



A Comprehensive Review of Lifestyle Diseases and Their Prevention in Unani Medicine

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Abstract

Lifestyle diseases are the major health concerns all over the world, and are responsible for an estimated 75% of non-pandemic related deaths globally in 2021, highlighting their significant contribution to the global health burden. Lifestyle diseases are defined as diseases that are caused by the way a person or group of people live their life. According to WHO, lifestyle diseases are not transmitted from one person to another, called as non-communicable diseases (NCDs). These diseases are largely the result of poor dietary habits, sedentary lifestyle, stress, alcohol, and smoking which lead to cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases, diabetes, hypertension, cancer, etc., among which cardiovascular disease and cancer are the leading causes of mortality in developed countries. According to the Unani system of medicine, these diseases arise from the imbalance in Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya over a long period of time. Unani medicine emphasizes on the importance of prevention of diseases as compared to curing diseases, because it is considered that “prevention is better than cure”. It is important to make people aware about the role of Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya for the maintenance of health and prevention of diseases. This review explores the understanding of lifestyle diseases and its preventive measures through the Unani system of medicine.

Keywords: Lifestyle diseases, non-communicable diseases, Unani medicine, Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya.

Introduction

Lifestyle diseases are the health problems that are caused by the way a person or group of people lives. Sometimes they are called as “diseases of longevity” and “diseases of civilization” interchangeably.^[1] According to WHO, Lifestyle related diseases commonly known as non-communicable diseases (NCDs) or chronic diseases.^[2] NCDs are becoming increasingly significant health concerns among adults in both developed and developing countries.^[3] These diseases cannot be transmitted from one person to another, typically long lasting, and progress gradually overtime.^[2] NCDs are responsible for approximately 68% of total deaths globally and account for nearly 60% of all deaths in India.^[4]

The major NCDs include; cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) such as heart attack and stroke, various forms of cancer, Chronic respiratory conditions like (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma) and Diabetes.^[2,5] CVDs and cancer have emerged as the leading contributors to death in developed countries.^[3] In addition to major NCDs, other common diseases include; Hypertension, Alzheimer's, Osteoporosis. Lifestyle diseases are currently the leading cause of death and account for the highest mortality rates worldwide.^[2] According to WHO, NCDs killed at least 43 million people in 2021 which is equivalent to 75% of non-pandemic related deaths globally.^[5] These diseases are frequently linked to unhealthy lifestyles, such as poor eating habits, prolonged stress, lack of physical activity, not getting enough sleep, and addictions such as alcohol, smoking.^[5,6] Lifestyle diseases significantly affecting people's lives, leading to loss of life, disability, family struggles, increased poverty and substantial economic burdens on the nation.^[3]

According to Unani system of medicine, all factors that play a role in health and disease are defined, with those exerting a constant influence on all individuals as these are the causes from which no one can escape throughout the life being termed essential factors (*Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya*) and the rest are non-essential factors (*Asbabe Sitta Ghair Zarooriya*).^[7,8,9] Non-communicable diseases arise due to the imbalances in Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya (six essential factors of life) over a long period of time. As *Jalinoos (Galen)* mentioned, sue tadbeer (any imbalance in one of the essential factors) can lead to the causation of fasaade tabiyat or disease.^[10] The primary objective of Unani medicine is the preservation of health, because prevention is considered better than cure. Since it is easier to stay healthy than to recover it when it once lost. Therefore, Unani system emphasizes simple preventive strategies as a priority by maintaining the balance in Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya.

Methodology

This review was conducted to explore the concept of lifestyle diseases and its prevention from the perspective of Unani medicine. A comprehensive search of literature was conducted using databases such as PubMed, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, along with official WHO and CDC reports. A wide range of classical Unani texts, modern textbooks, and previously published review papers relevant to the topic were reviewed. Search terms included “lifestyle diseases”, “Unani medicine”, “non-communicable diseases (NCDs)”, “diet and lifestyle”, relevant guidelines by WHO, CCRUM, and the Ministry of AYUSH were reviewed. Data from

eligible sources were extracted manually and organized thematically to present a comprehensive understanding of Unani perspectives on lifestyle diseases and its prevention.

