swelling in pregnancy, but fresh curds are sometimes recommended, as it is \* nutritious \* appetizer \* useful in chronic cold. Particularly in Rajasthan, it is not usually part of the diet as it is in other states. Sour butter-milk is recommended during pregnancy to help digestion by women in Gujarat. The advice regarding ghee in pregnancy is contradictory.

**Table 3:** Milk or milk products eaten or avoided

(Key: 3 = eat, 6 = don't eat, \* = text-mentioned, &127; = not text-mentioned)

| Milk and milk products |                  | B<br>I<br>H | G<br>U<br>J | K<br>A<br>R | K<br>E<br>R | M<br>A<br>H | M<br>P | O<br>R<br>I | R<br>A<br>J | T<br>N | U<br>P | W<br>B | T<br>O<br>T |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|-------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| *                      | Milk             | 3           | 3           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | 3           | 3      | 3      | 3      | 6           |
| &127;                  | Sour butter-milk | 3           | 3           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | -      | -      | -      | 2           |
| *                      | Ghee             | 3           | 6           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | 6      | -      | -      | 3           |
| &127;                  | Curds            | -           | 6           | -           | -           | -           | 6      | -           | 6           | -      | -      | -      | 3           |

In Bihar women are advised to eat ghee, but in Gujarat and Rajasthan, ghee and oil are avoided during pregnancy.

According to ayurveda, milk is an important nutritious food being \* sweet (madhura) \* oily (snigdha), \* vitality enhancing (oja-vardhak) \* nourishing for the seven dhatus \* heat/fire-subsidizing (pitta-shaamaka) \* kafa-elevating heavy to digest (guru).

The qualities change when milk is made into curds. The texts describe the properties of curds thus \* heavy to digest \* increasing body heat \* astringent \* causing or increasing swelling.

So, vaidyas caution against having curds during pregnancy. However, if part of the usual diet it may be alright. When ever curds are allowed or recommended, they should be eaten with other foods like moong daal, ghee, honey, sugar or jaggery. Curds should be avoided when they are sour, or not properly set. They should not be eaten at night and during spring (vasanta), summer (greeshma) and autumn (sharada) seasons.

Ayurveda recognizes that butter-milk (takra) has good digestive properties and is beneficial during pregnancy, but warns against letting it get sour.

Ghee (ghrita) and vegetable oils are nutritious and strength-giving and should be consumed during pregnancy. But, according to ayurveda, foods fried in ghee, oil

and vegetable ghee (vanaspati) are guru (heavy to digest). So, fried foods should be avoided during pregnancy and otherwise.

**Vegetables:** Women from nine states, except Orissa and Uttar Pradesh recommended eating all vegetables, including leafy vegetables during pregnancy.

**Table 4.:** Vegetables eaten or avoided

(Key: 3 = eat, 6 = don't eat, \* = text-mentioned, &127; = not text-mentioned)

| Vegetables |               | B<br>I<br>H | G<br>U<br>J | K<br>A<br>R | K<br>E<br>R | M<br>A<br>H | M<br>P | O<br>R<br>I | R<br>A<br>J | T<br>N | U<br>P | W<br>B | T<br>O<br>T |
|------------|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|-------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| *          | All           | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3           | 3      | -           | 3           | 3      | -      | 3      | 9           |
| *          | Chillies      | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | 6           | -      | 6      | 6      | 3           |
| *          | Brinjal       | -           | 6           | -           | 6           | -           | -      | 6           | -           | -      | -      | -      | 3           |
| *          | Lady finger   | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | 6           | 6      | -      | -      | 2           |
| &127;      | Jackfruit     | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | 6           | -           | 6      | -      | -      | 2           |
| &127;      | Potato        | 6           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | 6      | -      | -      | 2           |
| &127;      | Bitter ground | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | 6           | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| &127;      | Ripe cucumber | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | 6           | -           | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| *          | Drumstick     | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | -      | -      | 3      | 1           |

Jackfruit is considered heavy to digest, and so it is avoided in Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu \* potatoes and lady-finger produce gases and should be avoided, say women in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat \* ripe cucumber increases pitta and is to be avoided according to women from Orissa \* bitter-gourd (karela), should be avoided according to woman in Rajasthan \* brinjal (Aubergine, egg plant) is heating and should be avoided according to women in Gujarat, Kerala and Orissa \* chillies increase pitta and should be avoided according to women from Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal \* in Uttar Pradesh, women recommended eating drumsticks.



