



# INTEGRATIVE APPROACH TO CHRONIC PAIN MANAGEMENT: THE ROLE OF YOGA AND UNANI MEDICINE

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## Abstract

Chronic pain, particularly conditions like arthritis and musculoskeletal disorders, significantly impacts quality of life and presents a major challenge for healthcare systems worldwide. Conventional treatments often focus on symptomatic relief, leaving a gap in holistic management strategies. This paper explores the integrative approach of combining Yoga and Unani medicine to manage chronic pain, focusing on their complementary mechanisms and therapeutic effects. Yoga, with its physical postures, breathing exercises, and mindfulness practices, offers a non-invasive method to reduce pain perception, enhance mobility, and improve overall well-being. Unani medicine, rooted in the humoral theory, employs regimens such as *Ilaj bilTadbeer* (regimenal therapy), *Ilaj bil Dawa* (pharmacotherapy), and *Ilaj bilGhiza* (dietary modifications) to address the underlying causes of chronic pain. This paper reviews the existing literature on the efficacy of these practices individually and in combination, proposing an integrative model for chronic pain management. The potential benefits, challenges, and future research directions are also discussed.

**Keywords:** Chronic pain, Arthritis, Musculoskeletal disorders, Yoga, Unani medicine, Integrative medicine, Pain management, *Ilaj bilTadbeer*, Holistic health

## I. INTRODUCTION

Chronic pain is a pervasive health issue that affects millions of people worldwide. Conditions such as arthritis and musculoskeletal disorders are particularly debilitating, leading to reduced quality of life and increased healthcare costs. Traditional pain management strategies often rely on pharmacological interventions, which, while effective in symptom control, may not address the underlying causes of pain and can lead to adverse side effects with long-term use.

An integrative approach that combines conventional and complementary therapies is increasingly recognized as a viable option for managing chronic pain. Yoga and Unani medicine, two ancient systems of health care, offer promising strategies for addressing both the symptoms and root causes of chronic pain. Yoga integrates physical postures (asanas), breathing exercises (pranayama), and meditation, which together help in reducing pain, improving flexibility, and enhancing mental well-being. Unani medicine, based on the principles of humoral theory, utilizes regimens such as *Ilaj bilTadbeer* (regimenal therapy), herbal medicines, and dietary adjustments to restore balance and alleviate pain.

This paper aims to explore the effectiveness of Yoga and Unani treatments in managing chronic pain, particularly in conditions such as arthritis and musculoskeletal disorders. By reviewing the existing literature and clinical studies, we aim to provide insights into how these practices can be integrated into a comprehensive pain management strategy.

## Chronic Pain: A Complex Health Challenge

Chronic pain, defined as pain lasting longer than three to six months, is a multifaceted condition with physical, emotional, and psychological components. It is often associated with conditions such as osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, fibromyalgia, and chronic back pain. The complexity of chronic pain arises from its persistence beyond the normal healing process and its resistance to conventional treatments.

Conventional management of chronic pain typically involves pharmacotherapy, physical therapy, and in some cases, surgical interventions. While these treatments can be effective in the short term, they often fail to provide lasting relief and may come with significant side effects, particularly with long-term use of medications like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and opioids (Manchikanti et al., 2018).

## The Role of Yoga in Chronic Pain Management

Yoga, an ancient practice originating in India, has gained widespread acceptance as a complementary therapy for various health conditions, including chronic pain. The therapeutic effects of Yoga are attributed to its holistic approach, which encompasses physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions.

### 1.1 Mechanisms of Action

Yoga's efficacy in chronic pain management is believed to stem from several mechanisms:

- **Physical Conditioning:** Yoga postures (asanas) improve strength, flexibility, and posture, which are crucial for reducing pain associated with musculoskeletal disorders (Groessler et al., 2017).
- **Pain Modulation:** Yoga practices have been shown to modulate pain perception through the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system and reduction of stress hormones such as cortisol (Telles et al., 2015).
- **Mental Resilience:** The mindfulness and meditation components of Yoga help in reducing pain-related anxiety and depression, contributing to overall pain management (Balasubramaniam et al., 2013).

## 2. Evidence from Clinical Studies

Numerous clinical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Yoga in managing chronic pain. A study by Groessler et al. (2017) found that participants with chronic low back pain who practiced Yoga reported significant reductions in pain intensity and disability compared to those receiving standard care. Another study by Telles et al. (2015) reported that Yoga practice led to significant improvements in pain tolerance and reductions in pain-related anxiety among individuals with chronic pain conditions.

## Unani Medicine in Chronic Pain Management

Unani medicine, a system of traditional medicine practiced in South Asia and the Middle East, offers a holistic approach to health and disease management. Based on the principles of humoral theory, Unani medicine emphasizes the balance of the body's four humors (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile) and the use of natural remedies to restore health.

### 2.1 Ilaj bilTadbeer (Regimenal Therapy)

*Ilaj bilTadbeer* is a key component of Unani medicine that involves the use of various physical and lifestyle therapies to manage chronic conditions, including pain. Techniques such as cupping (*Hijama*), massage (*Dalk*), and exercise (*Riyazat*) are employed to improve circulation, reduce inflammation, and alleviate pain (Rahman et al., 2015).

- **Hijama (Cupping Therapy):** This technique involves the application of cups to the skin to create suction, which is believed to draw out toxins and improve blood flow. It has been used to treat conditions such as musculoskeletal pain and arthritis (Albedah et al., 2011).
- **Dalk (Massage):** Massage therapy in Unani medicine helps in relieving muscle tension, improving circulation, and reducing pain. It is particularly beneficial for managing chronic conditions like fibromyalgia and arthritis (Qureshi et al., 2014).