Unani concept of Lifestyle Diseases

According to Unani system of medicine, lifestyle diseases arise due to imbalance of Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya (six essential factors of life) for a long period of time. An imbalance in these essential factors can cause the accumulation of harmful substances at the humoral level, eventually leading to the onset of disease. This disturbance further disrupts the physiological functions, weakening the digestive, urinary and circulatory systems.^[11] Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya are the efficient causes, that affect the body either to maintain health or to cause the disease.^[12] In Unani medicine, the theory of Mizaj plays a vital role in representing the nature of every component in the body, from atoms and molecules to cells, tissues and organs.^[13] Mizaj of a person indicates an individual's bodily constitution and inherent tendencies.^[14] Hence, any imbalance in these essential factors of life leads to imbalance in Mizaj. An imbalance in Mizaj disrupts the body's internal harmony, resulting in the development of various diseases.^[15] Lifestyle diseases refer to conditions that arise from the way a person manages the Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya (essential factors) and Asbabe Sitta Ghair Zarooriya (non-essential factors of life) in their everyday routine, as these factors are closely related to such conditions. Since these essential factors are considered efficient causes for body and Mizaj, they have an impact on body, Mizaj (temperament) and Quwa (faculties) and ultimately affect the Afaal (functions) of body.^[14]

Risk factors

A risk factor is defined as “An aspect of personal behaviour or lifestyle, an environmental exposure, or a hereditary characteristic that is associated with an increase in the occurrence of a particular disease, injury, or other health condition”.^[4] According to WHO, risk factors are as follows:

Behavioral risk factors include smoking, unhealthy diets, harmful use of alcohol, insufficient physical activity.^[5,16]

Environmental risk factors include air pollution, source of drinking water.^[5,16] Among these, air pollution is responsible for millions of deaths worldwide due to NCDs mainly due to stroke, ischemic heart disease, COPD and lung cancer.^[5]

Metabolic risk factors include high blood pressure, which is a leading risk factor globally accounting for 25% of global NCD deaths, followed by high blood glucose levels and overweight and obesity.^[5]

Role of Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya in prevention of Lifestyle Diseases

According to Unani medicine, Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya play a significant role either in maintenance of health or causation of disease. These essential factors are six in numbers, influence each and every individual as these are the factors that are inevitable for human existence, therefore they are called as Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya.^[7,9,12,17] Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya must remain in equilibrium to maintain health, these essential factors are;

1. Hawa-e-Muheet (Atmospheric Air)
2. Makool-wa-Mashroob (Food and Drinks)
3. Harkat-wa Sukoon-e-Badani (Bodily Movement and Repose)
4. Harkat-wa-Sukoon-e-Nafsaani (Psychic Movement and Repose)
5. Naum-wa-Yaqza (Sleep and Wakefulness)
6. Istifragh-wa-Ihtibas (Elimination and Retention)

Lifestyle diseases which constitute a significant health burden today, can be effectively, economically and safely prevented by adhering to guidelines related to these essential factors.^[8]

Hawa-e-Muheet (Atmospheric air)

As life cannot exist without air, it is given the utmost importance among all Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya.^[17] When the air is in pure form, air regulates the hot temperament of ruh through inspiration called as “tarveeh” and purifies the lungs by means of expiration called as “tanqiya”. When the air is contaminated, it will lead to the sue mizaj (abnormal temperament) of ruh.^[7] Air quality has a direct impact on mizaj of ruh, which either maintain or disrupt health.^[17] There are seasonal variations in air which is considered normal changes. In each season, air changes to a new temperament.^[18] Such as in summers, air becomes hotter, it is advisable to consume cool foods, and engage in mild physical activity to maintain good health.^[8] It is considered an abnormal change when the air becomes impure or polluted, which affects the heart, as it reaches the heart through respiration, first it disrupts the mizaj of qalb and ruh and then leads to the putrefaction of humors within the heart.^[17,18] As prolonged inhalation of polluted air can cause lifestyle diseases such as COPD and lung cancer.^[3] *Ibne Sina* emphasized the importance of spacious homes with proper ventilation along with playgrounds, and gardens within the cities, to ensure access to fresh air.^[19] This highlights the pivotal role of pure air in performing the physiological functions and preventing diseases as the impure air can result in various diseases.

