


**Three Minute Article for Parents**

**Is Mulethi (Liquorice) safe for consumption by children? Advice to mothers**

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Mulethi, also referred to as Liquorice or sweet wood, is a medicinal herb considered to be an age-old Ayurvedic home remedy for various health problems. The medicinal property of mulethi is due to phytochemicals and flavonoids, believed to be rejuvenating medicines in ancient Ayurveda. The use of mulethi can be dated back to around 2500 BC by ancient Egyptians as strips and ropes of candy. It was traditionally used for the treatment of respiratory problems like asthma, as well as eye problems, oral and gastric ulcers, constipation and wound healing due to its anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, expectorant and cooling properties. At the same time, several superstitions arose regarding the use of mulethi by mothers, especially in rural settings.

We encountered a case of a 3½-year-old male, a known case of developmental delay, predominantly affecting language milestones, with a hearing defect with significant premature birth insults, who presented to our institution with recurrent episodes for the last 10 days, about 15 episodes per day. Ultrasonography of the abdomen and pelvis was done which was normal. A gastroenterologist's opinion was sought and a gastroscopy was planned. Astonishingly, the patient was found to have 'mulethi sticks' in the oesophagus which were removed through endoscopy. The mother then gave a history of ingestion of mulethi sticks by the child as she believed that ingestion of mulethi sticks would help to improve speech<sup>1</sup>.

The use of mulethi in children has been on the increase due to various superstitious beliefs of mothers. It has been falsely believed that it improves speech in cases of speech delay, improves cognition and memory, and improves digestion, all of which have not been proven scientifically. Various hazardous effects like muscle weakness, paralysis, electrolyte imbalances and hypertension go unnoticed and sometimes a foreign body ingestion episode or aspiration could also result, as was evident in our publication.

This article was written to emphasise that the haphazard use of mulethi and various other substances for many health problems without scientific evidence, may in turn lead to unpredictable and serious health hazards. Mothers, especially in rural areas, should be counselled and encouraged to visit primary health care units instead of persisting with home remedies and self-imposed care and it is important to explain to them the hazards of using substances out of superstitious beliefs without advice from a medically qualified doctor. We encourage parents to be empowered regarding the health hazards of mulethi in children which was considered a traditional practice to improve the child's speech.

**References**

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