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Concept of life style diseases and its prevention through Unani system of medicine- A review

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Abstract

Lifestyle diseases are defined as diseases accompanying with and often caused by the way in which people live their life. Lifestyle diseases are commonly produced by unhealthy eating, lack of physical activity alcohol and smoking, which lead to heart disease, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancer. Since diseases are not transmitted directly from one person to another, it is also called Non-Communicable Diseases. A unique philosophy of Unani system of medicine “prevention is better than cure. It is very vital to prevent the onset of disease Unani system stresses on the importance of prevention of diseases more than its treatment. There is a need to aware people about the role of Asbabe-Sitta-Zarooriah in maintenance of human health. The aim of this paper is to know about the concept and prevention of life style diseases through unani system of medicine.

Keywords: Life Style Diseases, Obesity, Prevention, Asbabe Sitta Zarroriyah, Health

Introduction

Lifestyle diseases are ailments that are primarily based on the day to day habits of society. In our daily life style people distract from the physical activity and move towards a sedentary life style and it can cause a number of health issues that can lead to non-communicable diseases that cause life-threatening consequences. Non communicable diseases kill around 40 million people each year that is around 70% of all deaths globally [1]. According to WHO lifestyle diseases are those which can't be passed from one person to another persons. These diseases have a slow progression and are of long duration. There are mainly four types of noncommunicable diseases, these are as follows:

- Cardio vascular diseases (like heart attack and stroke),
- Cancer.
- Long-lasting respiratory diseases.
- Diabetes [2].

Lifestyle diseases are predominant in the middle and old age peoples who had prolonged exposure to unhealthy life style like use of tobacco, consumption of alcohol, fast food and unhealthy diet, insufficient physical activity. A fit life-style leads to physical, mental, social and spiritual health. Healthy lifestyle includes controlled bad habits, healthy diet, absence or minimum presence of alcohol and tobacco consumptions and regular physical activity [3].

In Unani System of Medicine, *Hippocrates* can be seen as the father of *lifestyle* medicines. As he had advised measures for the prevention of life-style diseases and modification of life-style habits through diet and exercise, in his famous treatises [4]. In Unani system of medicine *lifestyle diseases* are considered to be result of improper management of Asbab-e- Sitta Zarooriyah (the six governing factors) over a prolonged period of time. If any imbalance occurs between these factors than toxins get accumulated inside the body at the humoral level, resulting in illnesses. It further leads to the functional imbalances and thereafter weakening digestive, urinary, circulatory functions of body. The comprehensive approach of Unani system of medicine is to cover the two main pillars of *lifestyle diseases* namely prevention and treatment by avoiding the accumulation of such toxins inside the body humours abnormally [5, 6].

Concept of Life Style Diseases in Unani System of Medicine

In unani system of medicine, lifestyle diseases are considered as a result of improper

management of the *Asbabe sitta zarooriyah* over a lengthy period of time^[7]. In Unani Tibb, mizaj (temperament) is an important theory which indicates the properties of an Unsur (atom), a molecule, a cell, a tissue, and an organ of an individual as whole. Mizaj of a person signifies its bodily constitution and tendencies. The inequity in Mizaj leads human body to various illnesses by creating a biotic inequity within body. *Asbab-e-sitta zarooriyah* are responsible for balancing the mizaj^[8].

Concept of Mizaj (Temperament) and Akhlat (Humour)

When Mizaj and Akhlat are altered it is considered as the most predominant factor for disease causation. According to Ibn-e-Abbas-Majoosi, humours in its well-adjusted proportion both in quantity and quality leads to fit bodily condition. Whereas, a disproportionate and irregular distribution of humours may lead to certain diseased form. This symmetry of humours is mainly controlled by the innate power of body called tabiyat, but the state of humour in the body may also be altered by any derangement in the external factors (for instance diet, environmental factors) which ultimately affects the temperamental composition of the body and becoming a cause of *life-style disease* as well^[9].

Ibn-e-Rushd laid emphasis that change in air quality, excessive fatigue, psychological factors such as anger and anxiety may also be a reason of altered temperament. Sedentary lifestyle and lacking in physical activity may also result in the temperamental change, diverting the body more toward coldness and moistness, this may become the main risk factor for developing obesity and narrowing in the vessels, further giving rise to conditions like coronary artery diseases, stroke etc.^[10, 11].

Mizaj also is an indicator for identifying the risk factors related with lifestyle diseases. A research study at the University of the Western Cape in 2006 shows that of 453 patients enrolled in the study 86% patients with hypertension had a dominant or sub-dominant sanguinous temperament. Similarly another study on 372 patients of phlegm-related bronchial asthma, 84% patients had a dominant or sub-dominant phlegmatic temperament. It shows that mizaj is also an important indicator for identifying the risk factor, because one's risk factors got identified. It will become easy to intervene necessary lifestyle changes mainly in diet and exercises^[12].

