

Nutriments and Its Recommendation for a Healthy Life in Unani System of Medicine: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Background and Objectives: Unani system of medicine is very rich in terms of its content especially those related to *ghidhā'* (nutriment) and its recommendation. *ghidhā'* is the entity that gets transformed by the body and becomes the part of organ. In other words, it provides replenishment to the body hence, sustains life. Unani physicians like Jalinus, Abu Sahl Masihi, Zakaria Razi, Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd etc. were of the view that health can also be maintained by consuming nutriment in a proper manner.

Methodology: Relevant literary material is collected from classical books of Unani system of medicine. Present work is an attempt to analyze and systematize collected relevant literary information regarding nutriment and its recommendation.

Interpretation and conclusion: According to Unani system of medicine, there are a variety of eatables available of which some have medicinal properties too that are consumed. These nutriments differ from each other in producing humours of different variety in respect of quality and quantity. Physicians recommended that quantity and quality of nutriment, timings of nutriment intake, number and sequence of meals etc. should be considered while eating to lead a healthy life.

Key words: Nutriment, Drug, Poison, *Ghidhā'*, *Dawa*

INTRODUCTION

Everyone knows that nothing is important in life than a good health. No one can be happy and enjoy life without a good health. There are various factors which play important role in maintaining health. One of them is *ghidhā'* (nutriment), which not only provides replenishment to the continuous dissolution occurring in the body as a normal process but also maintains health when consumed as recommended.

There are variety of entities available when impinge on the body, act in different ways to be called as *ghidhā'*

(nutriment), *dawā'* (drugs) and *samm* (poison) etc. ^(1,2)

Fate of entities:

All the entities which impinge on the body are influenced by *ḥarārate ghariziyya* (innate heat) of the body then may have one of the three following fate:

- The entity is transformed by the body but does not transform it.
- The entity is transformed by the body and also transforms it.
- The entity is not transformed by the body but transform it.

On this basis, these substances are classified into nutriment, drug and poison etc.

(A) Those substances which are transformed by the body but do not produce any considerable change in the body are of two types:

(i) These entities become similar to the body, in other words become part of the organs known as *ghidhā' mutlaq* (absolute nutriment).

(ii) These entities do not become similar to that of the body known as *dawā' moatadil* (moderate drug).

(B) Those entities which when impinge on the body are transformed by the body and also bring about transformation in it are of two types:

(i) These entities bring about transformation in the body and themselves get transformed by the body until finally the body transform them to the point of becoming ineffective. These entities may either become similar to that of the body known as *ghidhā' dawā'i* (nutriment cum drug) or do not become similar to that of the body known as *dawā' mutlaq* (absolute drug).⁽¹⁻³⁾

(ii) These entities bring about transformation in the body and themselves get transformed by the body. These do not become ineffective instead transform the body up to the level that result in physical disturbances. These are known as *dawā' sammi* (poisonous drugs).

(C) Those entities which are not transformed by the body but transform it, are known as *samme mutlaq* (absolute poison). Like all other entities, poison also get influenced by innate heat when impinge on the body. But it does not get transform instead it brings about catastrophic changes in the body and results in death.^(1,2)

Nutriment when passes through gastric and hepatic digestion and get converted into humours then it is known as *ghidhā'-e-haqiqī* (real nutriment). This is because these are the humours which body utilises for replenishment.^(4,5) In general bread and meat etc. are called nutriment but these are potential nutrients as they are capable of converting into humours.⁽⁵⁾ Nutriment is

defined as an entity which after passing through the process of gastric and hepatic digestion converts into blood and then this blood is transported to various organs and becomes the part of organ in such a way that it maintains consistency as well as optimum temperament of organs.⁽³⁾

When nutriment enters the body, it passively submits itself to the *ṭabi'at* (nature) of the body hence *quwā ghadhiya* (nutritive faculty) digests the nutriment and derives the nutrition from it. On the other hand, *dawā'* when impinge on the body, it dominates over the *ṭabi'at* and *quwwat* of the body.⁽³⁾ Galen has written that the main difference between nutriment and drug is that latter masters the faculties (*quwā*) of the body whereas the former is mastered by them.⁽⁶⁾

There are three types of nutrients:^(1,3,4,5,7)

- I. *Ghidhā-e-Laṭīf* (light nutriment)
- II. *Ghidhā-e-Ghaleez / Kathīf* (heavy nutriment)
- III. *Ghidhā-e-Moatadil* (Moderate nutriment)

I. Ghidhā-e-Laṭīf:

These nutrients produce blood of thin consistency e.g. meat of partridge and chick, pumpkin etc.^(3,4) These types of nutrients provide less nutrition to the body even in large amount.⁽⁴⁾ Therefore, these are suitable for persons who do less strenuous work and also advised to those who are prone to develop calculi and vascular obstruction in their body.^(3,4)

