

Milk - An Overall Perspective

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“...ksheeram.....tulyagunatvaachoujasovardhanam.....”
(*Sushruta Samhita, sutrasthan, chapter 45, verse 49*)

Ayurved has two main goals as described in the Samhitas: maintaining the health of the healthy, and alleviating and treating the diseases of the sick. Milk can be an important tool in achieving both these objectives.

From birth until death, milk is an important source of many of our essential nutrients. It has protein, abundant calcium, vitamins A and D, minerals such as zinc, and a certain amount of fat, depending on the type of milk. That is why it is considered as a complete food.

From Ayurved's perspective, milk has been attributed with exceptional properties like increasing life span, rejuvenating (*rasayan*), increasing virility (*vajeekar*), an excellent tonic for the brain (*medhya*), helpful in healing broken bones, rich in nutrients necessary for the growth and development of the body, etc.

In Ayurvedic texts, the properties of milk of various animals have been described. There are eight milk sources that have been mentioned, along with their inherent properties. Briefly speaking, cow's milk is considered best in quality as it has rejuvenating (*rasayan*) and life giving or nurturing (*jeevaneeya*) properties, and it has no adverse effects, except a mild effect of blocking body channels (*abhishtyandi*), depending on its fat content. The other milks that have been described are –

Milk Source	Salient Features
Goat	Light, appetizing
Camel	Dry, light, salty
Sheep	Sweet, heavy
Buffalo	Blocks channels of the body, induces sleep, rich in fats, heavy
One hooped animals like donkey, horse	Hot, boosts strength
Human	Light, life giving
Elephant	Heavy, good for the eyes

Acharyas Sushrut and Bhav Mishr have described these properties in great detail, and anyone wanting to delve deeper into this should research their texts. References may be found at the end of this article.

A few general rules about milk:

- 1.** Generally, milk obtained in the morning (from any animal) is heavy, cooling and binding, as night is considered to be 'som gun pradhan' due to the effect of the moon and to the fact that the animals have rested throughout the night. On the other hand, during the day, due to the presence of the sun, wandering and exercising, milk obtained at the end of the day is light, refreshing and good for the eyes.
- 2.** The properties of milk are also affected by the kind of fodder the animal consumes. A cow that eats cereals and grains, besides grass, gives milk that is heavy, increases kapha, strengthens, and increases virility. On the other hand, the cow that feeds only on grass, husk and cotton seeds will give milk that is light and is therefore indicated for consumption by sick people.
- 3.** The features of the land where the animals graze also alter the properties of the milk secreted by them, especially the fat content. For example, the fat content in the milk of animals grazing on the hills is far greater than the milk of those in the wetlands (*aanoop pradesh*) or flat plains and jungles (*jaangam pradesh*), which has the lowest fat content. Accordingly, the milk may be considered as heavy or light.
- 4.** Raw milk is comparatively difficult to digest, but when consumed after boiling and cooling, it is very light, and therefore does not block any body channels. Except human mother's milk, which is best used raw, all other milks should be boiled before consumption. Ideally, a little amount of water should be mixed with milk before boiling to prevent condensation of milk, which alters its properties. Also, milk should be boiled on low heat to achieve the minimal destruction of vitamins, phosphorus and proteins, which are heat sensitive.
- 5.** According to Ayurvedic texts, 'dhaaroshn' milk, which means milk consumed straight from the udders of the animal, is considered like 'amrit' or the nectar of life. Here, the vessel for milk collection is your mouth. Even if a utensil is used for collection, but the milk is consumed immediately after, it will still have properties like 'dhaaroshn'. However, if the milk is kept for a while after collection, Ayurvedic texts recommend boiling it before consumption.
 - 'Dhaaroshn' milk is considered best when obtained from the cow.
 - Buffalo's milk is considered best if consumed 'Dhaaraasheet', i.e. 'dhaaroshn' milk that has been just cooled down.
 - Boiled and consumed hot is considered best in the case of sheep's milk.
 - Boiled and cooled before consumption is best in the case of goat's milk.
 - Human mother's milk is best when consumed raw.

There is much more information on milk in Ayurvedic texts, for example, on the properties of milk when consumed at different times of the day (*dugdh sevan kaa*), churned milk (*mathit dugdh*), milk foam (*dugdh fen*), etc., but so as not to exceed the scope of this article, this information should be obtained from the books mentioned in the bibliography.

To touch on the modern perspective on milk, let us start with a brief description of nutrients found in milk.

Essential Vitamins and Minerals in Milk

No other beverage contains more key nutrients than a glass of milk. At a glance, here is how the milk's nutritives work for you.

Calcium: Builds strong bones; maintains bone density.

Protein: Milk's protein contains essential amino acids that help build and sustain muscles.

Vitamin A: Vitamin A helps maintain healthy vision and skin, helps regulate cell growth, and supports the immune system.

Vitamin D: Promotes the absorption of calcium and phosphorus; helps strengthen bones.

Vitamin B-12: Essential for the development and well being of the nervous system.

Potassium: Vital to the regulation of the balance of fluids in the body. Milk has ten times the potassium as an equal amount of the leading sports drink.

Riboflavin: Helps generate energy in the cells of the body and plays a fundamental role in the growth of the nervous system.

Niacin: Keeps enzymes functioning; aids the body in processing sugars and fatty acids.

Phosphorus: Creates energy in the body's cells; and effects bone mineralization and the strengthening of bones.

Before concluding, I feel obliged to discuss the movement for the consumption of organic, raw milk going on in many countries, including the U.S. A recent article kindled my interest in organic, raw milk and on deeper study, I could easily see that life does come full circle. Centuries ago, our Ayurvedacharyas likened cow's milk 'dhaaroshn' to 'amrit', or the nectar of life. Today, despite leaps and bounds of modernization, basic answers to health and longevity can still be found in ancient pearls of wisdom. There is a growing population of people that are choosing natural against processed, and in the process, enjoying better health and immunity. To anyone interested in reading more about organic, raw milk, I would recommend this site in particular, which I found very informative - <http://www.raw-milk-facts.com/index.htm>

I would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the raw milk of a cow fed totally on grass (unlike the milk of cows in large factory dairy farms) contains

natural antibiotics and can resist spoilage by lactobacillus for a few days at least, especially when it is cooled down to 36°F-38°F after obtaining it from the cow.

In conclusion, it is evident that milk is an excellent source of nutrition for all age groups. One can consume milk from different healthy animal sources, in health and sickness, as need be. Barring major allergy issues, I strongly feel that properly cooled, organic, raw cow's milk has great nutritional benefits as opposed to the processed, homogenized cow's milk available to us. Our Acharyas recommended boiling before consumption, as good cooling techniques were not known at that period of time, especially in a tropical country like ours. Jai Ayurved!

Bibliography:

Book resources -

Charak Samhita, Sutrasthan, Chapter 27
Sushrut Samhita, Sutrasthan, Chapter 45
Ashtang Sangraha, Sutrasthan, Chapter 6
Bhaav Prakash Nighantu, Dugdhvarg

Web Resources -

<http://www.raw-milk-facts.com/index.html>
<http://www.whymilk.com/>

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