

Role of Unani Medicine in the Management of Chronic Lifestyle Disorders

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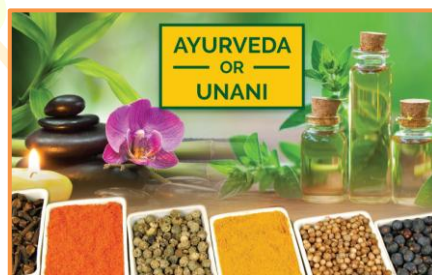
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Chronic lifestyle disorders, such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, cardiovascular diseases, and mental stress, are increasingly prevalent due to sedentary habits, poor diet, and environmental stressors. Modern medicine offers symptomatic relief but often lacks a holistic approach. The Unani system of medicine, based on the balance of humors, emphasizes lifestyle modification, herbal therapies, and natural interventions. This article explores the Unani perspective on chronic lifestyle diseases, therapeutic strategies, commonly used formulations, advantages, limitations, and supporting research.

Key words: Modern medicine, hypertension, obesity, cardiovascular diseases.

Introduction

Chronic lifestyle disorders, also known as non-communicable diseases (NCDs), have emerged as a significant global health challenge in the 21st century. These disorders, including diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, and certain respiratory conditions, are primarily linked to sedentary lifestyles, poor dietary habits, stress, and environmental factors. Unlike infectious diseases, chronic lifestyle disorders develop gradually over time and require long-term management strategies that address both prevention and treatment. Conventional medicine offers various pharmacological interventions for these conditions, but the rising prevalence, side effects of long-term drug use, and increasing healthcare costs have prompted the exploration of complementary and alternative medical systems. Among these, Unani Medicine, a traditional holistic system of healing with roots in Greco-Arabic medical practices, offers valuable insights and therapeutic approaches in managing chronic lifestyle disorders. Unani Medicine, also known as Unani Tibb or Arabic Medicine, is a comprehensive system based on the principles of maintaining the equilibrium of bodily humors—Dam (blood), Balgham (phlegm), Safra (yellow bile), and Sauda (black bile). This balance is believed to be essential for health, while its disturbance results in disease. The Unani system emphasizes individualized treatment by considering a



person's temperament (Mizaj), environment, diet, and lifestyle. Unlike the symptom-focused approach of modern medicine, Unani Medicine aims at restoring overall harmony within the body, strengthening natural defences, and promoting self-healing.

Role of Unani Medicine

Unani Medicine plays a significant role in the management of chronic lifestyle disorders by offering a holistic and natural approach rooted in centuries-old principles. It emphasizes the balance of the four bodily humors—Dam (blood), Balgham (phlegm), Safra (yellow bile), and Sauda (black bile)—to maintain health and prevent disease. Chronic lifestyle disorders such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and cardiovascular diseases arise mainly due to imbalances caused by modern sedentary habits, poor diet, and stress. Unani Medicine addresses these issues by focusing on individualized treatment plans based on a person's temperament (Mizaj), lifestyle, and environment.

Unani Principles in Disease Management

1. Balance of the Four Humors: Unani medicine is based on the belief that human health depends on the balance of four bodily humors—**Dam (blood), Balgham (phlegm), Safra (yellow bile), and Sauda (black bile)**. When these humors are in equilibrium, the body remains healthy. Disease occurs when there is an imbalance or disturbance in the quantity or quality of any of these humors. Therefore, treatment focuses on restoring this balance to bring back health.

2. Concept of Mizaj (Temperament): Every individual has a unique **Mizaj** or temperament, determined by the dominance of certain humors in their body. The Mizaj influences physical characteristics, mental behaviour, and susceptibility to diseases. In Unani medicine, understanding the patient's Mizaj is crucial for designing personalized treatment plans. Therapies and medicines are chosen to complement or correct the patient's temperament to achieve optimum health.

