

Fire Confinement, Postpartum Care in Thai Traditional Medicine

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ABSTRACT

Postpartum care is the period of recovery from childbirth. Psychological and physiological change need to be supported. The uterine involution and lochia need time to change. The pregnant can return her physiologic change to normal as before pregnant within 6 weeks. Thai traditional medicine has a procedure called fire confinement or “YU FAI”. This procedure has its principle of high temperature and herbal effect. It can be explain many benefits to the postpartum mother in 5PRIK such as quick recovery, promote wound healing and uterine involution, prevent uterine infection, shortening of lochia period, increase breast milk production, burning fat, muscle relaxation and reduce muscle ache, increase circulation and body wind flow, maintain body balance and keep the body warm. However, the procedure is complicated and difficult to be arranged in modern life. Many modifications are introduced with difference effect. Tent is the most appropriate modification that remains the major efficiency of the conventional one. This procedure can be easily performed in modern city life. This Thai traditional procedure can be supported its efficacy by scientific explanation.

Key words: fire confinement, postpartum care, Thai traditional medicine

INTRODUCTION

Postpartum is defined as the period after childbirth. It is the tired period of mother for breast feeding and the recovery time after a long period of pregnancy and delivery. Emotional and psychological affect is starting as postpartum depression, anxiety about her child, her family and herself. Physiological change during pregnancy is finished and starting to recover. In recent medical practice, medical personal may have major roles in the phase of immediate postpartum or during admission. However, after the mother being discharged, the family will take this position. Postpartum mother should have psychological support from her family, especially her husband. Physiological change will be depend on natural way only.

In Thai traditional medicine, both psychological and physiological change are important. It was practiced for long time as in the record of the history that postpartum mother should have one procedure to assist this recovery period. We call YU-FAI as fire confinement procedure.

POSTPARTUM

As mentioned above, the psychological change needs to be supported by the family members. After tired time, the mother may have many concerns about her baby, how to feed, how he or her grow up, what will be going on in the future, etc. The worry about family may be the cost of living and job. The nearest concerning is herself, how she looked like, the possibility to return normal in function and body image, etc.

The physiologic change during pregnancy are the main concern. Weight gain during normal pregnancy should be 12-15 kgs. Some mother has more but only few mother has less gain. Immediate after delivery, the baby's

weight, placenta and amniotic fluid should be around 5 kgs. The remaining should be in concern to get them out. Most of the mother plan to do exercise after 3 months postpartum. However, should they wait?

Uterine enlargement during immediate postpartum will become gradually involution. Lochia in the first 3 days is red, called lochia rubra. Then it turn pink or paler as lochia serosa for next 1-2 weeks. Finally the color become clear as serum without blood, called lochia alba. The whole process of normal physiologic return to normal as before pregnant may take 6 weeks.

POSTPARTUM CARE IN THAI TRADITIONAL MEDICINE

The concept of Thai traditional medicine in postpartum period is to support the mother in both psychological and physiological aspect. The postpartum mother should not be neglected. The family member or the therapist should have their role in the period. Fire confinement or “YU FAI” is one of the procedure promoting the healing process. It can be started within a week of postpartum in normal vaginal delivery or natural childbirth. But it should be delayed to over a month in Caesarean delivery, waiting for the healing of the operative wound and preventing wound infection. Duration to continue the procedure may be short as only 7 days or up to 3 months depends on the therapist and the mother. However, the daily procedure cannot be done over 30 days consecutively.

It is classified in Thai traditional medicine that the fire confinement is one of the therapy in postpartum period. The benefit of the procedure are as 5PRIK.

1. Promote mother to have quick recovery from childbirth to her normal physiology before pregnant.
2. Promote healing process of the episiotomy wound, involution of the uterus and closing of cervix that prevent ascending uterine infection and vaginal discharge.
3. Promote flow of lochia in early phase and shortening the whole lochia period.
4. Promote burning of fat accumulated during pregnancy and clear skin.
5. Promote breast milk production.
6. Relax muscle and tendon being pressed by the uterus during pregnancy to reduce muscle ache and back pain. This is not only in postpartum period but aimed for the future pain in elder, too.
7. Increase circulation and wind flow of the body to maintain the body's elements balance.
8. Keep body warm, prevent chill from anemia after blood lost during childbirth.

