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Integrated approaches to obesity management: Synergizing yoga practices and Unani therapeutics

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Abstract

Obesity, a pervasive global health challenge, necessitates multidimensional strategies for effective management. Conventional interventions often fall short in addressing the complex biopsychosocial aspects of this condition. This paper proposes an integrated approach combining Yoga practices and Unani therapeutics to holistically manage obesity. Yoga, with its evidence-backed benefits in reducing stress, enhancing metabolism, and promoting physical activity, aligns seamlessly with the Unani medicine system's focus on balancing humors (Akhlāt) and temperament (Mizaj). Unani conceptualizes obesity as *Saman-e-Mufrit*, resulting from an imbalance in phlegm (Balgham) and associated humoral disruptions. The integration of these paradigms leverages Yoga's stress-modulating and metabolic-enhancing effects with Unani's dietary guidelines, herbal remedies, and cupping therapy. This interdisciplinary approach addresses obesity's physical, psychological, and social dimensions, targeting root causes rather than symptoms. Evidence from clinical trials and historical practices underscores the complementary mechanisms of these systems, including hormonal regulation, inflammation reduction, and enhanced blood circulation. A proposed integrative model incorporates dietary modifications, physical activity, and therapeutic interventions from both traditions.

Keywords: Obesity, yoga, Unani medicine, *Saman-e-Mufrit*, integrative health, holistic management, humoral balance, complementary medicine

1. Introduction

Obesity is a multifaceted global health problem associated with significant morbidity and mortality ^[1]. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines obesity as a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or greater ^[1]. Over the past few decades, obesity prevalence has escalated globally, attributed to sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy dietary patterns, and genetic predisposition ^[2]. Obesity contributes to an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, diabetes mellitus, musculoskeletal disorders, and some cancers ^[3].

Conventional treatment approaches, including lifestyle modifications and pharmacotherapy, often fail to address the underlying psychosocial and cultural determinants of obesity. Integrative and holistic approaches, such as Yoga and Unani medicine, offer potential benefits in managing obesity by addressing its root causes through physical, psychological, and dietary interventions ^[4, 5].

This paper explores the integration of Yoga and Unani therapeutics, focusing on their synergistic effects in managing obesity.

2. Pathophysiology and Etiology of Obesity

Obesity is characterized by excessive adipose tissue accumulation due to an imbalance between energy intake and expenditure ^[6]. This imbalance often results from complex interactions between genetic, environmental, and behavioral factors. Dysregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and alterations in adipokines, such as leptin and adiponectin, are critical contributors to obesity ^[7]. Chronic low-grade inflammation, mediated by elevated cytokines like interleukin-6 (IL-6) and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF- α), exacerbates metabolic dysregulation ^[8].

Unani medicine views obesity (*Saman-e-Mufrit*) as a disorder arising from an excess of phlegm (*Balgham*), leading to an altered humoral balance ^[9]. This imbalance impairs metabolism and affects the temperament (*Mizaj*), predisposing individuals to systemic dysfunctions ^[10]. Unani practitioners emphasize lifestyle modifications, dietary regulation,

and herbal formulations to restore humoral balance and metabolic harmony ^[11].

Table 1: Comparison of Obesity Pathophysiology in Western Medicine and Unani Medicine

Aspect	Western Medicine	Unani Medicine
Cause of Obesity	Imbalance between energy intake and expenditure.	Excess of phlegm (Balgham) and humoral imbalance.
Key Contributors	Genetic factors, lifestyle choices, metabolic dysregulation.	Humoral imbalance (Mizaj) and excessive cold temperament.
Metabolic Effects	Insulin resistance, dyslipidemia, and altered adipokines.	Impaired digestion and nutrient assimilation.
Inflammation	Chronic low-grade inflammation, cytokine dysregulation.	Disrupted humoral balance leading to systemic dysfunction.
Therapeutic Focus	Diet, exercise, medication.	Diet, herbal formulations, cupping (Hijama).

Yoga complements these principles by addressing the physical and psychological aspects of obesity. Regular practice enhances parasympathetic activity, improves hormonal regulation, and reduces stress-induced weight gain ^[12].

3. Therapeutic Interventions in Yoga and Unani Medicine

3.1 Yoga-Based Interventions for Obesity

Yoga integrates physical postures (*asanas*), breathing techniques (*pranayama*), and meditation to promote overall well-being. Studies have demonstrated that Yoga improves metabolic rate, reduces body mass index (BMI), and enhances insulin sensitivity ^[13]. Specific practices such as *Surya Namaskar* and *Kapalabhati* pranayama target abdominal fat and improve digestion ^[14].