3. Types of Treatment: Unani disease management uses three main approaches: **Ilaj bil Tadbeer (regimental therapy), Ilaj bil Dawa (drug therapy), and Ilaj bil Yad (surgery)**. Regimental therapy includes lifestyle modifications like diet, exercise, massage, and cupping to detoxify the body. Drug therapy involves prescribing natural herbal and mineral medicines tailored to balance the humors. Surgical procedures are used only when necessary and as a last resort.

4. Role of Diet

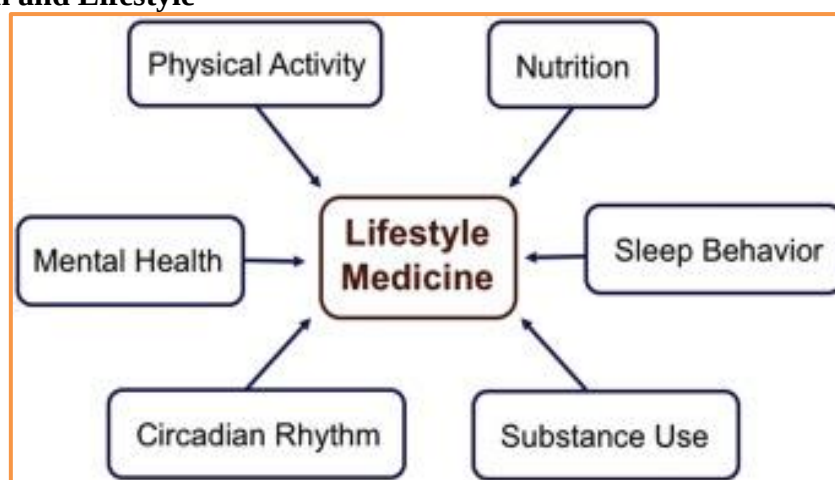


The Role of Diet and Nutrition in IVF Success

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Diet is considered a cornerstone of treatment in Unani medicine. Foods are classified based on their effects on the humors, and dietary recommendations are made accordingly to either reduce excess humors or strengthen weak ones. A well-planned diet not only supports recovery but also prevents aggravation of the disease, promoting long-term wellness.

5. Prevention and Lifestyle



Prevention and Lifestyle

Prevention is emphasized equally alongside treatment. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including proper sleep, regular exercise, stress management, and avoidance of harmful habits, is vital to preserve the balance of humors. Unani medicine promotes a holistic approach, focusing on mental, physical, and environmental factors to prevent the onset or recurrence of disease.

Unani View:

- ✓ Considered a result of excessive heat and dryness in the liver and kidneys affecting the balance of humors.
- ✓ Weak digestion and impaired absorption are core concepts.

Unani View:

- ❖ Result of excessive "hot" blood temperament or an imbalance of Safra (bile).
- ❖ Related to emotional stress and dietary excess.

Management:

• Herbs:

- ❖ *Arjun* (*Terminalia arjuna*)
- ❖ *Sana Makki* (*Cassia angustifolia*)
- ❖ *Lehsun* (Garlic)

- **Diet:** Cold, moist, and light food recommended. Salt and spicy food restricted.

Obesity (Samanta al-Mufrit)

Unani View:

- Caused by excess cold and moist temperament leading to accumulation of fat (Balghami Mizaj).

Management:

Ilaj bil Tadbeer:

Hijama (cupping), Dalk (massage), Hammam (steam bath)

Diet: Warm and dry foods; fasting under supervision.

Drugs:

- ✓ *Zeera* (Cumin), *Kalonji* (*Nigella sativa*), *Senna*, *Majoon Suranjan*

Cardiovascular Diseases

Cardiovascular diseases in Unani medicine are attributed to an imbalance of blood and bile humors, causing vessel obstruction and heart weakness. Treatments include herbal cardiotonics like *Terminalia arjuna* and regimental therapies such as cupping and massage, aimed at restoring humor balance and improving heart function naturally.

