



# Unani-The Science of Holistic Healing

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## Abstract

Unani medicine is a conventional medical system practised in South Asia. Hippocrates and Galen, two ancient Greek physicians, are credited with developing the principles of unani medicine. According to unani medicine, six physical or external elements known as *asbab-e-sittah-zarooriah* are crucial for developing a synchronised biological rhythm and, consequently, leading a healthy life. *Al-umoor al-tabiyah*, the seven fundamental physiological principles of Unani philosophy, are said to be harmoniously arranged and are thought to promote human health. *Arkan*, or elements, *Mizaj*, or temperament, *akhlata*, or body humours, *Aaza*, or organs and systems, *Arwah*, or vital spirit, *Quwa*, or abilities or powers, and *Afaal*, or functions are some of these principles. These seven organic elements interact with one another to keep the human body's basic constitution in balance. This paper discusses the important principles and holistic nature of Unani medicine.

**Keywords:** Unani medicine, holistic, asbab-e-sitta zaruriyah

## Introduction

Unani medicine, also known as Unani tibt, Arabian medicine, or Islamic medicine, is a conventional medical system practised in South Asia [1]. Hippocrates and Galen, two ancient Greek physicians, are credited with developing the principles of unani medicine [2]. It was later developed and improved as a field by the Arabs through methodical experimentation, most notably by Muslim scholar-physician Avicenna. The majority of Greek knowledge was translated into Arabic under the Caliphate (the political-religious Muslim empire that started in 632 AD) [3], and among that information were the fundamentals of medicine. Unani medicine also became known as Arabian or Islamic medicine as a result of additional contributions of medical knowledge from various regions of the Middle East and South Asia [4].

## Basic Principles of Unani Medicine

*Al-umoor al-tabiyah*, the seven fundamental physiological principles of Unani philosophy, are said to be harmoniously arranged and are thought to promote human health [5]. *Arkan*, or elements, *Mizaj*, or temperament, *akhlata*, or body humours, *Aaza*, or organs and systems, *Arwah*, or vital

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spirit, *Quwa*, or abilities or powers, and *Afaal*, or functions are some of these principles. These seven organic elements interact with one another to keep the human body's basic constitution in balance [6]. The *tabiyat* (or *mudabbira-e-badan*; vis *medicatrix naturae* in Latin) or ability of each person's constitution to self-regulate or maintain the seven constituents in equilibrium [7]. An individual's internal strength or capacity to tolerate or combat disease and to carry out typical physiological activities is known as *tabiyat* in the Unani medicine. Unani hakims maintain that they just provide assistance from "outside" by providing therapeutic relief since they believe that only *tabiyat* is genuinely involved in actually healing a condition. If not adversely impacted, *tabiyat* can treat most infections without using what is essentially the body's and mind's built-in immune system [8].

According to unani medicine, six physical or external elements known as *asbab-e-sittah-zarooriah* are crucial for developing a synchronised biological rhythm and, consequently, leading a healthy life. The six *asbab-e-sittah-zarooriah* are:

1. *Hawa* (Air): We believe that the quality of the air you breathe is directly related to your temperament and thus your health.
2. *Makul wa Mashrub* (food and drink): The nutritional value, quality and quantity of food and drink are believed to strengthen the *tabiyat* and ensure physical strength.
3. *Harkat-wo-sakoon-e-jismani* (Physical Exercise and Rest) emphasizes the beneficial effects of balanced physical exercise on a person's internal resistance and *tabiyat* [9].
4. *Harkat-o-sakoon nafsaniah* (Mental Work and Rest) emphasizes that the human mind is simultaneously involved in numerous emotional and intellectual activities. Just as the body needs systematic and planned exercise and rest, Unani Medicine believes that the human mind and brain also need proper stimulation and proper relaxation.
5. *Naum-o-yaqzah* (Sleep and Wake) understands that an individual's health and wakefulness depend on a certain amount of healthy sleep during a 24-hour (circadian) cycle.
6. *Ihtebas and Istifragh* (retention and removal), food and liquid metabolism are considered affected and regulated by *Tabiyat*. According to Unani Medicine, the assimilation of food and liquids facilitates the elimination of excess and harmful substances from the body. Therefore, in order to maintain a harmonious and attuned *tabiyat*, the specific beneficial end-products (development and dissolution) of *Kauno Fasad* (genesis and lysis) are retained in the body, while the harmful ones are expelled [10].

Unani practitioners believe that these six elements directly affect the harmony of the human mind and body. Socio-economic, geographical, and environmental factors are considered secondary factors (*asbab-e-ghair-zarooriah*) in the Unani system and thus indirectly affect the *tabiyat*. However, both primary and secondary factors must be carefully considered in the Unani treatment process [11,12].

