

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF UNANI AND INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE



E-ISSN: 2616-4558
P-ISSN: 2616-454X
www.unanijournal.com
IJUIM 2025; 9(2): 145-147
Impact Factor (RJIF): 6.59
Peer Reviewed Journal
Received: 09-07-2025
Accepted: 20-07-2025

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Six essential causes of health in Unani medicine (Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriya) and their parallels in lifestyle-based disease prevention

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/2616454X.2025.v9.i2b.353>

Abstract

Unani medicine describes six essential causes of health—Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriya—which provide a comprehensive framework for maintaining physical and mental well-being. These six causes—air, food and drink, movement and rest, psychic influences, sleep and wakefulness, and retention and elimination—have close parallels in Lifestyle Medicine, a modern evidence-based approach that emphasizes diet, exercise, stress management, and sleep for preventing chronic diseases. This paper explores the historical context and scientific relevance of these causes, comparing them with lifestyle-based interventions. The convergence of ancient Unani principles with contemporary health promotion strategies affirms the need for integrative healthcare models.

Keywords: Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriya, Unani Medicine, Lifestyle Medicine, Preventive Health, Temperament, Sleep, Diet, Exercise, Mental Health.

1. Introduction

The Unani system, rooted in Hippocratic and Islamic medical traditions, proposes six fundamental determinants of health known as Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriya (Six Essential Causes) [1, 2]. These form a holistic understanding of human well-being based on environmental, behavioral, emotional, and physiological dimensions. Modern Lifestyle Medicine also advocates similar pillars for preventing and reversing non-communicable diseases, particularly through behavioral modification [3-5].

2. Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriya and Modern Lifestyle Medicine

2.1 Hawa-e-Mufradah (Air)

In Unani medicine, air is considered vital for respiration, temperament regulation, and vitality [6]. Polluted or stagnant air is a cause of deranged Mizaj (temperament) [7]. Modern medicine affirms the harmful effects of air pollution on cardiovascular, respiratory, and neurocognitive health [8-10].

2.2 Makool-o-Mashroob (Food and Drink)

A balanced diet tailored to an individual's Mizaj is central to Unani therapy [11, 12]. Overeating or poor combinations disturb humoral balance. Lifestyle Medicine promotes nutrient-dense diets like plant-based regimens to reduce obesity, diabetes, and cancer risks [13-15].

2.3 Harkat-o-Sukoon-e-Badani (Physical Activity and Rest)

Unani scholars emphasize individualized movement suited to the person's temperament, age, and climate [16]. Inactivity results in humoral imbalance and accumulation of waste [17]. Modern guidelines recommend 150-300 minutes of moderate physical activity weekly for health maintenance [18-20].

2.4 Harkat-o-Sukoon-e-Nafsani (Mental and Emotional Status)

Emotions such as grief, anger, fear, and joy affect physical health, causing derangements in Mizaj and organ function [21]. Lifestyle interventions like mindfulness, cognitive behavioral therapy, and social connection are evidence-based stress modulators [22-23].

2.5 Naum-o-Yaqzah (Sleep and Wakefulness)

Unani physicians insisted on natural, rhythmic sleep at night to maintain temperament and rejuvenate vital organs ^[24]. Modern studies link circadian disruption and sleep deprivation to chronic inflammation, insulin resistance, and cognitive decline ^[25-27].

2.6 Ihtibas-o-Istifragh (Retention and Evacuation)

Proper excretion of waste (urine, stool, sweat) is necessary to prevent disease. Both constipation and excessive evacuation disturb health ^[28]. Contemporary medicine focuses on bowel regulation, hydration, liver and kidney function for toxin elimination ^[29-30].

3. Comparative Chart

Unani Concept	Lifestyle Medicine Equivalent	Primary Focus
Hawa-e-Mufradah	Clean air, pollution control	Environmental exposure
Makool-o-Mashroob	Nutritional medicine, hydration	Balanced diet and digestion
Harkat-o-Sukoon-e-Badani	Physical activity, exercise therapy	Personalized movement prescription
Harkat-o-Sukoon-e-Nafsani	Mental health, emotional regulation	Psychological stress management
Naum-o-Yaqzah	Sleep hygiene, circadian rhythm	Rest and recovery
Ihtibas-o-Istifragh	Detox, gut health, fluid-electrolyte balance	Elimination of waste and homeostasis

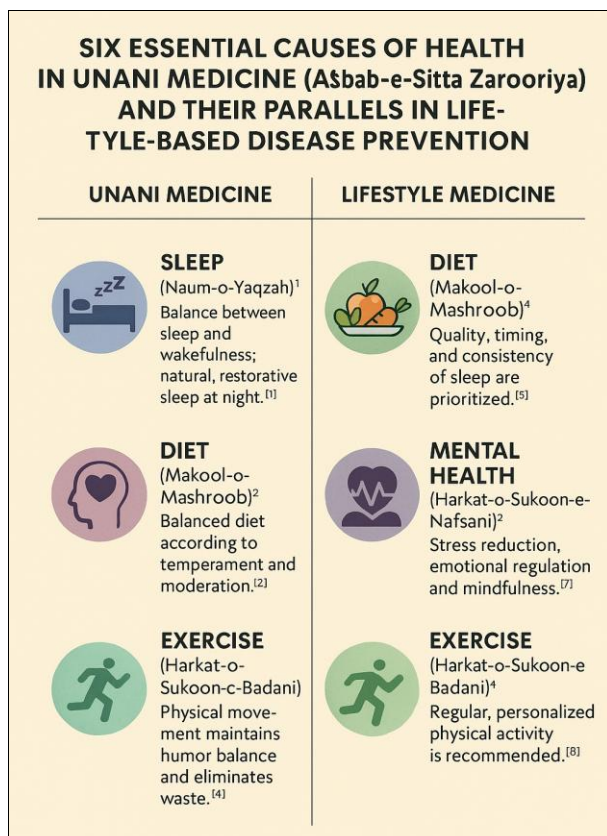


Fig 1: Comparative Infographic of Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriya and Lifestyle Medicine

5. Conclusion

There is remarkable harmony between Unani medicine's six essential causes of health and the pillars of lifestyle medicine. These overlapping paradigms support the revival

of traditional health frameworks with scientific backing to form integrative, preventive, and personalized healthcare systems.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

Financial Support

Not available

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How to Cite This Article

Kumar R, Ul Haq E. Six essential causes of health in Unani medicine (Asbab-e-Sitta Zarooriya) and their parallels in lifestyle-based disease prevention. International Journal of Unani and Integrative Medicine. 2025;9(2):145-147.

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