Asbab-e-sitta zarooriyah

Asbab is defined as a precise factor which either maintains the state of the body or changes it from health to illness or from illness to health. Unani system of medicine believed upon the homeostasis of the body that depends on equilibrium of the four humours and disturbance in six essential factors that will become a cause of the illness. The basis of preventive medicine in unani system is based upon *Asbab-e-Sitta-Zarooriah*. These factors are as below:

- Hawa-e-Muheet (atmospheric air)
- Makool wa Mashroob (food and drinks)
- Harkat wa Sukoon-e Badni (physical movement and rest)
- Harkat wa Sukoon-e Nafsani (mental movements and rest)
- Naum wa Yaqza (sleep and wake fullness)
- Ehtibas wa Istifragh (retention of essential and excretion of wastes)^[11, 13].

1. Hawa-e-Muheet (atmospheric air)

All forms of life depend on atmospheric air. For our existence human beings need a continuous supply of air because air is a vital rukn of ruh and bodies^[14]. It constantly grasps to ruh and become a basis of its optimisation and significances in *tadil-e-ruh*. Ruh possess quwa. Quwa and afaal are complementary to each other^[15]. Therefore, *mutadil ruh* leads the normal functioning of quwa and afaal. The two main functions of air are:

- Tarveh is for restraint of hot temperament of ruh. This modification is attained by means of inspiration through the lungs.
- Tanqiya is for expulsion of waste product of ruh. This purification is attained by means of expiration through lungs.

Both of these functions occur when the air is in pure form. When it is contaminated it leads to the sue mizaj of ruh. Therefore, the quality of breathing air is supposed to directly influence the mizaj (temperament) of ruh^[15] and thus either health is maintained or lost. There are certain types of variations that occur in atmospheric air, occasionally these changes are normal (e.g. seasonal) and occasionally are abnormal. The seasonal deviations in the air favour the *tabiyat-e-insaniyah* and become advantageous to health. But when these changes are inconsistent to *tabiyat-e-insaniyah* consequences in sue mizaj of ruh.^[16] Such types of contradictory changes in the air cannot serve the purpose of maintaining healthy life.

2. Makool-wa-Mashroob (Foods and Drinks)

The term makool means foods and mashroob means drinks^[16]. In healthy state diet is taken for the maintenance of health and for aid of *tabiyat* but the goal is different in abnormal conditions^[17]. The foods and drinks act upon the body in three ways:

- By mean of kaifiyat.
- By mean of madda (matter).
- By mean of surat-e-naueya (morph)^[16].

Therefore, foods and drinks with the help of their kaifiyat, madda and surat-e-nauyia are believed to be ensure healthy state. The importance of food can also be provoked by "Gruner" the commentator of *Al-Qanoon-Fit-Tib* who had stated that "the stomach is the house of diseases and the diet is the head of healing" unani scholar recommended specific diet in specific diseases^[18, 19].

Foods are categories mainly into three categories such as

- Ghiza-e-latif (light foods) produces thin blood.
- Ghiza-e-kaseef (heavy foods) produces thick blood and
- Ghiza-e-mutadil (moderate foods)^[16].

When the individual is taking a balance diet their health is maintained otherwise, they may suffer from malnourished or other types of abnormalities. In relation to food intake Galen says that food intake should be in accordance with the digestive ability of the stomach and taken in a limit so that stomach can execute its function easily. Water drinking immediately following meal, should be avoided because it hinders with digestive process. Water must be taken after descending of foods from upper digestive tracts or on severe thirst. This may show beneficial to digestive process. The water intake with foods either in little or in more quantity is a very common among the people due to lack of knowledge. By making those aware about its effects on digestive

process one can minimise the terrible outcome. The individual must follow their own menu and shifting from one menu to another one is not allowed abruptly because tabiyat is not habituated to digest^[17]. Therefore, any consumption of food against the individual routine may become injurious, unless their tabiyat become familiar to digest. In metropolitan city, too much attention is being paid by people to eating 'correct food'^[20] and they take the help of nutritionist. But this facility is not available everywhere especially in rural areas. Therefore, due to lack of dietetic knowledge the people of the community sometime suffer from various diseases such as underweight, obesity etc.^[20].

3. Harkat-wa-Sakoon-e-Badni (Rest and Physical activity)

Whenever the body of an individual does harkat (i.e. mild, moderate, and severe) the body extricates hararat which stimulate the hararat-e-ghareeziyah and melt the waste product generated in the body^[21].

According to the Unani Tibb, hararat is the implement of all quwa especially quwa tabaiyah. These quwa, process the food, metabolise and oust the waste materials out of the body. When the waste materials get accumulated in the body and it is not expelled out it ceases the hararat-e-ghareeziyah^[22]. Sakoon after harkat is critical for health preservation. Continuous harkat without sakoon result in dissolution of ratubat which further distresses the hararat-e-ghareeziyah^[21]. Once the hararat-e-ghareeziyah becomes subnormal, the normal metabolic process cannot occur. Sakoon supports digestion process which results in formation of good quality of humour and health depends on humoral balance. Excess of either harkat or sakoon or both produces baroodat (cold) which affects the action of faculties and eventually the function of the body becomes abnormal. Therefore, the balanced harkat and sakoon are important for good health^[21].

