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Adopting a new normal: Enhancing healthy living through the Unani medical system

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), has evolved into a global crisis impacting not only public health but also social and economic systems. In response to the pandemic, adapting to a 'New Normal' lifestyle has been proposed as a key strategy to mitigate its effects. While classical Unani medicine does not specifically mention the coronavirus, its clinical features closely resemble those of *Amraz e Waba* (epidemic diseases), a term used to describe various types of contagious illnesses. According to the Unani system, the root cause of such diseases is a disturbance in one or more of the *Asbab Sittah Zarooriyah* (Six Essential Factors), which include: Hawa-e-Muheet (atmospheric air), Makool wa Mashroob (foods and drinks), Harakat wa Sukoon al-Badaniyah (physical movement and rest), Harakat wa Sukoon al-Nafsanayah (mental and emotional balance), Nawm wa Yaqzah (sleep and wakefulness), and Istifragh wa Ihtibas (evacuation and retention). Any imbalance in these factors weakens the body's *Tabi'at* (nature) and disrupts the *Mizaj* (temperament), making the body more susceptible to microbial infections. The Unani approach emphasizes holistic health preservation, focusing on prevention and immunity enhancement. This review explores how integrating the *Asbab Sittah Zarooriyah* concept can support lifestyle modifications, improve immunity, and promote a transition to a healthier, more resilient 'New Normal' post-pandemic.

Keywords: Six essential factors, *Asbab Sittah Zarooriyah*, *Amraz e Waba*, pandemic, new normal, unani medicine, immunity enhancement, lifestyle modification

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), is an ongoing global crisis, impacting not only public health but also socio-economic structures worldwide. Adapting to the 'New Normal' concept has emerged as a crucial strategy to mitigate the long-term consequences of the pandemic.

The Unani system of medicine, also known as Greco-Arabic medicine, is an ancient holistic system that originated in Greece around 5000 years ago. It is based on the teachings of Greek physician Hippocrates, Roman physician Galen, and prominent Arab physicians such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Al-Razi (Rhazes), Al-Zahrawi (Abulcasis), and Ibn Nafis ^[1].

In Unani medicine, the human body is understood through the framework of seven natural principles or components, known as *al-umur-al-tabai'yah* (principles of human physiology). Derived from the concept of *tabi'at* (nature), which is seen as the supreme planner of the body, these principles are fundamental to health and disease management. The seven principles include: Arkan (Elements), Mizaj (Temperament), Akhlat (Humours), A'za' (Organs), Arwah (Vital Spirit), Quwa (Faculties), and Af'al (Functions) ^[2]. These components work together to maintain the balance and health of the human body.

Additionally, the Unani system identifies six *Asbab Zaruriyah* (essential factors) that influence health and disease: Hawa-al-Muheet (Atmospheric Air), Makool-wa-Mashroob (Foods and Drinks), Harakat-wa-Sukoon-al-Badaniya (Physical Movement and Rest), Harakat-wa-Sukoon-al-Nafsanayah (Psychic Movement and Rest), Nawm-wa-Yaqzah (Sleep and Wakefulness), and Istifragh-wa-Ihtibas (Evacuation and Retention). A disturbance in any of these factors weakens the body's *Tabi'at*, leading to an imbalance in the *Mizaj* (temperament) and *Akhlat* (humours), which can create a favorable environment for microorganisms to attack the body.

While classical Unani texts do not mention the coronavirus specifically, the clinical features of COVID-19 resemble those of *Amraz e Waba* (epidemic diseases), a term used in Unani

medicine for all types of infectious diseases. The Unani system emphasizes a holistic approach to health preservation, focusing on the prevention and treatment of diseases rather than merely addressing symptoms.

In the Unani framework, the body's defense system, known as *Tabi'at Mudabbir lil Badhan*, plays a crucial role in maintaining immunity. This innate power defends the body against harmful microorganisms. When the body becomes infected, *Tabi'at* activates various defense mechanisms, mobilizing the biological system to fight and eliminate the disease.

This review aims to explore the preventive aspects of *Amraz e Waba* (epidemic diseases), focusing on immunity enhancement through the application of the *Asbab Sittah Zarooriyah* (six essential factors). These factors can serve as a guide for lifestyle modifications, promoting the transition to a 'New Normal' healthy lifestyle.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this review are to:

1. Provide an overview of the concept of *Amraz e Waba* (epidemic diseases) within the Unani system of medicine.
2. Examine the application of the *Asbab Sittah Zarooriyah* (six essential factors) in preventing pandemic diseases.
3. Explore the correlation between the *Asbab Sittah Zarooriyah* and internationally accepted modern guidelines for pandemic prevention.