Interestingly, perhaps, none of the green leafy vegetables is restricted. The ayurvedic texts recommend vegetables which are sweet and cooling during pregnancy. However they have specifically restricted some of these and their properties are \* garlic ... heating \* onion...heating \* yam ... irritant for the whole body \* mustard leaves ... disturbs vaayu pitta kafa \* overgrown radish...disturbs vaayu-pitta-kafa \* coriander leaves ... bitter, increase urine.

**Fruits:** While not many women mentioned fruits at all,

**Table 5:** Fruits eaten or avoided

(Key: 3 = eat, 6 = don't eat, \* = text-mentioned, &127; = not text-mentioned)

| Fruits                     | B I<br>H | G<br>U<br>J | K<br>A<br>R | K<br>E<br>R | M<br>A<br>H | M<br>P | O<br>R I | R<br>A<br>J | T<br>N | U<br>P | W<br>B | T<br>O<br>T |
|----------------------------|----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|----------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| &127; Pappya               | -        | -           | 6           | 6           | 6           | 6      | 6        | -           | 6      | -      | -      | 6           |
| * Bananas                  | -        | -           | -           | -           | 6           | -      | 6        | 6           | -      | -      | -      | 3           |
| &127; Dried juice of mango | -        | -           | -           | -           | -           | 3      | -        | -           | 3      | -      | -      | 2           |
| * Coconut                  | -        | -           | -           | -           | 6           | -      | -        | 6           | -      | -      | -      | 2           |
| * All fruits               | -        | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | 6        | -           | -      | 3      | -      | 2           |
| &127; Green plantain       | -        | -           | 6           | -           | -           | -      | -        | -           | 6      | -      | -      | 2           |
| &127; Pineapple            | -        | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -        | 6           | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| * Lemon                    | -        | -           | -           | -           | -           | 3      | -        | -           | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| * Jujube (berries)         | -        | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | 3        | -           | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| &127; Mohua                | -        | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -        | -           | -      | 6      | -      | 1           |

Women in Uttar Pradesh were, advised all kinds of fruits;

In Orissa all kinds of fruits were discouraged, but at the same time, locally available sour fruits are fine;

In Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh, papaya is restricted for the fear of miscarriage; ayurveda confirms this fear in case of raw papaya and restricts papaya especially in the first three months of pregnancy;

In Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Orissa banana (kela) is feared to cause difficult, delayed or obstructed child-birth, as mentioned before.

Women also believe that eating cold foods particularly during the last three months, would lead to cold labor pains and cause delay in child birth. Ayurveda recommends eating or drinking hot foods and herbs in order to facilitate labor. Therefore fruits like banana and other cold foods are restricted during pregnancy.

We noted with surprise, that women did not talk of local fruits like guava (amarood) custard apple (sitapal), berries (ber) goose berry (amla) karaonda, bael. It is possible that woman consider these local fruits safe for eating during pregnancy and therefore do not restrict them.

Ayurvedic texts support the use of locally available fruit in the diet during pregnancy. There are no major restrictions. The following list provides details regarding the local fruits that should be consumed during pregnancy.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Angoor (grapes).... Best fruit, vrushya, cooling, nourishes all the seven dhatu | Anaar (pomegrante)... good for improving taste, appetite, astringent, light          |
| Kela (banana)..... nourishing, heavy, cooling, increases kafa, subsides pitta.  | Aam (mango)... (uripe) sour, pitta-vaat karak (ripe) heavy, subsides vaayu.          |
| Katahar jackfruit (pipe)... sweet, cooling, heavy to digest                     | Anuvla (goose-berry)..... only fruit having five rasa except salty, considered amrit |
| Khajoor (dates).... nutritive, cooling  | Karonda.... Sour, subside vaayu  |
| Nariyal (coconut)... nutritive, cooling   | Big lime..... sour, vaat-shamak, appetiser   |
| Faalsa.... Sweet, cooling, nutritive  | Khirini... sweet, cooling  |

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Taad.... Sweet, cooling, nutritive | Ber (berries)..... sweet-sour, appetizing |
|------------------------------------|---|

**Non vegetarian foods:** Regarding advice about non-vegetarian food - meats, fish and eggs the data was not large, but there is a lot of variety. Non-vegetarian foods are generally considered to be 'hot'. They may be advised in pregnancy for their strength-giving effects, if they are locally available. Women are cautioned to avoid excess. Consider Table 6.

