



# Importance of Ilaj bil Ghiza (Dieto-therapy) in Unani System of Medicine

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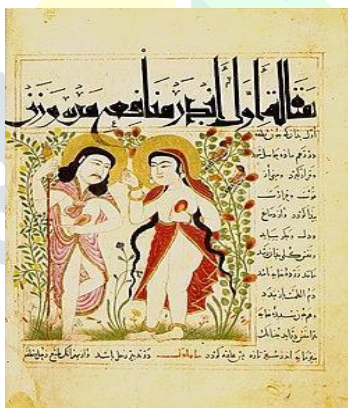
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## Abstract

Unani Medicine is a holistic approach to healthcare that originated in ancient civilization of Mesopotamia and was further developed in the Greece, Egypt and Islamic world, emphasizing the balance of bodily humors (blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile) for overall well-being.

In the Unani System of Medicine four types of measures are employed for therapeutic purposes, which include Ilaj bil-Tadbér (Regimen therapy), (Dietotherapy) Ilaj bil-Ghiza, (Pharmacotherapy) Ilaj bil-Dawa and Ilaj bil-Yad (surgical intervention). Besides, Ilaj Nafsani (Psychiatric treatment) and Ilaj Rūhani (spiritual treatment) are also used. ILAJ BIL GHIZA (Dieto-therapy) is an important subject not only for the present world but also in terms of Unani medicine.

Keywords: Ilaj bil Ghiza, Diето-therapy, Unani medicine



## Introduction:

Dietotherapy, or "Ilaj Bil Ghiza" in the Unani system of medicine, plays a crucial role in maintaining health and treating various diseases. Many of us may not realize how much importance Unani physicians have given to nutrition and how they have worked on it in various capacities. The Unani Medical system has a vast reservoir of literature on food and nutrition written by various authors, and these require a large book because of the glorious and distinguished works. This topic is also essential because in the beginning, just as the human being felt hunger, thirst, and need for air, he also used plants in the case of illness. Minerals he could not eat and animals were beyond his reach as he had to get them by hunting, so the simplest and easiest way for him was to use plants to meet his nutritional needs. In the beginning, all parts of plants, such as root, stem, branch, leaf, flower, fruit, etc were used by human beings. It suggests that the substances used medicinally were the plants he had learned to eat as food.

Here are some key points highlighting the importance of dieto-therapy in Unani medicine:

**Balancing Humors:** Unani medicine believes that an imbalance in the four humors leads to disease. Diet is considered one of the main factors influencing the balance or imbalance of these humors. Therefore, dietary choices are carefully prescribed to restore equilibrium. **Prevention and Maintenance of Health:** Dietotherapy is not only

used to treat diseases but also as a preventive measure. Following a balanced diet helps in maintaining good health and preventing the onset of various disorders. Individualized Approach: Unani medicine recognizes the uniqueness of each individual, taking into consideration factors like temperament (Mizaj), age, gender, and the prevailing seasons. This personalized approach ensures that the diet prescribed is tailored to the specific needs of the person. Natural and Whole Foods: Unani dieto-therapy emphasizes the use of natural, whole foods that are in their most original form. This means avoiding processed, refined, and chemically altered foods. Therapeutic Properties of Foods: Foods are categorized based on their therapeutic properties. For

### **Unani Medicine**

The link of Unani System of Medicine goes to the oldest medical civilization Mesopotamia and the oldest Egyptian medicine, some 5000 years ago. Mesopotamia is the land "between the rivers" in modern-day Iraq, home to the ancient Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. The Egyptian civilization is also considered one of the most influential civilizations that generally advanced its medical sciences. Regarding the foods, whether it is Mesopotamia or the oldest Egyptian medicine, the man saw the abundance of plants around him and started tasting and eating them. As a result, many medications came to the knowledge of man. Concerning plants, these substances that man started eating as the food came in the beginning, and these plants became the source of his medicine. The next important thing is that certain fragrances were used to perform religious rituals before the Gods, such as Frankincense, Sandalwood, Oud, etc. Apart from the fragrances, they also offered substances like alcohol, fruits, grains, and fruits. For example, the names of roses, wheat, grapes, and rice are mentioned in the books. Later these things came to be used in medicine, and their medical benefits came before man.

In Mesopotamia, foods used as medication from plant sources were saffron, figs, grapes, pomegranates, apples, garlic, onions, buckwheat, cucumber seeds, wheat, millet, rye, cumin, and olives. In contrast, animal sources include bones, blood, eggs, honey, liver, fats, and milk. The organs of animals like sheep, goats, geese, deer, pigeons, and chickens, were used medicinally. Ancient Egyptian medicine, which directly influenced Greek medicine, also emphasized the importance of food for hygiene and healing. From a hygienic point of view, pork is prohibited in authentic diets, and the drinking of boiled water has been instructed. Ebers Papyrus, an Egyptian compilation of medical texts dated about 1550 BC, is one of the oldest known medical works. In this book foods include celery, garlic, mint, cumin, fennel, honey, vinegar, figs, papaya flesh, and other nutrients.