II. Ghidhā-e-Ghaleez:

Those nutrients which are capable of producing viscous blood are known as *ghidhā' ghaleez*. e.g. *khushk* (dry) *sulb* (hard) *lazij* (viscous) nutrients like boiled egg, cheese, lentil and beans etc.⁽³⁾

These nutrients provide ample nourishment to the body even in lesser amount. Therefore, these are suitable for persons who do strenuous/heavy work and avoided in those who are prone to develop calculi and vascular obstruction in their body.^(3,4)

III. Ghidhā-e-Moatadil:

These type of nutrients neither increase

nor decrease the viscosity of blood rather maintain it e.g. meat of chicken and meat of yearling goat or sheep. ^(1,3,4)

(A) Depending on the type of blood produced after digestion and transformation of nutriment, it can be classified into following types:

1. *Jayyid al-kaymūs* (Good chyme forming)

2. *Radī al-kaymūs* (Bad chyme forming)

1. *Jayyid al-kaymūs* is that nutriment which produces normal blood in respect of its quality and quantity and has other humours in a proportion suitable for the body. ⁽⁷⁾ e.g. half boiled egg and fresh fish. ⁽³⁾

2. *Radī al-kaymūs* is that nutriment which produces blood not good in quality or quantity. ⁽⁷⁾ e.g. spleen of cattle, meat of camel/rabbit. ⁽⁵⁾

(B) Classification of nutriment according to their nutritional value:

The nutriment after being processed inside the body is converted into blood and is distributed to various organs. On the basis of amount of blood which is becoming part of organ. ⁽¹⁾ Nutriment is classified into following types:

1. *Kathīr-al-taghdhiya* (wholesome)

2. *Qalīl al-taghdhiya* (less nutritious)

1. *Kathīr al-taghdhiya*: The nutriment which has greater nutritional value known as *kathīr al-taghdhiya*. ^(3,4) The nutriment that produces least amount of wastes provides ample nourishment to the body. ⁽³⁾ Apart from that the body which has a capability of digesting *Ghaleez ghidhā'* can get adequately nourished by such nutriment. Easily digestible nutriments are *kathīr al-taghdhiya*. ^(3,4) The amount of nourishment depends on the quantity of that part of nutriment which is capable of converting into blood and *ghaleez ghidhā'* has more quantity of such part as compared to *laṭīf aghdhiya*. Therefore, all *ghaleez aghdhiya* and the *ghidhā'* which generate small amount of waste when get digested completely are considered as *kathīr-al-taghdhiya*. ^(3,5)

2. *Qalīl al-taghdhiya*: The *ghidhā'* which provides less nourishment to the body are called as *Qalīl al-taghdhiya*. It includes *laṭīf*

ghidha and *ghidha* that has either *rutūbat* or *yubūsat* in excess and also that *ghidhā'* which produces more waste. Abu Sahl Masihi is of view that nutriments of cold temperament should also consider *qalīl al-taghdhiya* because these nutriments oppose the action of innate heat which helps in their digestion. ⁽³⁻⁵⁾

(I) *Ghidhā laṭīf* can be classified as:

a) *Ghidhā laṭīf kathīr al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* eg. Meat soup, half boiled egg yolk.

b) *Ghidhā laṭīf kathīr al-Taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs*. e.g. Lungs

c) *Ghidhā laṭīf Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. Pomegranate, Apple

d) *Ghidhā laṭīf Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. Vegetables. ^(2,7,9)

(II) *Ghidhāe Ghaleez* can also be classified as:

a) *Ghidhāe Ghaleez kathīr al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. Boiled egg

b) *Ghidhāe Ghaleez kathīr al-taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. fresh meat

c) *Ghidhāe Ghaleez Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. cheese

d) *Ghidhāe Ghaleez Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. dry meat. ^(2,7,9)

(III) *Ghidhāe moatadil* can be classified as:

a) *Ghidhāe moatadil kathīr al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. meat of yearling sheep.

b) *Ghidhāe moatadil kathīr al-taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. meat of camel hump.

c) *Ghidhāe moatadil Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. turnip

d) *Ghidhāe moatadil Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. cauliflower. ^(2,7,9)

There is another classification of nutriment according to rate of digestion:

1. *Sarī-ul-Haḍm* (Easily digestible)

2. *Baṭī-ul-Haḍm* (Hardly digestible)