**Table 6:** Non-vegetarian foods eaten or avoided

(Key: 3 = eat, 6 = don't eat, \* = text-mentioned, &127; = not text-mentioned)

| Non-vegetarian |                  | B<br>I<br>H | G<br>U<br>J | K<br>A<br>R | K<br>E<br>R | M<br>A<br>H | M<br>P | O<br>R<br>I | R<br>A<br>J | T<br>N | U<br>P | W<br>B | T<br>O<br>T |
|----------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|-------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| *              | Any meat/mutton  | 3           | 3           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | 6           | -      | -      | -      | 3           |
| *              | Mutton of rabbit | -           | -           | 6           | -           | 6           | -      | -           | -           | -      | -      | -      | 2           |
| *              | Goat's meat      | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | 3      | -      | -      | 1           |
| &127;          | Sheep's meat     | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | 6      | -      | -      | 1           |
| &127;          | Chicken          | -           | -           | -           | -           | 6           | -      | -           | -           | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| &127;          | Fish             | -           | -           | 6           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | -      | -      | 3      | 2           |
| &127;          | Dry fish         | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | 6           | -           | 6      | -      | -      | 2           |
| *              | Sea fish         | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | 6           | -           | -      | -      | -      | 1           |
| &127;          | Pork             | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | 6      | -      | -      | 1           |
| *              | Eggs             | 3           | -           | -           | -           | 6           | -      | -           | -           | 63     | -      | 63     | 4           |

Meats: In Bihar and Gujarat, all sorts of meat are advised. In Karnataka, women are advised goat's meat during pregnancy. All meats are restricted in Karnataka.

In Maharashtra and Karnataka, rabbits' meat is restricted. In Tamil Nadu sheep's meat is restricted.

According to ayurveda, the various meats have different properties. Goat's meat is lean and has properties similar to raagi - it is comparatively less heating. As goat eats smaller plants, moves quite a lot, its flesh is easier to digest. Also, it is said to be similar to human flesh, so it will cause the least disturbance. It should already be part of the local diet. It is more suitable for women of kafa and pitta dominant prakriti.

Ayurveda advises washing meat thoroughly, then cooking it completely without using much oil or spices. The texts also recommend consuming meat soups (maans rasa) rather than whole meat with plenty of oil or ghee. This, is nourishing and normalizes the functioning of vaayu.

Eggs may be advised in pregnancy, but not always.

Eggs were recommended by women from Bihar, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. They do not specify whether to eat chicken eggs, duck eggs, pigeon eggs...

According to the shastras, a reason why eggs are good during pregnancy is that the changes in a woman's body, during pregnancy correspond to the properties of egg.

Advice regarding sea-food naturally came from the coastal regions.

Women from Karnataka advised against eating fish, but in West Bengal, fish is recommended. In Orissa, they advised against eating sea-fish and shrimp, while river-water fish was perfectly alright to eat. In Tamil Nadu and Orissa, they advised against eating dried fish during pregnancy.

According to ayurveda, fish and other aquatic animals have properties that increase kafa. They are heavy to digest. Therefore, except in areas where fish is usual in the diet and the woman accustomed to it, it is best to avoid sea-foods during pregnancy.

Other foods: Women from nine states, except Karnataka and Kerala, reported numerous other foods that were restricted or recommended. Consider [Table 7](#).