Methodology

A systematic review was conducted to explore the concept of *Amraz e Waba* (epidemic diseases) in Unani medicine and the application of *Asbab e Sittah Zarooriyah* (six essential factors) for preventing pandemic diseases.

Eligibility Criteria

Studies were eligible for inclusion if they provided a description of the Unani system's understanding of *Amraz e Waba* and *Asbab e Sittah Zarooriyah*, specifically in relation to disease prevention and health promotion. We included original research articles, reviews, and case studies from reputable Unani textbooks and peer-reviewed journals. Additionally, studies that discussed internationally accepted modern guidelines for pandemic prevention were also considered for comparison and correlation.

Data were collected from a comprehensive search of electronic databases, including PubMed, Scopus, and Google Scholar, as well as authentic Unani medicine textbooks and journals. Furthermore, official websites of global health organizations, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), were searched for relevant guidelines on pandemic prevention.

A systematic search was conducted using key terms such as "Amraz e Waba," "Asbab e Sittah Zarooriyah," "Unani medicine," "epidemic diseases," "pandemic prevention," and related synonyms in both English and Arabic. The search was limited to articles published in the last two decades to ensure the inclusion of contemporary perspectives on the subject.

Data Extraction

Data were independently extracted by two researchers to minimize bias. Extracted data included information on the conceptual framework of *Amraz e Waba* and the *Asbab e*

Sittah Zarooriyah as discussed in Unani texts, as well as the preventive strategies outlined in modern pandemic prevention guidelines. Any discrepancies in data extraction were resolved through discussion.

Amraz e Waba (Epidemic Diseases)

In Unani medicine, the term *Amraz-e-Waba* is used to describe all kinds of epidemic diseases^[3]. Although ancient Unani texts do not mention microorganisms by specific names, early Unani scholars clearly understood the ideas of infection and contagion. Ibn Sina (Avicenna), in his famous book *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*, referred to harmful disease-causing agents as "khabisah." He also described changes in the quality of air during epidemics as "taghayyur jauhari." According to him, *Amraz-e-Wabae* (epidemic diseases) spread quickly from one person to another and could move from one city to another, similar to the way a message travels. This shows that Unani scholars were aware of how diseases can spread^[2]. It was believed that epidemic diseases spread through contagion or through ajsām-e-khabisah (harmful particles) present in air or water^[4].

In *Kitab al-Mansoori*, Zakariya Razi (Rhazes) explained that most epidemic diseases occur in the autumn season, especially when the previous summer was humid and the wind remained calm. He stated that the direction of the wind plays an important role in the spread of epidemics. Razi also noted that people who get affected by epidemics often share similar factors—such as living in the same place, eating similar food, drinking the same water, or having similar travel histories. Importantly, he also discussed the spread of epidemic diseases through fomites, meaning contaminated objects. This shows a very early understanding of indirect transmission of diseases.

The preventive methods suggested by Razi are very similar to modern public health measures. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social distancing and quarantine were widely used to stop the spread of infection. These methods closely match the measures recommended by Razi for controlling the spread of *Amraz-e-Wabae* many centuries ago^[4].

Preventive aspects of Unani medical system

1. Hawa-e-Muheet (Atmospheric air)

In Unani medicine, air holds the highest priority among the six essential factors because life cannot exist without it^[5]. Hippocrates, often regarded as the father of epidemiology, was the first to highlight the significance of air, its quality and characteristics, in determining health, disease patterns, and the occurrence of endemic and epidemic disorders caused by air pollution^[6]. Galen further proposed that pollutants responsible for certain diseases are carried by winds, allowing them to spread rapidly, primarily entering the human body through the respiratory tract^[7].

Air (*Hawa*) is considered both an Arkan (element) of the human body and an important medium supporting Arwah (vital spirit). It performs two essential functions: Ta'deel-e-Ruh (regulation of the vital spirit) during inhalation and Tanqiya-e-Ruh (purification of the vital spirit) during exhalation. Because of these vital roles, the availability of clean, fresh air is fundamental not only for maintaining health but also for the treatment of disease^[8]. Rhazes emphasized this by stating, "Even if your treatment is accurate, it becomes useless if the surrounding air is unsuitable^[7]."

