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PREVENTION OF LIFESTYLE DISEASES THROUGH *ASBAB-E-SITTA ZAROORIYAH* (SIX ESSENTIAL FACTORS) OF UNANI MEDICINE: A REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Lifestyle diseases are a group of diseases whose onset and progression are related to lifestyle and behavioural factors such as dietary habits, physical activity, rest, smoking, alcohol consumption, etc, and result in the development of chronic diseases, specifically heart disease, stroke, diabetes, obesity, metabolic syndrome, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and some types of cancer. The Unani (Greek-Arabic) system of medicine, originating in Ancient Greece (Yūnān), is largely based on the teachings and principles of the Greek physician Hippocrates (460-370 BC). The Unani system of medicine establishes rules for a balanced lifestyle, revolving around six essential elements (*Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah*); these are atmospheric air, diet, rest and physical activity, psychological activity and rest, sleeping and waking habits, and elimination and retention. The Unani system of medicine distinguishes between lifestyle diseases and other diseases in specific contexts by *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah*. According to Unani medicine, lifestyle diseases are diseases that result from an imbalance in the *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah* over a long period of time. In this article, we will discuss the overall assessment of the role of *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah* (six essential elements) in preventing lifestyle diseases.

Key words: Unani Medicine, *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah*, Lifestyle diseases, Non-communicable diseases

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INTRODUCTION

Lifestyle diseases or metabolic syndrome are diseases primarily caused due to inappropriate lifestyle. Lifestyle diseases, also called non-communicable diseases, do not spread from person to person. They are long-lasting and often progress slowly. Chronic non-communicable diseases are rapidly gaining importance as a global public health concern. The four main types of non-communicable diseases are cardiovascular disease (such as heart attack and stroke), cancer, chronic respiratory disease (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes. Unhealthy diet and lack of physical activity can manifest in humans as high blood pressure, increased blood sugar, high blood lipids and obesity. These are called metabolic risk factors and can lead to cardiovascular disease, the leading non-communicable disease leading to premature death. The emerging epidemic of non-communicable diseases is closely linked to increased life expectancy in developed and many developing countries, profound and often unhealthy changes in lifestyles and physical environments, socially unfavourable. By the end of the twentieth century, non communicable diseases were estimated to have contributed more than 60% of deaths in the world and almost half of the global burden of diseases. Non communicable diseases (NCDs) kill 41 million people each year, equivalent to 74% of all deaths globally.¹

The problem is universal and low and middle - income countries suffer the severe and growing impact of non communicable diseases, which creates tremendous difficulties for public health services in area where human and technical resources are extremely limited.² Lifestyle disease is a group of diseases the onset and progress of which are concerned with lifestyle and behaviour factors such as dietary habits, physical activities, rest, smoking, alcohol consumption, etc.³ Cardiovascular diseases (CVD) continue to be the major cause of mortality representing about 30 percent of all deaths worldwide. As per the report by Health of the Nation 2023, India has experienced a massive spike in lifestyle diseases, including an increase in the prevalence of early risk factors like obesity and cholesterol irregularities, between 2019 and 2022.⁴ Lifestyle diseases like hypertension, diabetes mellitus, dyslipidaemia and overweight/obesity are the major risk factors for the development of

CVD. With rapid economic development and increasing westernization of lifestyle in the past few decades prevalence of these diseases has reached alarming proportions among Indians in the recent years.⁵ Unani medicine strives to find the best possible ways by which a person can lead a healthy life. Unani system of Medicine lays rules for a balanced lifestyle, which revolves around six essential factors (*Asbab-e- Sitta Zarooriyah*); these are atmospheric air, dietetics, rest and physical activities, psychological activities and rest, sleeping patterns and wakefulness and eliminations and retentions.⁶ Unani system of medicine differentiates lifestyle diseases and other diseases within the context of the *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah*. According to Unani medicine, lifestyle diseases are diseases that result from an imbalance in the *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah* over a long period of time.⁷

***Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah* (Six Essential Factors) and their role in Prevention and Control of Lifestyle Diseases**

Unani medicine strives to find the best possible ways by which a person can lead a healthy life with minimum or zero sickness. Unani system of Medicine lays rules for a balanced lifestyle, which revolves around six essential factors *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah* includes six essential pre requisites which are as follows.^{8, 9, 10, 11}

1. ***Hawa-e-Muheet*** (Atmospheric Air)
2. ***Makool wa Mashroob*** (Food and drinks)
3. ***Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Badani*** (Physical activity and repose)
4. ***Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Nafsani*** (Mental activity and repose)
5. ***Naum wa Yaqza*** (Sleep and wakefulness)
6. ***Ehtibas wa Istifragh*** (Retention and elimination)

The above six factors essentially influence each and every human body; therefore, they are called *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah*. Nobody could escape from these factors so long he is living.¹¹

***Hawa -e-Muheet* (environmental air)**

Air is the first and foremost important factor of all the six essential factors, without air we can't envision the presence of life. Air carries out the function of *Ta'adeel-e-Rooh* at the time

of *inspiration* by exchanging the air. Simultaneously it also works as *Tankiya-e-Rooh* at the time of *expiration*.^{12, 13} Most of the air bone diseases are caused by seasonal or natural changes and environmental pollution of air. The temperament of the air changes for every season accordingly produces changes to human body. Air pollution can affect body fluids. Human life should have clean air in order to keep the body strong and healthy. We can control and prevent chronic diseases by promoting clean air.