### **Discussion:**

Unani medicine benefited from ancient medication. The foods were used both as provisions and as medicine, which the Greeks derived from the oldest medical civilizations, Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. In Greek times, Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle mentioned the medical benefits of food.

Hippocrates: He has written the book of *Ikhtilaf al-Azminah wa Islah al-Aghziyah* on the difference between Seasons and the correction of Foods.

*Islah al-Aghziyah* (Correction of the foods): From the title, it is evident that the disadvantages of food also came to his knowledge, so he decided to work on its reform. Therefore, since the time of Hippocrates, books on dietary reform have started. Work had begun on food involving medical practice throughout the Greek period. The services of Unani scholars are the most in this regard. After the Greeks, with the onset of the Roman period, animals started to be used as medicine, and man began to use animals more than plant foods. So a recipe that is found in Roman books is mentioned here. This recipe includes camel's brain, rennet of sea calf, crocodile secretions, rabbit's heart, sea turtle's blood, and wild boar's testicles. This entire recipe contained animal ingredients. So it is clear that apart from fulfilling the nutritional requirements, animal components started to be used as medicine and vegetable components.

Galen (129-216 AD) has written a significant book on the properties of Foods. It was translated into Arabic by Hunayn bin Ishaq (809-873) with the title of *Kitāb Quwa al-Aghzia*. It contains three chapters, listing all nourishing foods and beverages. This book was also translated into Latin. This book is the most important book that reveals medical information about ancient foods. Its manuscripts are available in different libraries around the world. It describes the energy of the foods and their effects. Hundreds of foods were added to medicines by the Greeks, giving them knowledge in the name of food science.

Valuable books on the subject of food are the remembrance of Greeks. However, most of those books were lost, but a good amount has reached us and is preserved in libraries.

Ibn Waḥshiya (d. 930) was the first Arab physician to focus on the welfare and cultivation of the plant. Ibn Waḥshiya was an agriculturalist, toxicologist, and alchemist. He was born in Qussīn, near Kufa in Iraq. He authored the book *Kitāb al-Filāḥa al-Nabaṭiyya* (the Nabataean Agriculture), an influential Arabic work on agriculture, astrology, and magic.

After that, Abu Zakariya Ibn al-Awwam (1101-1200) took it forward. He was a Muslim Arab agriculturist who flourished at Seville (modern-day southern Spain) in the later 12th century. He derived his knowledge of medicinal foods from the practical farming experiences of Spanish peasants. He wrote a lengthy handbook on agriculture entitled *Kitāb al-Filāḥa* (Book on Agriculture), the most comprehensive book on the subject in the medieval Arabic period and one of the most important medieval works in any language. It was translated into Spanish and French and published in the 19th century. It contains 35 chapters describing agronomy, cattle and poultry raising, and beekeeping.

This book mentions 585 plants, explaining the cultivation of more than 50 fruit trees. Many valuable observations on soils, manures, plant grafting, and plant diseases are included.

Ibn Wafid (1008-1074): The most renowned name in Unani medicine in nutrition is Ibn Wafid, an Andalusian Arab physician known in Latin as Abenguefith. Ibn Wafid was convinced by his knowledge of food that the treatment should be done through food as far as possible.

He planted a botanical garden at the request of the king, Al-Ma'mūn, in the king's orchard, which extended between the Galiana and Tajo palaces in front of the bridge of Alcántara. Ibn Wafid worked on the *Kitāb al-Adwiya al-Mufrada* (Book of the Simple Medicines) for twenty years, a synthesis with some new data of Dioscorides and Galen. Ibn Wafid did not like to prescribe compound medicines but simple ones, and, if possible, he abstained from prescribing the latter and tried to cure his patients by following a dietary regimen. In the case of simple drugs, he preferred those that were mild and of level one or two, and if he used compound drugs in case of necessity, he used those compounds that contained the least amount of ingredients.

#### **Ilm al-Tanjeem (Astronomy):**

For the first time in history, the Babylonians took help from astronomy. They studied the configuration of stars and the birth of celestial bodies, physical functions, disease and treatment, medicine, and nutrition. Apart from diseases and cures, they also recognized stars' importance in diet and abstinence. They have explained the specific effects of stars on medicines and food during different positions of the planet, sun, and moon and their relationship. They described the impact of the planets and the planetary objects on the human body and nature, the guidelines of the diet, and abstinence according to the day and date.