In Unani thought, *Waba* (epidemic) arises due to changes in the essence (*jauhar*) of air, which leads to air impurity. This impure air disturbs the temperament (*mizaj*) of the vital spirit, ultimately contributing to widespread morbidity and mortality.

Unani scholars consistently advocated the importance of fresh and clean air for good health and linked many diseases to the deterioration of air quality. They recommended living in open, well-ventilated spaces with proper air circulation.

Modern public health guidelines echo these ancient principles. The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the role of adequate ventilation in preventing the indoor spread of COVID-19. The guidelines recommend maximizing natural ventilation, such as by opening windows whenever it is safe and feasible, to reduce airborne transmission^[9].

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

Under normal conditions, food is consumed to maintain health and support *Tabi'at* (the natural healing force). However, during illness or abnormal states, the purpose of diet changes. Since every individual differs in temperament, age, physical condition, dietary habits, and living environment, food must be selected according to personal needs^[10].

In Unani medicine, foods and drinks influence the human body in three ways:

1. By their *kaifiyat* (quality)—whether they produce heat, cold, dryness, or moisture in the body;
2. By their *madda* (substance or matter);
3. By their *surat-e-naueia* (form or structure).

These characteristics determine how food alters the state of the body. The quality and quantity of food play a major role in balancing or disturbing the body's internal condition.

Modern health guidelines reflect similar ideas. According to the WHO's "COVID-19: Food Safety and Nutrition" recommendations, a healthy diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables is essential. While no food or supplement can prevent or cure COVID-19, good nutrition supports a strong immune system and improves the body's ability to prevent, combat, and recover from infections.

In healthy condition food is taken for the preservation of health and for aid of *tabiyat* but the aim is different in abnormal circumstances^[10].

Every individual differs in bodily conditions, temperament, age, dietary patterns and habitat etc. so there is a need to choose different food according to their requirements. Foods and drinks act upon the human body in three ways: by their quality alone, or simply by their element, or by their substance as a whole. Foods change the state of the body their quality (quality of becoming hot or cold when it enters human body) and quantity^[8]. The foods and drinks act upon the body in three ways: by their *kaifiyat* (quality), by their *madda* (matter) and by their *surat-e-naueia* (morph) or vice versa^[11]. According to Hippocrates, one should remember three things as dietary habits; Food should not be taken until there is a need, Overeating is harmful to health, Rest is necessary after taking the food. *Jalinoos* (Galen) suggested that four conditions should be kept in mind while making eating or drinking habits: Time of the food, Type of the food, Quantity of the food, Temperament of the food^[8]. 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 Ibn Sina described this in his famous treatise '*Al qanoon fit tib'*'- Dietetics and Nutrition is one of the important medical subjects^[12]. Therefore, the physicians recommended the dietary regimen in healthy or in disease state which are favourable for *tabi'at*. According to Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Food safety and nutrition guidelines of WHO, Fresh fruits and vegetables are part of a healthy diet, and their consumption should be encouraged^[13]. Eating a healthy diet is very important during the COVID-19 pandemic. What we eat and drink can affect our body's ability to prevent, fight and recover from infections. While no foods or dietary supplements can prevent or cure COVID-19 infection, healthy diets are important for supporting immune systems.

3. Harakat-wa-Sukoon-e-badaniya (physical or bodily movement and repose).

Physical activity and rest are both necessary for optimal health and well-being while excess of both is injurious to health. So, it can be said that to sustain health, regular exercise as well as proper rest is needed. The effect of *Harkat* (Movement) results in liberation of *Hararat* (Heat), that is the basic tool of all *Quwā* (faculties) especially, *Quwā tabaiyah* (vegetative faculties). Vegetative faculties perform digestion, metabolism and finally, expel the waste materials out of the body. If these waste materials are getting accumulated and not expelled out of the body regularly, it leads to increase in *Rutubat-e-Ghariba*, decrease in *Hararat-e-Ghariziyah* (Innate Heat)^[6]. Avicenna said; "By proper exercise at suitable time; one can uphold health and harmony of the body". He also said, "Exercise is the cause of good health if done in moderate quantity at right time"^[6]. To maintain perfect health and to prevent many diseases that come from sedentary lifestyle, the body requires physical activity as well as rest. According to WHO's Be Active campaign, it's very important for people of all ages and abilities to be as active as possible^[15].