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## Modes of Treatment

The first approach to treatment in the Unani system involves establishing regimens to normalize and balance the external factors (air, water, food, etc.) involved in illness and disease [13]. The unani treatment prescribed by Hakim acts as an external factor that strengthens the patient's *tabiyat*, restoring health and well-being.

*Ilaj-bi-ghiza* or diet includes specific dietary recommendations, the simplest and most natural remedy by Hakim [14]. For fever, for example, Unani medicine emphasizes a diet rich in nutrients and low in fiber, including dahlia (porridge) and keel (milk soup). Both quantity and quality of food are considered. *Ilaj-bi-dawa* or drug therapy is the use of medicine by his Unani Hakims [15]. Hakims believes this method of treatment is natural, environmentally friendly, less intrusive, and more effective than many others. The Unani system's pharmacopoeia is extensive and enriched with over 2,000 medicinal products derived from a variety of botanical, mineral, and animal sources [16].

Unani medicines are often processed according to classical methods of preparation originally described in Greek-Arabic medicine [17]. Unani medicines are used alone or in combination with other substances to achieve synergistic, antagonistic, or detoxifying effects or simply as a basis for effective uptake and assimilation [18].

In the 1930s, Indian physician Ajmal Khan revolutionized Unani medicine by advocating conducting research on various natural products that ancient physicians claimed to provide miraculous healing [19]. Indian-born scientist Salimuzzaman Siddiqui, who specialized in (plant chemistry), isolated a powerful compound from a plant known in India as Chhota Chand (*Rauwolfia serpentina*). Subsequent pharmacological studies revealed that plants were the source of a bioactive compound called reserpine. Reserpine was used in Western medicine as a sedative and antihypertensive (lowering abnormally high blood pressure). These uses supported some of the medical uses described by Hakims. Siddiqui named a derivative drug containing ajmaline and ajmalysen in honor of Khan's pioneering research efforts [20].

Unani system was recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1976, it became internationally accepted as a system of traditional medicine. In India, several institutions are working on his Unani education and research. For example, the Central Unani Medical Research Council (CCRUM) promotes translation of classical heritage, organization of clinical trials, improved drug standardization, and research into toxicological and phyto-pharmacological properties [21].

Classical Unani medicine recommended an established "regimenal" therapies (*Tadabir*) for the treatment of various chronic and acute diseases [22]. These therapies include *dalak* (massage), *hammam* (bath and sauna), *riyazat* (exercise), *fasad* (venesection), and *hijamat* (cupping, the process of drawing blood to the surface of the body) [23–27]. The essential function of all these treatments is to rid the body of impure blood and impurities [28].

The various modes of treatment in Unani Medicine are:

- a. The regimental therapy, also known as "*Ilaj Bil Tadbeer*," consists of various procedures such as venesection (*Fasd*), cupping (*Hijamah*), diaphoresis (*Ta'reeq*), diuresis (*Idraar*), Turkish bath (*Hammam*), massage (*Dalak*), cauterization (*Kai*), purgation (*Ishaal*), emesis (*Qai*), exercise (*Riyaazat*) [29,30].
- b. The Diet-o-therapy (*Ilaj Bil Ghiza*) treatment aims to treat specific illnesses by prescribing particular diets or by controlling the quantity and quality of food [31,32].
- c. Pharmacotherapy (*Ilaj Bil Dawa*) focuses on using medicines that are derived from naturally occurring substances, primarily herbs, although some medicines are also made from minerals and animals [33].
- d. Additionally, the Surgery (*Ilaj Bil Yad/ Jarahat*) has been utilized in this system for a long time. In fact, the early practitioners of Unani medicine were innovators in this area and had created their own tools and methods. Only minor surgery is currently being done [34].

### Concept of Disease Prevention in Unani medicine

Prevention is preferable to cure. The Unani medical system has a distinctive philosophy known as "*Parhez ya Ehtiyaat Ilaaj se behtar hai*". Preventing disease from starting is essential because it can save your life [35]. The Unani system places more emphasis on disease prevention than on disease treatment. It is one of the earliest medical systems, and the fact that it has persisted throughout time in various civilizations is proof enough of the soundness of its tenets [36,37].

The main benefits of unani medicine include its comprehensive methodology and temperament-based diagnosis and treatment of illnesses. In addition, the Unani system is based on the concepts of the *Asbab-e- Sittah Zarooriyah*, which are fundamental for tenacity and the maintenance of health [38].

*Taqwiyat-e-A'za* (toning up the body organs) and *Qoowat-e-Mudabbera-e-Badan* (improving the immune system) are two distinctive Unani System of Medicine philosophies that are well-known for their positive outcomes. These philosophies have proven to be extremely helpful in enhancing the quality of life for those who are suffering from chronic and some other intractable diseases [39,40].