Makool wa Mashroob (food and drinks)

Makool wa mashroob (Food and Beverages) is an important part of *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah*. Unani physicians had advocated precise diet for specific disease.¹⁰ Avicenna described this in his famous treatise "*Alqanoon fit tib*" Dietetics and Nutrition is one of the significant clinical subjects. The significance can additionally depict by Gruner in his book *Al qanoon fit tib* "the stomach is the house of disease and the diet is the head of healing. This was noted by Hippocrates, Galen and Ibn Sina, the original pioneers of Tibb. Infact, most of the chronic diseases of our age are caused by some form of nutritional deficiency. The root causes of diabetes, obesity, heart disease, inflammatory diseases, certain skin conditions and cancer can be traced back to inadequate or unhealthy diet - too much salt or fat; too little fibre; not enough fruit and vegetables; bad eating habits, etc. Hippocrates thought of it first: "*Let your food be your medicine, and medicine be your food.*"¹⁴

Instead of being an afterthought when treating a particular disorder, changes and improvement of diet is now being considered. In Unani Medicine philosophy, the concept of the qualities of heating and cooling, moistness and dryness, is linked to the effect of different foods have on the person bodily metabolism and formation of the humours. Heating foods will increase the body basic metabolic rate, and cooling foods will have the opposite effect. For some diseases, like phlegmatic disorders, heating foods should be used. For other disorders, like gastritis, cooling foods are more beneficial.¹⁴

Unani Physicians treated patients through a scheme starting with physiotherapy and diet; if this failed, drugs were used. Rhazes's treatment scheme started with diet therapy, he noted that "if the physician is able to treat with foodstuffs, not medication, then he has succeeded."¹⁵

Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Badani (physical activity and repose)

Physically active plays an essential role in ensuring health and well-being, and there is a large body of research investigating the benefits of exercise. Physical activity has positive effects on many parts of the body (heart, muscles, bones, blood (including cholesterol levels), immune system and nervous system) and can reduce the risk of many non communicable diseases.¹⁶ Unani physicians advocated that physical activity is essential for the activation of *hararat ghariziya* (innate energy) and to excrete the waste products of the body but prolonged activity of every kind leads to dispersion of the *hararat ghariziya* (innate heat). Rest is important to relieve the fatigue and to decrease the body temperature which is harmful to body fluids. *Riyazat* (exercise) stimulates innate heat and mature the thick morbid matters after that eliminate it proper outlet. *Riyazat* enhances arterial blood supply and nutrition to affected part of the muscles. Physical activity can help people to achieve a variety of goals, including increased cardiorespiratory fitness, increased vigour, improved glycaemic control, decreased insulin resistance, improved lipid profile, blood pressure reduction, and maintenance of weight loss.

Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Nafsani (mental activity and repose)

Ibn-e-Sina was the first physician who developed the relation between psychology and medicine. Body and mind have impact on each other as *nafsiyati awamil* (psychological factors) are dependent on dominant *khilt* and *mizaj* of that person. Mental stress associated with many lifestyle disorders like hypertension, diabetes, obesity, etc. Mental relaxation through various ways protects human life.

Naum waYaqza (sleep and wakefulness)

Ismail Jurjani stated that normal sleep is very beneficial to all, while sleeplessness changes the temperament of brain and interferes with the process of digestion and metabolism. It not only weakens the ability of thought, sense and movement but also deteriorates them gradually and renders the person to take decision.¹⁷ According to *Allama Nafis* excessive awakening produces dissolution of *rooh* leads to weakness and *yaboosat* (dryness) of brain and indigestion.¹³ Excess of sleeping causes coldness in temperament which further become

the cause of weakness, laziness in the body and headache etc and may develop many diseases. Insufficient sleep has also been linked to obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and other health problems and it is considered as important risk factor and getting enough high quality sleep is important to health and wellbeing as nutrition and exercise.^{18,19}

***Ehtibas wa Istifragh* (retention and elimination)**

Ehtibas wa istifragh (retention and elimination) has got last but not least essential factor over all the six essential factors. Obesity is one of the lifestyle disorder and also major risk factor of other lifestyle as well as NCD like Type 2 diabetes mellitus, coronary heart disease, and hypertension etc. According to Unani Medicine, obesity is also known as *Samane Mufrat* is a *Balghami* (Phlegmatic) disease in which *Khilte Balgham* predominates in the body of person which is a predisposing factor in causation of obesity. In this condition loss of movements of *Aaza* (organs) is due to excessive accumulated *Balgham* (fat) and cold temperament, hence the person becomes lazy and dull and leads to lifestyle diseases.²⁰

Retention and deposition of *Balgham* (Atherosclerosis) obstructs *Nufuz of Rooh* (passage of oxygen) in the organs which finally cause death.¹⁸ Proper *ehtibas wa istifragh* (retention and elimination) through proper channels is very important to maintain health and wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

Considering the expeditious prevalence, risk factors, socio-economic impact, premature mortality, it is high time to find better ways to overcome the risks of lifestyle disorders. An important way to control lifestyle disorders or NCDs is to focus on reducing the risk factors associated with these diseases. Lifestyle recommendations within the health plan targets physical activity, smoking cessation, dietary habits, stress management and alcohol intake also prevent lifestyle disorders. Low-cost solutions exist for governments and other stakeholders to reduce the common modifiable risk factors. The Unani system of medicine has traditionally taken a holistic approach to disease prevention and treatment. Unani system of medicine provides a unique combination of *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah* which should be implicated in day to day life. *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah* can have a pivotal role in preventing various lifestyle diseases which has become threat to our life.

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