Greek physicians agreed with astronomers that the moon's distance from the sun and other stars affected climate, disease, medicine, and diet. Apart from tracing the changes of the seasons through the stars and studying their effects on food and medicine, Arab physicians were also skilled in identifying the winds prevailing in different seasons. According to them, there were twelve types of winds: south, north, east, west etc. The properties of these winds, and their knowledge about various types, are found in multiple places in medical books. They especially included Foods in its scope. They have also written many books on the subject with expertise in the science of spirits and winds. In this regard, the book of *Kitab Al-Anwa* by the famous pharmacist and nutritionist Al-Dailami explains the effects of different winds on food.

Ibn Zahr Latin: Avenzoar (1094–1162): Ibn Zahr is another important name in this regard. He was an Arab physician, surgeon, and poet. He was born at Seville in medieval Andalusia (present-day Spain). He prescribed *Huqna Ghizai* (Nutritional enema) in case of being unable to eat due to pain. See, this is a big deal because, in that era, they felt that many foods could not be consumed by mouth. Hence, physicians prescribed a nutritional enema that delivered food and essential nutrients to the stomach through the enema.

Ibn Zuhr has written an influential book of *Kitab al-Aghziya* on foods. As its name indicates, it is a manual on foods and regimens. It contains guidelines for a healthy life. Classification of foods like bread, meat, beverages, fruits, and sweets are described. The meat of different kinds of animals, even unusual ones like gazelles, lions, and snakes, based on their taste, usefulness, and digestibility are mentioned. He also recommended specific foods for each season of the year, such as during winter, digestion goes faster, so the amount of food consumed should be increased. Moreover, the food should also be warmer and drier, as temperatures are lower and humidity is higher.

Abu Ya'qub Ishaq ibn Suleiman al-Isra'ili (832-932): He is also known as Isaac Israeli the Elder and Isaac Judaeus, who was one of the foremost physicians and philosophers living in the Arab world. He has written a remarkable book on Single Medicines and Foods titled *Kitab al-Adwiyah al-Mufradah wal-Aghziyah*. It is a book on remedies and ailments in four sections. The first section was translated into Latin and Hebrew, consisting of twenty chapters. Al-Isra'ili was proud of this book. He had no children, so he used to say that my name would live on in the world because of this book. Besides this, Musa bin Maimon (1138–1204) provided much information about food in the book of *Risalah Afzaliya*, which he wrote for Malik al-Afzal.

It is imperative to note that Greek physicians have not only emphasized the benefits of foods and their uses as medicines but also prescribed foods for patients and written books on these subjects. Similarly, they have also

written books and recommended diets for healthy people. What kind of food should a person take in a state of health, and what kind of food should be consumed in the case of various diseases? In Tibb Unani, balanced diets for healthy individuals are discussed, and different foods and their effects on disease are described. So in Unani Medicine, as you know, there is not only a discussion on the functions and properties of medicine and their uses, but it includes a description of foods in every significant Unani medical book. Therefore the physicians did not limit themselves to that but wrote separate books for healthy and sick people. They have written treatises and books separately about the harms of foods and the damages they have seen. It was a big deal. No other traditional medicine in the world has literature on food in such a wide variety and in so many different dimensions than that is provided in Unani Medicine. This process was carried forward by the Arabs in their time much further than the Greeks.

Qusta ibn Luqa (820–912) (Costa ben Luca, Constabulus): He was a Syrian physician, philosopher, astronomer, mathematician, and translator. He has written a book about the laws of food with the title of Qawanin al-Aghziya. It is among the books found in the Unani treasure on nutrition. It is about when food should be consumed for different diseases and various health conditions.

Kitab fi al-Ghiza wal-Dawa: This book was written by Yaqub ibn Ishaq al-Şabbāh al-Kindī (801–873 AD) on drugs and diets.

Fi Quwa al-Aghziya: This book was written by Thabit ibn Qurra (826-901 AD) on the powers of foods and their effects.

Another eminent physician Muhammad ibn Zakariyā al-Razi (865-925 AD) has written many books on foods, and some of them are mentioned here:

Book of Kafiyat al-Ightiza: It is an inclusive tract on the quality of food

Manāfi al-Aghziyah wa-Dafa Mazarrihā (The benefits of food and the removal of its harms): Arabic text was published in 1888 from al-Maṭba‘ah al-Khayriyah, Egypt, and again in 1993 from Dār al-Ihyā al-'Ulūm, Beirut. In this book, he has expressed his views on the harms and disadvantages of foods. After that, he tried to correct the harm and remove the damage found in foods.

Fi At'ima al-Maraza: This book is about foods for sick people. On this important topic, many books were written by other physicians besides Razi.