Table 2: Yoga Asanas and Their Role in Obesity Management

Yoga Asana	Effect on Obesity	Mechanism of Action
Surya Namaskar	Reduces abdominal fat and enhances metabolism.	Increases heart rate, improves circulation, and stimulates digestion.
Kapalabhati Pranayama	Targets abdominal fat and promotes detoxification.	Increases oxygen intake, enhances metabolic activity, and reduces stress levels.
Utkatasana	Strengthens legs and improves metabolism.	Tones the core muscles and aids in the reduction of belly fat.
Trikonasana	Enhances digestion and promotes weight loss.	Stimulates the abdominal organs and improves nutrient absorption.

In a randomized controlled trial, Yoga significantly reduced waist circumference, body weight, and stress markers in obese participants ^[15]. Stress reduction through Yoga practices modulates cortisol levels, which play a critical role in central adiposity ^[16].

3.2 Unani Therapeutics for Obesity

Unani medicine employs a holistic approach to obesity management, focusing on dietary modifications, herbal formulations, and physical therapies like cupping (*Hijama*) ^[17]. Key principles include regulating the temperament (*Mizaj*) and restoring humoral balance.

Table 3: Herbal Formulations in Unani Medicine for Obesity Management

Herb	Therapeutic Action	Mechanism of Action
<i>Nigella sativa</i>	Anti-obesity, appetite suppression, metabolic enhancer.	Reduces food intake, improves lipid metabolism.
<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	Stimulates digestion and reduces fat accumulation.	Improves gastrointestinal function and metabolism.
<i>Foeniculum vulgare</i>	Aids in digestion and acts as a diuretic.	Reduces bloating, enhances fat burning, and increases urine output.
<i>Cinnamomum verum</i>	Reduces adiposity and balances blood sugar levels.	Enhances insulin sensitivity and promotes fat breakdown.

Dietary Recommendations

Unani dietary interventions emphasize consuming foods with a cold and dry temperament to counteract phlegmatic excess. Avoiding high-fat, carbohydrate-rich foods is critical in managing *Saman-e-Mufrit* ^[20].

sativa (black seed), and *Foeniculum vulgare* (fennel) are used to enhance metabolism and reduce adiposity ^[21]. Studies highlight the anti-obesity effects of *Nigella sativa*, mediated through appetite suppression and improved lipid metabolism ^[22].

Herbal Formulations

Medicinal plants like *Zingiber officinale* (ginger), *Nigella*

4. Mechanistic Synergy Between Yoga and Unani Medicine

Table 4: Comparative Benefits of Yoga and Unani Medicine in Obesity Management

Intervention	Yoga	Unani Medicine
Metabolic Enhancement	Increases metabolic rate, improves insulin sensitivity.	Herbal formulations enhance digestion and nutrient assimilation.
Inflammation Reduction	Reduces stress-related cytokines, modulates cortisol.	Targets humoral imbalances, reducing systemic inflammation.
Stress Management	Lowers cortisol levels, induces relaxation.	Focuses on mental well-being and equilibrium of temperament.
Circulatory Improvement	Improves blood flow through postures and breathing.	Cupping therapy and herbal remedies improve circulation and detoxification.

The integration of Yoga and Unani therapeutics addresses obesity's multifactorial nature by targeting physical, metabolic, and psychological components.

- **Metabolic Enhancement:** Yoga boosts mitochondrial function and metabolic rate, while Unani herbal remedies enhance digestion and nutrient assimilation ^[24].

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- **Inflammation Reduction:** Both systems mitigate chronic inflammation, with Yoga reducing stress-related cytokines and Unani therapies targeting humoral imbalances.
- **Stress Management:** Yoga reduces cortisol levels and promotes relaxation, complementing Unani principles of mental well-being.
- **Circulatory Improvement:** Unani cupping therapy and Yoga postures enhance blood flow, promoting detoxification and lipid metabolism.

5. Conclusion

The integration of Yoga and Unani therapeutics presents a comprehensive, patient-centered approach to obesity management, combining the strengths of both systems to address the multifaceted nature of obesity. By targeting the underlying causes of obesity—such as metabolic imbalances, stress, and humoral disruptions—this synergistic model fosters holistic healing and promotes long-term well-being. Yoga's capacity to enhance physical activity, reduce stress, and regulate metabolism aligns seamlessly with the Unani focus on restoring humoral balance through dietary adjustments, herbal treatments, and therapeutic practices like cupping. Together, these modalities offer a balanced and sustainable approach to combating obesity. To maximize the impact of this integrated approach, future research should aim to develop robust, evidence-based protocols that incorporate both Yoga and Unani practices. This will not only strengthen the scientific foundation for their effectiveness but also increase their acceptance and applicability in contemporary obesity management.

Conflict of Interest

Not available

Financial Support

Not available

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