Advantages of Unani System in Lifestyle Disorders

1. Holistic and Personalized Care

Focus on temperament (Mizaj), lifestyle, mental and physical balance.

2. Use of Natural Substances

Minimally processed herbs with centuries of empirical use.

3. Preventive and Promotive Approach

Emphasis on early correction of humor imbalance.

4. Minimal Side Effects

When used properly under expert guidance.

5. Integration of Regimental Therapies

Promotes detoxification, improves circulation and organ function.

Side Effects and Limitations of Unani Medicine

While the Unani system of medicine is generally regarded as natural and safe, especially when administered by trained practitioners, it is not entirely free from side effects or limitations. The misconception that all herbal or traditional remedies are harmless can lead to misuse or inappropriate self-medication, which poses certain health risks.

One of the primary concerns is the potential toxicity of certain herbal ingredients. Some classical Unani formulations include potent herbs like *Aconitum* or *Hyoscyamus niger*, which can be toxic if used in excess or without proper detoxification. Moreover, mineral-based preparations, particularly those containing heavy metals such as lead, mercury, or arsenic (commonly found in certain types of *Kushta*), may cause adverse effects if not processed and purified correctly. Though these are traditionally detoxified in Unani pharmaceuticals, improper manufacturing or storage can lead to harmful residue.

Adverse reactions, though less common than in synthetic drugs, are also reported, especially among individuals who are hypersensitive to specific herbs. These can manifest as gastrointestinal issues, skin rashes, headaches, or more severe allergic responses. Furthermore, drug interactions between Unani medicines and modern pharmaceuticals may occur if used simultaneously without professional supervision. For example, combining blood sugar-lowering Unani herbs with allopathic anti-diabetic medication might lead to dangerously low blood glucose levels.

Scientific Evidence and Research Support

Over the years, many studies have aimed to scientifically validate the therapeutic potential of Unani medicines, especially those used in managing chronic lifestyle disorders. One of the most extensively studied herbs is *Gymnema sylvestre*, known as *Gurmar* in Unani medicine. Clinical trials have demonstrated its ability to lower blood glucose levels by stimulating insulin secretion and regenerating pancreatic beta cells. This herb has gained recognition as a complementary treatment for diabetes, reinforcing its traditional use.

Another prominent Unani herb is *Terminalia arjuna*, widely used for cardiovascular diseases. Research has confirmed its cardioprotective effects, including the ability to improve heart muscle function, reduce blood pressure, and act as an antioxidant. Such findings align with its traditional application as a cardiac tonic (*Qurs-e-Arjun*), thus bridging ancient knowledge with modern pharmacology.

Nigella sativa (black seed) is another herb that has received substantial scientific attention. It exhibits antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, hypoglycaemic, and lipid-lowering properties. Studies have shown that its active compound, thymoquinone, plays a vital role in reducing oxidative stress and improving metabolic parameters, making it effective against multiple lifestyle disorders such as diabetes and hypertension.

Advantages of Unani Medicine

1. Holistic treatment addressing body, mind, and lifestyle.
2. Personalized therapy based on individual temperament (Mizaj).
3. Uses natural and herbal remedies with minimal chemical additives.
4. Emphasizes prevention through diet and lifestyle modifications.
5. Focuses on restoring the balance of humors (Dam, Balgham, Safra, Sauda).
6. Includes regimental therapies like massage, cupping, and exercise.
7. Minimal side effects compared to many modern synthetic drugs.
8. Encourages detoxification and cleansing of the body.

9. Adaptable to chronic disease management with long-term benefits.
10. Integrates dietary guidelines that support overall health.
11. Enhances immunity through natural means.
12. Accessible and affordable in many regions due to use of local herbs.
13. Provides mental health benefits by treating stress and anxiety holistically.
14. Uses time-tested formulations developed over centuries.
15. Can complement modern medicine in integrative health care.
16. Promotes sustainable and eco-friendly health practices

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