The book of Fi al-Aghziyah wa al-Adawiyah written by Ali ibn Rizwan (988–1061 AD), is a vital link in this series. He wrote another book called Ashriba wa Aghziyah Lil-Asihha. It means that the foods and drinks that can be delicious for health have been collected permanently.

In the same way, Philagrius, the Greek physician, also wrote a book on delicious and nutritious foods, which was translated as Al-Ashribah al-Nafiya al-Lazizah.

Unani physicians also had written books on the principles of eating and drinking. The name of a physician's book is Usul Makul wa Mashrub. This book was written in 1331.

It describes the properties of plants that nourish the body and are used as food. Most of these plants were grown in Arab and Central Asian countries. Apart from the medical benefits of plant foods, vegetables, and salads, Unani physicians have also written books on the nutritional benefits of animals.

Book of Taba'iyeh al-Haiwan wa Khawassihā wa Manfi Aazayihā (The nature of the animal, its properties and the benefits of its organs) was written in Arabic by Abu Sa'id Ubaidullah ibn Bakhtyashu (940–1058 AD). It was translated into Persian as Manfi al-Haiwan by Abdul Hadi ibn Muḥammad Maraghi in the 13th century. This book is about animals and the medicinal properties of their body parts. Out of 585 drugs mentioned in the Book of Manfi al-Haiwan, 44 drugs are related to animals, and it highlights the nutritional benefits of animals.

Kitab al-Aghziya Lil-Marza was written by Najibuddin Samarqandi (d. 1222 AD) on the food for sick people. The Unani scholars have not only worked on plant foods for medicine but have also written many valuable articles and books on animal foods. A significant name in this regard is Sikandar al-Mulk, his tenth treatise on Khawass al-Haiwan, considered his most important work.

### **Organo-Therapy**

It is worthy to note that the Arab physicians coined the theory of organo-therapy that organs where the disease occurs should be treated with the same animal organ. The weakness of specific organs is corrected by administering the same organ of an animal by way of food; for instance, disorders and weakness of liver are treated by including the goat liver in the patient's diet. Likewise, the heart, kidney, and brain of the animal are recommended in the respective organ's treatment. In the case of bone weakness, they treated it with bone marrow. In case of lung weakness, they used animal lungs, especially calcined lungs. Many Indian physicians also had a routine for giving calcined lungs of animals for tuberculosis. Hence, they not only presented the concept of organ therapy but also

used animal organs in case of organ failure, and they wrote many books on it. Before the Arabs, the Greeks did not have the concept of organ therapy. It is one of the inventions of the Arabs. Many libraries have such books in their collections.

### **Conclusion:**

Dietotherapy aims at preventing and treating certain ailments by administration of specific diets or by regulating the quantity and quality of food. Unani Medicine lays tremendous stress on treating certain disorders by administration of specific diets. In addition to nutritional properties, various foods have pharmacological actions too. For example, many foods are laxatives, diuretics and diaphoretics. The unique thing is that plants are the most important among the three sources of drugs, where minerals and animals also exist. The amount of work devoted to food and nutrition in Unani medicine is unmatched by any other traditional medicine. They have described the functions and properties from different dimensions and positions and also focused on the benefits and harms of foods and treatment by foods. Along with plant foods, animal foods have also been used. In terms of nutrition, Unani medicine has contributed significantly to the effects of foods and the properties of animals. It will be an excellent asset for Unani Medicine if some kind of research work is carried out on the food and nutrition in Unani Medicine. For instance, some foods are considered hot, cold, moistening, or drying in nature. These properties are taken into account when designing a diet plan to counteract imbalances.

**Supporting Digestive Health:** Unani medicine places a strong emphasis on the health of the digestive system. The type and combination of foods prescribed are chosen to support optimal digestion and assimilation of nutrients.

**Incorporating Herbs and Spices:** Many herbs and spices are considered integral parts of the Unani diet. They are often used not only for flavor but also for their medicinal properties, contributing to the overall therapeutic effect of the diet.

**Management of Chronic Diseases:** Diet plays a significant role in managing chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and gastrointestinal disorders in the Unani system. A carefully tailored diet can complement other treatments and improve the patient's condition.

**Minimizing Harmful Effects:** Dietotherapy aims to minimize the intake of foods and substances that are considered harmful or detrimental to health, thereby reducing the risk of developing diseases.

**Promoting Holistic Well-being:** Unani medicine views health as a state of balance between the body, mind, and spirit. Dietotherapy is one of the pillars, along with other therapies, in achieving this holistic well-being.

In summary, dieto-therapy in the Unani system of medicine is an integral part of the holistic approach to healthcare. It is based on the principle of balancing bodily humors and tailoring dietary recommendations to the individual's specific needs. By incorporating natural, whole foods with therapeutic properties, Unani diet-otherapy aims to prevent, manage, and treat various health conditions, ultimately promoting overall well-being.

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