Makool-wa-Mashroob (Food and Drinks)

Makool and Mashroob act upon the body in three ways; by their kaifiyat (quality), madda (matter) and their surate naueya (morph).^[20] “OC Gruner” who is commentator of *Al-Qanoon-Fit-Tib* stated that “The stomach is the house of disease and diet is the head of healing”^[18] which highlights the vital role of diet in lifestyle diseases. For the maintenance of health and prevention of disease, it is advisable to take diet which should be balanced, within a limit and according to the digestive ability of the stomach.^[21]

Buqrat (Hippocrates) suggested three basic dietary principles:

1. Food should not be taken until the hunger is real
2. Stop eating while still hungry
3. Take some rest after eating.^[22]

Drinking water immediately after meal should be avoided, for people with barid mizaj (cold temperament) is recommended to drink pure water once food has descended from the upper digestive tract, and for people of haar mizaj (hot temperament) recommended to drink water during meals, as it may support the digestion process.^[17,23] Diet play a very crucial role in lifestyle diseases such as

obesity is associated with consumption of excessive food which is high in fat, meat, sugar and beverages. Unani physicians advised to take taqil-e-ghiza (low calorie diet) to prevent obesity which itself prevent heart diseases, diabetes, hypertension that develop due to unhealthy dietary patterns.^[24,25] According to *Jalinoos* and other Unani physicians, four specific principles must be considered while choosing dietary intake:

1. Time of food
2. Type of food
3. Quantity of food
4. Temperament of the food.^[22]

Harkat-wa-Sukoon-e-Badani (Bodily Movement and Repose)

Physical activity produces hararat (heat) which stimulates the hararat ghariziya (innate heat) and dissolve the waste product of the body.^[17,18,26] Since hararat supports all quwa (faculties) within the body, especially quwa tabiyah (vegetative faculty) which is responsible for digestion, metabolism, and eliminating the waste from the body.^[21] Diseases like diabetes, obesity, hypertension are related to the sedentary lifestyle which can be prevented by exercise. Ibne Sina said that “exercise is the cause of good health, if it is done at the right time and in moderate quantity”.^[24] Obesity can be prevented by kasrat-e-riyazat (excessive exercise) which should be done before having meal, and for the prevention of heart diseases, *Zakariya Razi* advised for morning brisk walk over intense exercises.^[15,24] Therefore, Unani physicians emphasized the importance of appropriate physical activity which is essential for the health such as stretching, gymnastics, breathing exercises, etc.^[18] Adequate Rest is essential not only in relieving fatigue but also supports the body in retaining the nutrients during the digestive process.^[8,23] Excess of any of these or both will result in baroodat (cold) which affects the functions of body.^[17] Thus, maintaining a balance between harkat and sukoon is important for health.

Harkat-wa-Sukoon-e-Nafsaani (Psychic Movement and Repose)

Psychic states such as, sorrow, fear, worry, anger, significantly impact overall health and particularly affect the functions of heart and brain.^[8,17] All psychic states are associated with the movement of ruh (pneuma), khoon (blood) and hararat ghariziya (innate heat) either towards inside the body or outside the body. Excessive emotions like anger and joy can cause vasodilation in the skin, can lead to the redness of skin and an increased heart rate, contributing to the risk of heart diseases as body and mind are interconnected that influence and regulate each other's functions.^[17,27] Lifestyle diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, asthma etc. are related to mental stress. Therefore, Unani physicians emphasized the importance of mental relaxation from personal life, every day responsibilities, and worries related to work, as essential preventive measures against these diseases.^[18] For the prevention of diseases, it is important to maintain a balance with emotions as positive emotions boost the immune system and negative emotions make a person physically weak.^[21]

Naum-wa-Yaqza (Sleep and Wakefulness)

Zakariya Razi mentioned that sleep for eight hours is very important for health. He also mentioned that sleep plays a crucial role in strengthening the vital faculty, pneuma and enhancing the process of digestion.^[10] Naum resemble with repose and yaqza resemble with movement, excessive sleep will result in dullness of psychic faculties, cold diseases and heaviness of head, on the contrary excessive wakefulness results in dryness, weakens the brain, impairs digestion, etc.^[18,20,23,26,28] Prolonged wakefulness leads to the dissolution of maddah (matter), which induces false hunger, that may lead to overeating and increase the risk of disease like obesity.^[28] Many diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, obesity, etc. are related to inadequate sleep which is an important risk factor. It is important to take adequate sleep for the maintenance of health and prevention of diseases.