**Table 7: Other Foods Eaten or Avoided**

|   | FOOD S                   | BIH | GU J | KAR | KE R | MA H | MP | ORI | RAJ | TN | UP | WB | T O T |
|---|--------------------------|-----|------|-----|------|------|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|-------|
| š | Ground nut               | -   | *    | -   | -    | *    | -  | -   | 4   | -  | -  | -  | 3     |
| * | Sour Foods               | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | -   | *   | 4  | -  | *  | 3     |
| * | Jaggery                  | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | -   | *   | -  | *  | 2  | -     |
| * | Old Tamari nd            | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | 4   | -   | -  | -  | -  | 1     |
| * | Liquid Foods             | 4   | 4    | -   | -    | -    | -  | -   | -   | -  | 4  | -  | 1     |
| * | sweets                   | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | -   | -   | 4  | -  | -  | 1     |
| * | Dry dates boiled in milk | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | -   | -   | -  | 4  | -  | 1     |
| * | Plenty of Water          | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | -   | -   | -  | -  | 4  | 1     |
| ~ | Protein s                | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | -   | -   | -  | -  | 4  | 1     |
| * | Oil                      | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | -   | *   | -  | -  | -  | 1     |
| - | Mushro om                | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | *   | -   | -  | -  | -  | 1     |
| - | Arisa Cake               | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | *   | -   | -  | -  | -  | 1     |
| - | Tea                      | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | *   | -   | -  | -  | -  | 1     |
| - | Pickle                   | -   | -    | -   | -    | -    | -  | -   | -   | -  | *  | -  | 1     |

|   |               |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| - | Molasses Cake | - | - | - | - | - | - | * | - | - | - | - | 1 |
|---|---------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

Tea was restricted during pregnancy only in Rajasthan.

Sour foods were restricted in Rajasthan and West Bengal but recommended in Tamil Nadu.

Ground-nut was restricted in Gujarat and Maharashtra but recommended in Rajasthan.

Dry fruits and dry dates boiled with milk are recommended by women in Uttar Pradesh.

Jaggery was restricted in West Bengal and in Orissa along with other apparently similar things like 'molasses cake' and 'arisa cake'.

### **What do women say about activity-restrictions?**

Fifty activities were listed from the eleven states. Thirty nine are restricted and eleven are recommended. There are contradictions in the data. For example, some women in West Bengal restrict housework whereas some recommend. In any case, there are comparatively more restrictions.

The activities are divided into \* house hold work \* outside at home \* rest and sleep \* mental activity \* sexual activity \* personal hygiene \* travel.

The details are enlisted in Tables 4.8 to 4.1 1. More than two thirds (37 out of 50) of these advises regarding activity are supported by the shaatras.

**House-hold work:** For a woman of reproductive age, routine house-hold work usually includes food preparation, preservation, grinding and cooking, cleaning, sweeping, scrubbing vessels and washing clothes, child-care and child-tending. Often, it also includes fodder-and-fuel gathering, water fetching and tending the household animals. It may also include aspects of family farm-work like weeding and plucking vegetables and marketing.

Generally, routine 'household work' is taken for granted and it is not considered strenuous. Consider [Table 8](#).

**Table 8: Work Related Restrictions**

(Key: 4 =do, 8 =don't, - = women don't report, \* = text mentioned, □ = not-text mentioned)

| Work                 | BIH | GUJ | K<br>A<br>R | KER | MAH | MP | ORI | RAJ | TN | UP | WB  | TOT |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-------------|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|----|----|-----|-----|
| All Light Work       | 4   | 4   | -           | 4   | 4   | 4  | 4   | 4   | 4  | -  | 4 8 | 9   |
| Lifting Heavy Weight | 8   | 8   | 8           | -   | 8   | 8  | -   | 8 4 | 4  | -  | 8   | 8   |
| Sweeping/Scrubbing   | 4   | 4   | 4           | -   | -   | -  | -   | 4   | -  | -  | 4   | 5   |
| Fetching Water       | -   | -   | 4           | -   | -   | -  | -   | 8 4 | 8  | 4  | 8 4 | 5   |
| Grinding by Handmill | -   | -   | -           | -   | -   | -  | -   | 4   | -  | 4  | 4   | 3   |
| Tiring Jobs          | -   | -   | -           | -   | -   | 8  | -   | -   | 8  | -  | 8   | 3   |
| Walking              | 4   | 8   | -           | -   | -   | -  | -   | -   | 4  | -  | -   | 3   |
| Running              | -   | -   | -           | -   | -   | 8  | 8   | 8   | -  | -  | -   | 3   |
| Fetching Firewood    | 4   | -   | -           | -   | -   | -  | -   | 4   | -  | -  | -   | 2   |
| Cooking, Cleanin     | -   | 4   | -           | -   | -   | -  | -   | -   | -  | -  | 4   | 2   |