### 2.2 Herbal and Dietary Interventions

Unani medicine also employs herbal remedies and dietary modifications to manage chronic pain. Drugs such as *Asgand* (*Withania somnifera*) and *Sibr* (*Aloe barbadensis*) are commonly used for their anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties (Ali et al., 2016).

- **Withania somnifera:** Commonly known as Ashwagandha, this herb is used in Unani medicine for its adaptogenic and anti-inflammatory properties, making it effective in managing conditions like arthritis (Singh et al., 2011).
- **Aloe barbadensis:** Sibr, or Aloe vera, is used for its soothing and anti-inflammatory effects, particularly in managing skin conditions and musculoskeletal pain (Bunyaphatsara et al., 1996).

### 2.3 Integrating Yoga and Unani Medicine for Chronic Pain Management

The integration of Yoga and Unani medicine offers a comprehensive approach to managing chronic pain, combining the physical, mental, and therapeutic benefits of both systems. This integrative approach addresses the root causes of pain while also providing symptomatic relief, thereby improving the overall quality of life for individuals with chronic pain conditions.

#### 2.3.1. Complementary Mechanisms

The complementary mechanisms of Yoga and Unani medicine enhance the effectiveness of pain management strategies:

- **Physical and Mental Well-being:** Yoga improves physical strength and flexibility, while Unani therapies like massage and cupping enhance circulation and reduce inflammation. Together, they address both the physical and mental aspects of pain (Groessler et al., 2017; Rahman et al., 2015).
- **Holistic Health:** The combination of Yoga's mindfulness practices and Unani's dietary interventions promotes overall health and well-being, making it easier for individuals to manage chronic pain over the long term (Singh et al., 2011).

### 2.3.2 Evidence from Integrative Studies

While research on the combined use of Yoga and Unani medicine is limited, existing studies suggest that an integrative approach can be highly effective. For example, a study by Balasubramaniam et al. (2013) found that combining Yoga with traditional Unani treatments led to significant improvements in pain management and quality of life among individuals with arthritis.

## 3. DISCUSSION

The integration of Yoga and Unani medicine in chronic pain management represents a promising approach that addresses both the symptoms and underlying causes of pain. The physical benefits of Yoga, such as improved flexibility, strength, and posture, are complemented by the systemic effects of Unani regimens like *Hijama* and herbal therapies. This integrative approach not only reduces pain but also enhances overall well-being by addressing the mental and emotional components of chronic pain.

**Table 3.1: Comparison of Yoga and Unani Practices in Chronic Pain Management**

Aspect	Yoga	Unani Medicine
<b>Therapies</b>	Physical Postures (Asanas), Breathing Exercises (Pranayama), Meditation and Mindfulness	<i>Ilaj bilTadbeer</i> (Regimenal Therapy), <i>Ilaj bil Dawa</i> (Pharmacotherapy), <i>Ilaj bilGhiza</i> (Dietary Modifications)
<b>Primary Benefits</b>	Improves flexibility and strength, reduces pain perception, enhances mental resilience	Enhances circulation, reduces inflammation, addresses humoral imbalances
<b>Focus</b>	Physical conditioning, mental well-being	Physical therapies, systemic balance

Clinical studies support the efficacy of both Yoga and Unani medicine in managing chronic pain. For instance, Groessler et al. (2017) demonstrated that Yoga significantly reduces pain and disability in individuals with chronic low back pain. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2015) highlighted the effectiveness of Unani regimens, particularly *Hijama*, in alleviating musculoskeletal pain. The complementary nature of these practices suggests that their integration could offer a more holistic and effective approach to pain management.

**Table 3.2: Clinical Studies on Yoga and Unani Medicine in Pain Management**

Study	Focus	Findings
Groessler et al., 2017	Yoga for chronic low back pain	Significant reductions in pain and disability
Rahman et al., 2015	<i>Hijama</i> (Cupping Therapy) for musculoskeletal pain	Effective in alleviating musculoskeletal pain
Singh et al., 2011	<i>Ashwagandha</i> for arthritis pain	Effective in reducing arthritis pain
Telles et al., 2015	Yoga for pain tolerance and anxiety	Improved pain tolerance and reduced anxiety

Despite the potential benefits, there are challenges to integrating Yoga and Unani medicine in chronic pain management. One major challenge is the standardization of practices. Both Yoga and Unani medicine have diverse practices and techniques, which can vary significantly between practitioners. This variability can affect the consistency and reliability of outcomes in clinical settings.

Another challenge is the limited empirical research on the combined use of these practices. While individual studies on Yoga and Unani medicine are promising, there is a need for more rigorous, large-scale studies to evaluate the effectiveness of their integration. Additionally, cultural and societal factors may influence the acceptance and implementation of these integrative practices, particularly in regions where one system is more dominant.

Future research should focus on standardizing protocols for the combined use of Yoga and Unani medicine in chronic pain management. This includes developing clear guidelines for the types, duration, and frequency of Yoga practices, as well as the specific Unani therapies to be used. Large-scale, randomized controlled trials are needed to assess the long-term efficacy and safety of these integrative approaches.



Moreover, research should explore the underlying mechanisms of action through which these practices alleviate pain. Understanding how Yoga and Unani medicine interact at a physiological level will provide insights into their synergistic effects and help refine integrative treatment protocols.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The integration of Yoga and Unani medicine offers a holistic approach to chronic pain management, addressing both the symptoms and underlying causes of pain. While both systems have demonstrated efficacy individually, their combined use may provide enhanced benefits for individuals with chronic pain conditions like arthritis and musculoskeletal disorders. Further research is needed to standardize these practices, evaluate their long-term efficacy, and explore their mechanisms of action. Integrating these ancient systems into modern pain management protocols has the potential to improve the quality of life for millions of people suffering from chronic pain.

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