Istifragh-wa-Ihtibas (Elimination and Retention)

Retention of substances that must be eliminated from the body such as urine, stool, sweat, menstrual blood, etc. causes certain diseases. Similarly, the elimination of substances that must be retained in the body such as fluids, salts, nutrients, etc. will lead to abnormal condition.^[20] According to Unani concept, obesity is caused by the retention of excess balgham (phlegm), hence it is considered as balghami (phlegmatic) disease, which itself a risk factor for many lifestyle diseases like diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, etc. Therefore, proper elimination of excess khilt balgham through proper channel is important to reduce the risk of obesity.^[29] Excess of elimination of any matter weakens the body and altered the Mizaj towards coldness and dryness.^[7,17,18] Excess of retention results in the accumulation of waste (suddah), leads to the putrefaction of akhlat (humors), reduces appetite and causes a sense of heaviness in the body.^[17] Therefore, proper balance between retaining necessary substances and eliminating harmful ones at right time is necessary to prevent diseases.

Preservation of health by Unani physicians

Rabban Tabri mentioned that health is maintained through the intake of appropriate food according to the body's mizaj, along with the proper evacuation of waste matter from the body.^[22]

Ibn Rushd mentioned that health can be preserved through four ways that are consumption of suitable food and drinks, elimination of waste matter from the body, avoidance of psychological factors that lead to imbalance temperament, and maintaining the purity of air.^[26]

Zakariya Razi mentioned two key methods to maintain health, maintaining balance in daily activities and implementing preventive measures at the early stage of disease by recognizing the initial symptoms of disease.^[30]

Ibne Sina mentioned that for the preservation of health, maintaining the equilibrium among these concomitant factors is important which includes moderation in temperament, food and drinks, elimination of waste matter, maintaining the integrity of whole body, maintaining the purity of inspired air, protecting against unexpected external factors, moderation in physical and psychic activity including moderation in sleep and wakefulness.^[18,20]

Preventive measures

- Unhealthy diets rich in calories, sugar, salt, spices, and harmful fats often consumed in excessive amount are associated with the development of lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, heart diseases, obesity.^[31,32] It is recommended to adopt a healthy eating pattern, which includes nutrient rich diet in appropriate portion sizes to maintain health.
- Engaging in regular exercise or any physical activity can support various health goals, such as better heart and lung health, improved blood sugar control, reduced insulin resistance, optimizing lipid levels, lowering blood pressure, and long-term weight management.^[29]
- Adequate sleep is essential for maintaining optimal physical and psychosocial functions.^[21] It is recommended for adults to take 6 to 8 hours of sleep each night to improve the cognitive function and emotional stability by keeping the person fresh and active,^[32] eventually contributing to the prevention of lifestyle diseases.
- Maintaining regular bowel habits, and starting regular health checkups after the age of 45 to 50 years are essential for early detection and the prevention of lifestyle diseases.^[32]

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Unani system of medicine focuses on preventing lifestyle diseases by eliminating the root causes that lead to toxin buildup in the body. Unani medicine which emphasizes the prevention of disease through the proper regulation of Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya, that are the efficient causes responsible for the preservation of health and prevention of disease either directly or indirectly. Unani medicine emphasizes maintaining a balanced mizaj to prevent the accumulation of toxins and the development of disease. By adhering to the guidelines related to the Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya such as moderation in diet, regular physical activity, adequate sleep, smoking cessation, and stress management, can effectively prevent the lifestyle diseases. The physician should also recommend a suitable regimen according to the individual's requirement such as, avoiding heavy, spicy foods, and avoiding water intake soon after meals. Maintaining a proper balance in Asbabe Sitta Zarooriya can significantly reduce the risk of developing many lifestyle diseases which are a major cause of death in our community.

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