|                               |   |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|-------------------------------|---|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| g,<br>Washing                 |   |    |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Hard<br>Work                  | - | 8  | - | - | - | - | - | - | 8 | - | - | 2 |
| Climbin<br>g Hills            | - | 8  | 8 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 |
| Farm<br>Work                  | - | -  | 8 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Boiling<br>Paddy              | - | -  | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 8 | 1 |
| Work in<br>field              | - | 4  | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Work<br>under<br>Sun          | - | 8  | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Restful<br>Work               | - | -  | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 4 | - | 1 |
| Bend<br>Too<br>Much           | 8 | -  | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Sitting<br>on Hard<br>Surface | - | 8  | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Stitching<br>Mattress<br>es   | - | 8  | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Touch<br>Grains               | - | -  | 8 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Knit<br>Wool                  | 8 | -  | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Total                         | 7 | 11 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 8 |   |

In nine states women said they are expected to continue doing house-hold work through out pregnancy.



In five states, women specially mentioned that sweeping the floor is good in pregnancy.

In Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, women are advised to avoid 'hard work' and exertion. In Uttar Pradesh, 'restful work' was specially advised. In Gujarat, women are cautioned to avoid working under the sun.

In West Bengal, women can avoid cooking if they want to, during pregnancy. They may refrain from sweeping or scrubbing the floor, too, if they like.

Women from seven states said it is not good to lift heavy weights during pregnancy, as it puts strain on the back as well as on the womb. (of course, children don't weigh anything.)

Women from West Bengal, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, abstain from fetching water.

These advises and permissions during pregnancy are among those contained in the texts of ayurveda. On one hand, a woman is advised to continue her usual house-hold work, without exerting herself, on the other hand, as a woman's wishes during pregnancy need to be fulfilled, the woman's desire to do less work gets some respect. In the early months, she may not feel like cooking because of nausea. As her womb grows, she may find sitting in some positions uncomfortable or impossible.

Ayurveda specifically cautions women to avoid lifting heavy weights, doing accident-prone work or tasks that involve straining postures and pressure on her abdomen. Further, women are cautioned to avoid working in heat or near fire for very long.

**Outside work:** In rural areas, women spend long hours working in the fields under the sun or in the rains.

A study carried out in Maharashtra has found a high incidence of still births, premature births and newborn deaths during the peak season for rice cultivation, when all persons in the community, even full term pregnant women, work in the fields the whole day. It involves squatting and bending for hours. Such

prolonged physical strain and pressure on the womb explains the findings (FRCH, 1989).

Women know that outside work has an effect on their bodies which could also influence the growth and development of the foetus. Therefore, Women in Karnataka and West Bengal advise against working in the farm and boiling paddy but women from Gujarat advise to continue working in the field.

The fact that restrictions related to occupational activities are reported by women in only three states indicates one of the major responsibility of women as bread winners. Considering it as a part of their daily lives, women cannot separate themselves from work, even when they know that it could be harmful during pregnancy.

**Sleep and rest:** There were numerous restrictions regarding sleep and rest, indicating its significance in women's lives. As we know, food and work are intimately related. During pregnancy, a woman's need for food increases, as does the energy which her body spends through reproductive work. Enough rest and sleep are important to help her make up the deficit. As discussed in earlier chapters of confirming pregnancy and desires during pregnancy, women do feel tired and sleepy. Consider Table 9.

**Table 9:** Sleep and rest related restrictions

(Key: 3 = eat, 6 = don't eat, \* = text-mentioned, &127; = not text-mentioned)

| Activity   |                      | B<br>I<br>H | G<br>U<br>J | K<br>A<br>R | K<br>E<br>R | M<br>A<br>H | M<br>P | O<br>R<br>I | R<br>A<br>J | T<br>N | U<br>P | W<br>B | T<br>O<br>T |
|------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|-------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| *          | Lying flat on back   | -           | 6           | -           | -           | 6           | 6      | 6           | 6           | 6      | -      | 6      | 7           |
| *          | Excessive sleeping   | 6           | -           | -           | -           | -           | 6      | -           | 6           | 6      | -      | 6      | 5           |
| &127;<br>; | Sleeping on one side | -           | 6           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | 3           | -      | -      | -      | 2           |
| *          | Sleeping on belly    | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | 6      | -           | -           | 6      | -      | -      | 2           |
| &127;<br>; | Take rest            | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | -           | -      | 6      | -      | 1           |

|        |                              |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|--------|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| &127 ; | Sleep on left side           | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6 | - | - | 1 |
| &127 ; | Roll in bed                  | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6 | - | - | 1 |
| &127 ; | Sleep in transverse position | - | 6 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| Total  |                              | 1 | 3 | - | - | 1 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 2 |   |