4. Harakat-wa-Sukoon-e-nafsaniya (Mental or psychic movement and repose).

Avicenna was the first physician who developed the relation between psychology and medicine. *Ruh* (Pneuma) is a vehicle for mental faculties (*Quwā-e-Nafsaniyah*) by which powers of the body permeated in each organ. *Nafis* correlated *Harkat-e-Nafsaniyah* (Psychic Movements) and *Ruh* (Pneuma) and says that "in case of psychic functions, *Ruh* (Pneuma) will always mobilize, because in faculties of the body, each movement is impossible without mobilization of *Ruh* (Pneuma). Same is as in case of repose. Psychic movement and rest or the emotional state of a person influences the health by different ways e.g. the negative emotions make a person physically sick and positive emotions boost the immune system. World Health Organization states that, as the coronavirus pandemic rapidly sweeps across the world. In public mental health terms, the main psychological impact to date is elevated rates of stress or anxiety. But as new measures and impacts are introduced, especially quarantine and its effects on many people's usual activities, routines or livelihoods such as levels of loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, and self-harm or suicidal behavior are also expected to rise^[16]. In any epidemic, it is common for individuals to

feel stressed and worried. According to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) which addresses set of guidelines for the public for dealing with stress during the COVID-19 outbreak [17].

5. Naum-wa-Yaqzah (sleep and wakefulness)

Proper sleep and wakefulness are necessary for health because it is main source to maintain the digestion and activeness of the body. *Majusi* said that *Tabi'at* (physis) is benefited in two ways by sleep. One is mental and physical rest and second is the digestion and concoction of *akhlaat* (humours) which prevents innate heat in the body. *Rhaze's* stated with reference to *Galen* that, Normal sleep produces good quality of humors and strengthens the vital faculty, *Ruh* (Pneuma) and promotes digestion by retaining *Hararat-e-Ghariziyah*, but excess sleep leads to increase in morbid humors. The lack of sleep disturbs food metabolism leading to dissipation of energy, mental weakness and indigestion. Normal wakefulness improves the innate energy, sensory and motor functions. *Ibn Nafis* gives the importance of wakefulness and stated that all the voluntary functions and movements of the body occur in wakeful condition, but excess awakening produces dissolution of *Ruh* (Pneuma) leads to dryness and weakness of brain and indigestion. The pandemic has led to disruptions to our daily living as well as our sleep [6]. At the molecular level, studies show that poor sleep disrupts the immune system by interfering with disease-fighting factors, including certain proteins called cytokines. That means that if you are sleep deficient, you may have more trouble coping with the lifestyles imposed by the pandemic and fighting infections. Getting good quality sleep at right time of day improves energy levels, emotional wellness and mental health, and builds stronger immune system [18].

6. Istifragh-wa-Ihtibas (Evacuation and retention).

Ihtebas means retention of necessary nutrients, minerals, water and electrolytes in the body, while *Istifragh* means evacuation of morbid materials to clean the body. There are two types of *Ihtebas-wa-Istifragh*: *Tabayee Ihtibas* (Normal Retention) which retains certain end products after digestion and metabolism and *Ghair Tabayee Ihtibas* (Abnormal Retention) which retains *Fuzlat* (morbid materials). Also, *Tabi'at* gets rid of waste product by the natural means such as passage of urine, stools, sweat, menstrual blood, semen and mucus secretions etc. through proper channels, known as *Istifragh Tabayee* (Normal evacuation). According to Unani concept retention and deposition of *Fuzalat* (Morbid materials) increase in *Rutubat-e-Ghariba*, which decreases *Hararat-e-Ghariziya* (innate heat) and weakens *Tabi'at*. Therefore, if retention and evacuation are balanced and take place at proper time through proper channels regularly, they are beneficial in maintaining health and well-being; otherwise, both are harmful [6].

Conclusion

This review highlights that many diseases, including epidemic illnesses, arise due to disturbances in the *Asbab Sitta Zarooriya* (six essential factors) and the *Tabi'at* (the body's natural healing power or *Medicatrix Naturae*). The World Health Organization defines health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. Accordingly, strengthening immunity through the proper regulation and modification of the six essential factors plays

a vital role in maintaining health and preventing disease. Furthermore, adopting a "new normal" healthy lifestyle guided by the principles of the six essential factors can significantly enhance public health resilience and aid in combating the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

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Not available

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