FIRE CONFINEMENT

The postpartum mother is not allow shampooing or showering since it is too cold and in the opposite way of fire. She needs to clear her skin with warm water prior to the procedure. She will stay on the large wooden board, like a bed, over the beneath 3 stoves. The stoves are lying in the line beneath her shoulder, abdomen and legs. The big sink plate is lying as the buffer of fire flame over the stove, not to burn the wooden board and functioned as the hot plate to distribute the temperature. It looks like to grill the mother. The charcoal in the stove is made of tamarind wood since it has fewer blisters broken out with constant flame. The mother on the wood board needs to turn her body side by side. This is the delicate procedure to prevent burning on her skin. She needs to drink enough warm herbal water during the procedure to prevent dehydration from heat. In some part of Thailand, the method had been modified by putting fire around the mother, not directly beneath. It has less temperature and less suffer to the mother. This is more popular than the grill type as above.

The postpartum mothers who lives in modern city may have difficulty to fine the place for fire confinement. They applied the traditional fire confinement into shortcut. Many modifications are introduced as follow.

Hot water bag, putting boiled water in the temperature durable container. The container is putting on the uterine area of lower abdomen. It is convenience and suitable for the local effect of warm compression. The higher temperature increase blood circulation of the uterus, promote healing and involution. It is believed that the temperature

making the lochia dry. However, it is only the local effect and cannot replace the whole process of conventional fire confinement.



Aluminum box, the commercial fire confinement belts in the market. The box is made of aluminum, filled and refillable with herbal charcoals. The charcoal needs to be lit but without flame. The box then covered with the thick cloth belt. The belt is putting around the waist with the aluminum box at the front on the position of the uterus. The effect of warm compression is similar to the hot water bag. However, the burning herbs provide additional aromatic effect to the mother for relaxing and sleeping. This box is also effect on local area and cannot replace the conventional fire confinement.

The herbal ball compression is another modification of conventional fire confinement. The ball is composed of many fresh or dried herbs. It needs to make the ball warm prior to compress on the specific area by the therapist. The mother feels relax as the pressure on the muscle may feel like Thai traditional massage. The temperature of the ball increases local circulation and relax the muscles. The symptoms of superficial muscle ache are relieved but the depth of the temperature by this method may not enough to reach the uterus, so the effect on the uterus may less. The total efficacy of this herbal ball is depend on many factors as type of the herbs, temperature and the most important is the therapist. The wrong pressing position may cause no relaxing effect.

Salt pot compression is the old style one. It remains using in the rural area of Thailand. The big granule of salt (not salt powder) is put in the clay pot. The pot is heated then put on the mother's lower abdomen. The leaf of lucid is placed between the pot and the skin. The effect of the salt is unclear except temperature keeping. The main effect should be the leaf of lucid that reduces pain. There are some modification of salt pot. The using the hot brick is an example. However, this method is not recommended because of burning area on the skin and the therapeutic result is unclear.

Tent is the most popular modification of fire confinement in the city. It is classified as a main replacement of the conventional one. The mother is sitting in the tent, covered the whole body below the neck. Her face is not exposed in the high temperature. The source of heat is the electrical cooking pot, filled with boiling herbs. It is putting in the tent. Most of the herbs are vaped such as bergamot, lemon grass, camphor, Borneo camper, shallot, turmeric, citrus leaf, etc. The high temperature inside the tent will open the sweat glands, like sauna. The vapor of boiling herbs will have their effect to clean the waste from the skin and replace with freshness. The mother can have the whole body treatment without suffer from too high temperature of fire and more effective effect of herbs in limited space. The recommendation to stay in the herbal tent is only 15 min.

The possible benefit of fire confinement can be explained scientifically as follow;

1. The high temperature causes sweating. It opens the sweat gland and push the debris out. Obstruction of the gland and the debris can be cleared by sweating, too.
2. The high temperature causes vasodilatation and increases circulation. Good blood flow can promote wound healing and prevent infection.
3. The high temperature relaxes the muscle and reduce muscle ache.



PRECAUTION

Since the procedure is dealing with heat and high temperature on tired postpartum mother. The possible of dehydration and burning injury should be aware. There are many believed contraindications such as toxic food related, cold water contamination and many restriction. However, scientific prove will be needed.

CONCLUSION

Postpartum period needs specific maternal care. Both psychological and physiological support are important. Fire confinement in Thai traditional medicine is one of the procedure with scientific explanation. It is less harm to the mother but assisting physiologic change in postpartum. The modifications of the procedure can be applied in modern life. However, it needs further study for the direct effect and more efficiency outcome.

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