In Bihar, Madhya Pradesh,, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal women said that too much sleep must be avoided.

Women from seven states, said that a woman who is pregnant must not sleep flat on her back, as the cord may wind around the neck of the foetus. They also said that sleeping on her belly is bad for the woman and foetus as it puts pressure on the womb. In Tamil Nadu, woman advise against sleeping on the left side and rolling about.

Ayurveda clearly says that sleep is an essential pillar of health. The suitable number of hours depends on individuals. The texts recommend that a woman who is pregnant should sleep early. She should avoid sleeping on very soft or very hard beds. She should avoid sleeping on high places, from where she could fall. Except in the hot summer season, she should not sleep during the day. Shaastric advice regarding sleeping positions is peculiar, and somewhat contradictory. Ayurveda does not specify one side or the other.

Western medicine describes foetal distress due to pressure on the major blood vessels, which sometimes happens when a woman sleeps on her right side. Shifting to her left side relieves the distressed movements and disturbed heart-beat of the foetus.

**Mental activity:** People believe that the thoughts and feelings of a woman during pregnancy directly affects the baby in the womb (See Table 10).

**Table 10:** Mental and other activity related restrictions.

(Key: 3 = eat, 6 = don't eat, \* = text-mentioned, &127; = not text-mentioned)

| Mental activity |                       | B<br>I<br>H | G<br>U<br>J | K<br>A<br>R | K<br>E<br>R | M<br>A<br>H | M<br>P   | O<br>R<br>I | R<br>A<br>J | T<br>N   | U<br>P   | W<br>B   | T<br>O<br>T |
|-----------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------|-------------|-------------|----------|----------|----------|-------------|
| *               | Peeping in deep well  | -           | -           | -           | -           | 6           | 6        | -           | -           | -        | -        | -        | 2           |
| *               | See dead bodies       | 6           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -        | -           | 6           | -        | -        | -        | 2           |
| *               | Quarell               | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -        | 6           | -           | -        | 6        | -        | 2           |
| *               | Unpleasant thought    | -           | -           | 6           | 6           | -           | -        | -           | -           | -        | -        | -        | 2           |
| *               | Spiritual thinking    | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -        | 3           | -           | 3        | -        | -        | 2           |
| *               | Talking loudly        | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -        | 6           | -           | -        | -        | -        | 1           |
| *               | Bath daily            | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -        | -           | -           | 3        | -        | -        | 1           |
| *               | Go to a haunted place | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -        | -           | -           | 6        | -        | -        | 1           |
| *               | Go out at night       | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -        | 6           | -           | -        | -        | -        | 1           |
| *               | Good thinking         | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -        | -           | -           | 3        | -        | -        | 1           |
| &12<br>7;       | Kill a snake          | 6           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -        | -           | -           | -        | -        | -        | 1           |
| &12<br>7;       | Look at solar eclipse | -           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -        | -           | -           | -        | -        | 6        | 1           |
| <b>Total</b>    |                       | <b>1</b>    | <b>-</b>    | <b>3</b>    | <b>1</b>    | <b>1</b>    | <b>1</b> | <b>4</b>    | <b>1</b>    | <b>4</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>1</b> |             |

In rissa and Tamil Nadu, thinking of good things and spiritual activities were stressed. In Gujarat and Kerala, women were urged to avoid unpleasant thoughts.

In Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and most other states, during pregnancy, women are specially cautioned against looking at a solar eclipse. It is believed to deform the un-born child.

Women are specially cautioned against looking at a solar eclipse.