***Sarī-ul-Haḍm*:**

The nutriment on which the pace of action of *quwwat haḍima* (digestive faculty) is higher, will get digested (*haḍm*) at a faster rate and such nutriments are known as *sarī ul haḍm*. ⁽⁵⁾ like the nutriment which is soft, moist and have moderate temperament. ⁽³⁾ In fact hot and wet component of nutriment is

sarī ul haḍm because it does not offer any resistance to the action of digestive faculty. Actually nutriment of hot and wet temperament itself help in the action of digestive faculty. ⁽⁵⁾

Baḥī-ul-Haḍm:

The nutriment which are hard, dry and fatty in nature and also those which are very hot or very cold are digested very slowly and are considered *baḥī ul-haḍm*. ^(3,4)

Recommendations of Unani physicians regarding nutriment:

Unani physicians have recommended that *Kammiyat* (quantity), *Kaifiyat* (quality), *Auqaat* (timings) of nutriment intake number and sequence of meals etc. should be considered while eating to lead a healthy life.

(A)Quantity of nutriment: Quantity of nutriment should be normal. Neither it should be too much nor too less. Quantity of nutriment is considered to be normal when after having meal, there is NO:

- heaviness and discomfort in stomach,
- difficulty in breathing and
- difficulty in lying. ⁽⁷⁾

It is recommended that quantity of nutriment should be according to individual's need in respect of age, profession, habit and season etc. Also, strength of digestive faculty of stomach must be taken in consideration. That is the reason; quantity of nutriment varies from individual to individual. But in any case, overeating is not encouraged. ^(5,7,10)

(B)Quality of Nutriment: Quality of nutriment should be according to age and season etc. According to Unani physicians, consideration of quality of nutriment becomes more important at extremes of age as well as season. Physicians have recommended nutriment of cold temperament during summer and nutriment of hot temperament during winter. ^(7,10,11)

(C)Sequence of nutriment: To lead a healthy life sequence of nutriment should be considered when more than one type of nutriment has to be taken. There are different types of nutriment available. These

nutriment differ from each other in respect of process of digestion as well as gastric emptying time. Simultaneous intake of different types of nutriment in one meal should be avoided. If more than one type of nutriment has to be taken in one meal then sequence of eating must be considered. For example, if *sarī ul haḍm* (easily digestible) and *baḥī ul haḍm* (hardly digestible) nutriment have to be taken in one meal then *sarī ul haḍm* nutriment should be taken prior to *baḥī ul haḍm*. ⁽¹²⁾

(D) Timings of nutriment intake: It is advised that a person should eat only when feeling hungry. And also hunger must be true because eating on false hunger results in disease. ^(7,8,11)

Actually, consideration of duration between meals is important. Unani physicians have advised that meal should be taken only when the previous meal has been fully digested because eating while previous meal is still undigested, is very harmful. ^(7,10,12) It may lead to indigestion. State of previous meal that is taken (whether digested or not), can be understood by odour of the nutriment. If previous meal is digested then there is no odour of meal is present on belching. ⁽⁷⁾

There is no hard and fast rule regarding number of meals. It depends upon the habit of the person. Whatever a person's habit is, of taking one or several meals a day, as long as his eating habit does not alter his health, no change in eating habit is required. If any alteration in such habit is required then it must be gradual. Sudden alteration should be avoided. ^(11,12)

(E)Rest and Physical activity: After having meal, rest is recommended for better digestion as during rest innate heat moves towards the internal organs. It facilitates *quwwate hadhima* to work more efficiently. ^(7,12) Jalinus suggested to those who want to be healthy that they should abstain themselves from physical activity after taking meal. Instead, he advocated mild physical activity before meal. ⁽¹⁰⁾ Activities like *hammam* (bath), *riyazat* (exercise), *jima* (intercourse) and horse riding etc. must be

avoided after having meal as these activities may lead to indigestion. (7,9,10)

Hamam: It should be avoided after having meal as it may results in weight gain as well as obstruction in the vessels. (7,8,11)

Riyazat: It should also be avoided after eating. It causes early gastric emptying even before the digestive faculty completed its action over the nutriment. The best time for *riyazat* is when *ghidhā'* has digested. (10,11)

Jima: Immediately after eating intercourse is discouraged as it causes exertion resulting in inappropriate digestion as well as absorption of nutriment. (10)

CONCLUSION

Ghidhā' is the entity that gets transformed by the body and becomes the part of organ. In other words, it provides nourishment to the body. It plays a pivotal role not only in sustenance of life but also in maintenance of health when a certain set of rules are followed regarding quantity and quality of nutriment, timings of nutriment intake, number and sequence of meals etc. Everyone should follow physicians recommendation if wants to live a healthy life. Even certain disorders (especially life

style disorders) cannot only be avoided but managed by practicing these recommendations in day to day life.

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