4. Harkat wa Sukoon-e-Nafsani (Mental Activity and Repose)

Nafsiyati awamil (psychological factors) are dependent on dominant khilt and mizaj of the person so it leaves an impact on his Body and mind. Nafsiyati awamil like happiness, sorrow, fear, anger have a significant effect on the health of a person and as excess of anger and joy may lead to dilatation of cutaneous blood vessels causing redness of the skin and it also increases the heart rate which is a cause for various CVS disorders. Unani physician also have an opinion that certain diseases and mental disorders may occur due to the emotional strain and mal-adjustment. Ibn-e-Sina was the first to provide the relationship between psychology and medicine^[23, 24] In recent times occurrence of stress and depression have been arise worldwide leading many other health problems with a shorter life span of individual. so, it may also conclude that safeguarding of mental health can be done by adequate stimulation and proper relaxation of the body^[25].

5. Naum-wa-Yaqzah (Sleep and Wakefulness)

Sleep and wakefulness are an indispensable factor of life. Sleep is equivalent to rest and wakefulness to movement. The normal physical and psychosocial functions depend on adequate sleep^[26]. A well-known Unani scholar Zakariya Razi explains that eight hours of sleep is very essential for health. He also says that siesta reinforces the vital faculty,

pneuma and promotes digestion by recalling hararat-e-ghareeziyah^[21]. Sleep also work as a great renovator of lost substances during day time^[16]. Therefore, proper sleep prepares the individual for next day routine by energy conservation. Excessive siesta causes tediousness of the psychic faculties, cold diseases and heaviness of head. On the other hand, excessive wakefulness produces dryness, impairs digestion etc^[23]. Now days, the life becomes so busy that the person does not have time to sleep adequately. This imbalance affects the health and may become a major cause for health worsening.

6. Istifragh-wa-Ihtibas (Elimination and Retention)

Unani scholars alleged that balanced between istifragh and ihtibas of substance is very important for maintenance of health. The term istifragh means elimination of unnecessary materials out of the body and retention of the substances which must be eliminated causes certain diseases^[27]. In the same way, elimination of the substances which must be retained causes the abnormal condition^[23] Elimination is carried through normal channels such as passage of urine, stools, sweat, menstrual blood etc. but excess excretion results in abnormal condition^[28]. The excess loss of fluid, salts, and nutrients in the stools, causes abnormalities. The excessive elimination of any matter always causes the coldness and dryness of temperament^[23]. Therefore, if elimination and retention are balanced and it take place at the time when they are needed, they are beneficial and maintain health.

Prevention of life style diseases-unani approach

Supervisory the risk factors related with a disease is an important way of controlling non-communicable diseases. According to Unani system of Medicine, diseases is prevented with the help of various aspect not only by single entity^[29]. Unani Tibb emphasizes at limiting the accumulation of toxins by appropriate adjustment of the person's *asbab-e-sitta zarooriyah* for preventing the onset of lifestyle diseases.

Preventing / delaying the onset of lifestyle diseases: The notion of mizaj is a useful indicator for recognizing the risk factors associated with individuals, as it designates the predisposition that the individual has to chronic disorders which are invariably the consequence of poor lifestyle management^[30, 31]. After recognizing a person's risk factors, appropriate lifestyle changes especially diet and exercise can be made. Changing the *asbab-e-sitta zarooriyah* in a way that it minimises the accumulation of toxins, especially when they arise from a poor, inadequate diet of an individual can delay the onset of the disorder.

Ghiza (Diet): Ghiza is one of the greatest factors in *lifestyle* and has direct kin with health. To improve overall health, specifically to attain individualized glycaemic, blood pressure, and lipid goals of an individual, healthy eating patterns consisting variety of nutrient dense foods in appropriate quantity is recommended.

Riyazat (Exercise): Qillate harkat-e-badani and unhealthy diet accelerated ageing, diseases of the body and brain and an overall decline in the quality of life. On the contrary, proper exercise and healthy diet recover sehat. According to Majusi, exercise fortifies the organs and upsurges the

power. Exercise increases sweat through which Fuzlat-e-Badan gets excreted. Accretion of Fuzlat is injurious for nervous system. Therefore, neglecting the exercise may be a risk factor for nervous system disorders. Exercise boosts Hararat-e Gharizia, which is responsible for better digestion and for general well-being^[32].

Conclusion

It can be concluded that *Asbab-e-sitta zarooriyah* are the efficient causes which are either directly or indirectly responsible for the preservation or transition of existing health. Lifestyle recommendations within the health plan targets physical activity, smoking cessation, dietary habits, stress management and alcohol intake also prevent lifestyle disorder *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah* can have a pivotal role in preventing various non-communicable diseases which has become threat to our life. They physician should also advice the appropriate regimen, as per requirement of body e.g. avoid heavy spicy food; avoid water drinking during meal or just after meal. If a balance in *Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriyah* will be maintained, many lifestyle diseases could be prevented to a large extent.

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