**Sexual activity:** Sexual intercourse is believed to injure the foetus. In eight states, sexual intercourse is restricted in various phases of pregnancy. Usually considered 'bad', sex may be discouraged to preserve good moral character in the foetus. Some say that, if the foetus is female, intercourse during pregnancy is a form of incest between father and daughter. The shaastras advise abstaining from intercourse during pregnancy to avoid miscarriage or premature birth. Consider Table 11.

**Table 11:** Sexual activity related restrictions

(Key: 3 = eat, 6 = don't eat, \* = text-mentioned, &127; = not text-mentioned)

| Activity |                            | B<br>I<br>H | G<br>U<br>J | K<br>A<br>R | K<br>E<br>R | M<br>A<br>H | M<br>P | O<br>R<br>I | R<br>A<br>J | T<br>N | U<br>P | W<br>B | T<br>O<br>T |
|----------|----------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------|-------------|-------------|--------|--------|--------|-------------|
| *        | Intercourse                | -           | 6           | 6           | -           | -           | 6      | -           | -           | 6      | -      | 6      | 5           |
| &127;    | Intercourse after 7 months | 6           | -           | -           | -           | -           | -      | -           | 6           | -      | -      | -      | 2           |
| &127;    | Excessive intercourse      | -           | -           | -           | 6           | -           | -      | -           | -           | -      | -      | -      | 3           |

Allopathic science has generally laid no restrictions on intercourse in pregnancy. But care is advised in the first three and last three months to avoid mishaps and also discomfort for the woman.

**Travel:** The main reason given for avoiding travel while pregnant is to avoid jolts and accidents. But the bad effects of strange foods, water, climate, people and spirits are also feared. During pregnancy, women are thought to be especially vulnerable to 'evil spirits and someone's evil eye'.

In Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, all means of travel aside from short-distance walking is restricted, for fear of miscarriage or premature child-birth. In Uttar Pradesh, women are allowed to do a job if it does not mean moving out of place.

On the other hand, traveling with care could give a woman a change of scene and improve her mood. This is one reason for the tradition of a young woman

going to stay at her 'mother's place' for the first childbirth. The ayurvedic texts also advise against traveling to avoid jerks leading to miscarries and premature child-birth.

### **What do shastras say about diet and activities?**

As a recently planted sapling is destroyed by strong heat and wind, the young foetus, can be dislodged or deformed by unwholesome food and activities. (translation of a shloka from Charaka Samhita)

Ayurveda lays out the principles for achieving health of woman-and-child based on 'right diet' (aahaara) and 'right activities' (vihaara). In order to keep healthy it is important that the woman eats and moves according to her body requirements and which are considered wholesome. Both diet and activities are integral part of the traditional health care.

The texts of ayurveda recommend foods in pregnancy according to the local diet, the season of the year, the woman's constitution and digestive capacity and the dravya-guna (properties of substances) of the foods.

### **Diet and activities that are recommended during pregnancy**

**Diet:** During pregnancy a woman's ideal diet would be \* pleasant \* liquid \* sweet \* nourishing and would include foods which stimulate her digestive power and impart strength. Her diet should be chosen in accordance with her prakriti (constitution). Bitter foods, the opposite of sweet, are not good for her.

The basic constitution or nature of a person is called prakriti. It is identified by an array of characteristics which a person experiences. Based on the degree of combination of the three doshas, there are seven types of shaaririk prakriti. They are \* vaata \* vaata + pitta \* vaata + pitta + kafa \* pitta \* pitta + kafa \* kafa \* kafa + vaata. The texts mention three types of manasik prakriti (mental make-up) or gunas \* saatvic \* raajasic \* taamsic

A woman who is pregnant should eat when she is hungry. Her diet should be modified according to the season cooling, light liquid diet during summer and more fatty diet during winter.