The impact of environmental factors and ecological conditions on people's health has long been acknowledged by unani medicine [41]. Unani Medicine places a strong emphasis on disease prevention and the enhancement of current health through the six essential factors (*Asbab-e-Sittah Zarooriyah*) of life [42]. This is in addition to treating disease conditions. It has a theory about the six necessary conditions for disease prevention and emphasizes the importance of maintaining a proper ecological balance as well as keeping the air, water, and food free from all pathogens and pollution [43].

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## Some important drugs in Unani System of Medicine

**Amla (*Phyllanthus emblica* Linn.):** *Phyllanthus emblica* Linn., sometimes known as Indian gooseberry or amla, and belonging to the Euphorbiaceae family, is a significant herbal remedy utilised in both the Unani (Graceo - Arab) and Ayurveda systems of medicine [44]. The herb is used to restore lost strength and vitality as well as a medicinal. Due to its great nutritional value, *Phyllanthus emblica* represents significant dietary supply of vitamin C, amino acids, and minerals. In addition, the plant includes tannins, curcuminoids, phyllembelic acid, phyllembelin, rutin, and emblicol. The fruit, which has been used in Ayurveda as a strong rasayana and in traditional medicine to treat diarrhoea, jaundice, and inflammation, is the most commonly utilised portion of the plant for medicinal purposes [45].

**Neem (*Azadirachta indica*):** Due to its numerous medicinal properties, *Azadirachta indica*, more commonly known as neem, has gained worldwide prominence in recent years. Neem has become a cynosure of modern medicine thanks to its extensive use in Ayurveda, Unani, and homoeopathic medicine. A wide variety of diverse chemical and structurally complex biologically active compounds are produced by neem. The various components of neem have yielded more than 140 compounds. In the past, the leaves, flowers, seeds, fruits, roots, and bark of the neem tree have all been used to treat fever, inflammation, infections, skin conditions, and dental problems. Immunomodulatory, anti-inflammatory, antihyperglycemic, antiulcer, antimalarial, antifungal, antibacterial, antiviral, antioxidant, antimutagenic, and anticarcinogenic properties have been demonstrated for the neem leaf and its constituents [46].

**Honey:** One of the most well-known functional foods, or *ghidha-i-dawai*, is honey, also known as *asl* (Arabic). Honey is a typically amber-coloured viscous liquid with a wonderful taste. Different types of honey have been found to contain numerous significant bioactive constituents, such as phenolics, proteins, vitamins, carbohydrates, organic acids, etc., that have significant biological effects, such as antimicrobial, wound-healing, immunomodulatory, anti-toxin, antioxidant, and many others. Honey has the capacity to treat a wide range of lifestyle disorders, lessen the negative impacts of toxins and medications, and also offer wholesome nutrition [47].

**Behidana (*Cydonia oblonga*):** *Behidana* is popular for its medicinal, nutritional, and ornamental uses. Its fruit is used in food industry. Quince seeds contain sterols, triterpenes, and tannins as active phytochemicals that account for its anti-diarrheal activity. Seeds of the plant are traditionally utilized for the treatment of diarrhea, cough, dysentery, sore throat, constipation, and bronchitis [48,49].

**Izkhar (*Cymbopogon martini* (Roxb.) Wats.):** Izkhar is a species of grass in the genus *Cymbopogon*. It is native to India and Indo-China and is also widely cultivated in various places for its aromatic oil. In Unani medicine, it is prescribed in the treatment of liver disorders [50].

**Filfil siyah (*Piper nigrum*):** *Piper nigrum* (black pepper) is a flowering plant of the Piperaceae family. It is grown as a fruit, dried and used as a spice and seasoning. It grows in southern India

and other tropical regions. Dried chili peppers have been used extensively for their spicy properties as well as in traditional medicine. Black pepper (*Piper nigrum* L.) contains the bioactive phytochemical piperine, which has antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimutagenic, antitumor, antiapoptotic, antigenotoxic, Anti-arthritis, anti-fungal, anti-depressant, anti-HVB (hepatitis B) and gastroprotective activity. Piperine also improves the bioavailability of phytochemicals (such as curcumin) and pharmaceuticals. Piperine inhibits free radicals and reactive oxygen species and lipid peroxidation due to its flavonoid and phenolic components [51,52].

### Challenges and strength areas

Although the Unani system is a complete treatment system like any other medical system, it has drawbacks in terms of use and effectiveness [53]. The vast materia medica, from plants and animals to mineral sources, as described in the ancient Unani textbooks, is sometimes so vague that modern pharmacological evaluations (basic In addition, the use of gems and minerals [54], which are the main ingredients of many polypharmaceuticals (multi-component pharmaceuticals), in Unani drugs is costly. These items are also often unavailable, hampering effective treatment [55].

### Competing Interests

None.

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