While eating her meal, the surroundings should be dean, pleasant and carefree. She should be able to taste and enjoy the flavor of the food. The food should be warm and pleasant, clean and fresh, fully cooked and easily digestible. It should consist of all the six tastes \* sweet \* sour \* bitter \* salt \* astringent \* pungent

The texts advise against excessive use of bitter, salty, pungent and astringent tastes as they hinder the nourishment of the seven dhatu. The diet should be adjusted so that her stomach is \* one-third filled with solids \* one-third with an equal amount of liquids \* one-third left empty for free movement of gases and proper digestion. Instead of eating one large meal, she should eat small quantities at frequent intervals. There is also an order to consuming the meal \* first, sweet and fatty foods \* next, the cold foods \* then, the hot and spicy, dry and light foods \* and at the end, butter-milk for digestion. Accordingly, the following foods are good in pregnancy:

Cereals: \* barley \* baajri \* jowar \* raagi \* red rice \* rice \* wheat

Pulses: \* bengal gram (chana) \* horse gram (kulath) \* green gram (moong) \* peas (matar) \* pigeon pea (tuvar) \* lentil (masoor) \* all daals

Meats: \* deer \* goat \* quail \* pigeon \* rohit & chuluki fish \* cock

Milk products: \* milk \* curds \* butter-milk \* butter \* ghee

Vegetables: jeevanti \* tender radish \* snake-gourd \* amaranthus

**Activities:** The woman should stay clean, well-dressed and he happy and content. She should be enabled to do things which make her feel happy. Prayerful meditation is good for her and for her child-to-be. She should sit and sleep on a reasonably soft seat and bed. She should follow ordinary rules of good conduct. Her activities should be appropriate for her constitution. For example, if the woman has a pitta predominant prakriti, she should avoid staying in/near the heat or sun.

### **Diet and activities that are restricted during pregnancy**

**Diet:** Remaining hungry, fasting or eating \* hot \* pungent \* heavy \* constipating \* dry and stale \* putrid \* irritating \* alcoholic items \* and garlic \* onion \* cold water \* clay \* yam are not recommended.

**Activity:** Excessive coitus \* excessive exercise \* late nights \* sleeping in very soft, very hard and high places \* exertion \* carrying heavy load \* traveling \* sleeping during day (except summers) \* assuming abnormal, uncomfortable postures \* squatting \* riding animals are to be avoided.

**Emotions:** Avoid \* fear \* sorrow \* anger \* visiting empty houses or cemetery (to avoid shock and negative feelings)

**Treatments:** Panchkarma is a special ayurvedic therapy, wherein the doshas are first increased and loosened and then removed through emesis (vamana) purgation (virechana) and enema (basti). Panchkarmas: \* snehan/swedan \* vamana \* virechana \* basti \* rakta mokshan are restricted.

**Dress:** A woman who is pregnant should wear light, loose and clean clothing. Heavy, tight, red-colored and soiled clothes should not be worn.

Natural urges: Fourteen natural urges \* urination \* defecation \* hunger \* vomiting \* crying \* desire of sex \* thirst \* flatus \* burping \* coughing \* sneezing \* sleep \* yawning \* breathlessness should not be suppressed.

**Habits of hygiene:** One must avoid \* not bathing \* touching dirty persons and dirty parts \* foul-smelling articles \* foul-smelling food.

### **Women advise or avoid...**

There is widespread knowledge of the effects of foods during pregnancy and otherwise. Food is chosen and consumed according to local availability, the geography of the region, the socioeconomic and even political realities and compatibility of foods with the prakriti (constitution) of the woman.

The findings of this study show that in rice-eating areas, women consume a lot of green leafy vegetables, whereas women in wheat-eating areas seem to prefer tubers and gourds. In general, there was less stress on pulses and more on milk and milk products during pregnancy. The general food pattern revealed by the survey has support in the ayurvedic texts. Relatively few foods were restricted during pregnancy. Yet on certain foods, restriction appears due to a wide-spread false idea that the foetus somehow shares the 'stomach' with the food.



\* Efforts should clarify human anatomy to communities and, at the same time, put stress on the nutritive qualities of particular foods and enhanced need in pregnancy \* Ways of tackling the problem of availability and disappearance of traditional foods must be sought.

The issue of restrictions and recommendations for women in pregnancy is linked with the social status of women. Nutritious and costly foods are often with-held. Frequently under the guise of caring about her foetus, the woman is controlled and deprived. Restriction of activities for a pregnant woman by and large control her mobility and her mind.

Education must value women and women's work, and give people a correct idea of enhanced energy expenditure in pregnancy to be met by diet, rest and activity.

Apart from the lacunae, there is ample scope for enriching awareness efforts for care during pregnancy with knowledge which the people already have.