

Gastrointestinal Headache: Exploring the *Sudaa-e-shirkimaidi* in Unani Medicine

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Abstract: *Gastrointestinal issues are commonly associated with headaches, indicating a significant connection between the two. Traditional Unani medicine recognizes a specific type of headache known as sudaa-e-shirkimaidi, originating from gastrointestinal disturbances rather than neurological or vascular causes. Unlike modern medical approaches, Unani medicine takes a holistic view, highlighting the interconnectedness of bodily systems, where gastric problems can trigger headaches due to imbalances in bodily humors. This paper investigates various factors contributing to gastrointestinal headaches, treatment principles, traditional Unani remedies, including herbal formulations and dietary recommendations, are discussed for effectively managing gastrointestinal headaches. Data for this study were gathered from classical Unani texts, supplemented by relevant studies retrieved from databases like PubMed, Science Direct, Scopus, and Google Scholar. This interdisciplinary approach ensures a detailed exploration of gastrointestinal headaches within the traditional Unani medical framework.*

Keywords: Gastrointestinal Headache, *Sudaa-e-shirkimaidi*, Unani Medicine

1. Materials and Methods

Data for this study were sourced from classical literature on Unani Medicine (UM), including the Canon of Medicine, *kamil us sana*, *Marajulbahrain* and *jamiulhikmat*. Additionally, relevant studies were identified through searches of databases such as PubMed, Science Direct, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

2. Introduction

Gastrointestinal disturbances are a very common cause of headaches¹. The prevalence of gastrointestinal headaches is not exactly stated; however, a study found that the prevalence of migraine was about 3.5 times higher in patients with one or more gastrointestinal diseases. Another study reported that 60% of patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) had migraines, compared to 22% in a control population. Studies have found a higher prevalence of headaches, particularly migraines, in individuals with various gastrointestinal disorders like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD), celiac disease, and *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*) infection. These findings suggest a significant correlation between gastrointestinal disorders and headaches^{2,3,4}.

The gut-brain axis, involving nerve signalling, endocrine activity, and immune system interactions, plays a crucial role in the relationship between gastrointestinal issues and headaches^{5,6}. Concurrent gastrointestinal symptoms such as abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, and altered bowel movements often accompany headaches, exacerbating the overall burden of symptoms and disability⁷. Misdiagnosis of gastrointestinal headaches as primary headache disorders is common, leading to delays in appropriate treatment and management⁸. To address this challenge, exploring traditional Unani medicine offers valuable insights into understanding and managing gastrointestinal headaches. In

Unani medicine, a specific type of headache known as *sudaa-e-shirki maidi* (participatory gastric headache) is recognized. This headache is attributed to disturbances or disorders within the gastrointestinal system, as opposed to neurological or vascular causes. The traditional Unani medicine emphasizes the interconnectedness of bodily systems, where gastric issues can stimulate or trigger the development of headaches. According to Unani principles, imbalances in the four *humors* (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile) can contribute to the onset of headaches^{9,10,11,12,13}. Unlike modern medical perspectives, which focus on inflammation, vascular spasm, or tension as primary headache causes. Traditional Unani medicine takes a holistic approach, viewing the gastrointestinal system as a significant contributor to the development of headaches. This perspective highlights the importance of addressing gastric health and function in the management and treatment of headaches within this medical framework. Traditional Unani medicine has introduced various herbs and gastroprotective agents for boosting gastric function and managing headaches associated with gastrointestinal disturbances. This approach aims to address the underlying gastrointestinal factors that may be triggering or contributing to the headache, in contrast to the modern focus on managing the headache symptoms directly¹⁴.

This review paper explores the causes, symptoms, and treatment principles of gastrointestinal headaches within the context of traditional Unani medicine.

***Sudaa-e-Shirki* (secondary headache / Involved Headache / Participatory Headache)^{9, 10,11,12,15}**

Sudaa-e-Shirki usually occurs when *warm* (inflammation) develops in any organs associated with the brain, causing the material of the inflammation to move towards the brain. The brain, being noble and sensitive compared to all other organs of the body, becomes irritated and affected by any discomfort in the associated organs, manifesting as a headache.

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Among the associated organs, specific are the stomach, uterus and testicles, followed by the diaphragm, liver, spleen, gall bladder, kidney, bladder, back, leg and foot etc.

Sudaa-e-maidi shirki (Gastric headache)^{9, 10,11, 12, 16}

Gastric headache refers to the headache that originates from gastric involvement. The brain has direct connection with the stomach through the vagus nerve and because it is delicate and weak, it readily accepts *fasid mawad wa bukharat* (spoiled substances and vapors), when any irritation is caused in the stomach by these substances, it causes headache.

The following are causes of gastric headache:

- 1) *Su-e-mizaj maida* (Dys temperament of stomach)
- 2) Excessive bile excretion in the stomach
- 3) Excessive black bile excretion in the stomach
- 4) Accumulation of viscous phlegm in the stomach
- 5) Accumulation of thick gases in the stomach
- 6) Weakness of stomach and hypersensitivity
- 7) Chronic constipation

1) *Su-e-mizaj maida* (Dys temperament of stomach)^{9, 10,11,12}

Symptoms

Heavy meals exacerbate stomach burden, bloating, and trigger headaches. Recurrent indigestion typically manifests with frontal headaches. An empty stomach or light meals alleviate headache symptoms. Headache increases with bending the head down. Generally, the headache is not persistent; rather, it occurs especially after eating, particularly after consuming heavy meals. After vomiting and diarrhoea, the headache decrease or subside.

Treatment Principles and Treatment

The stomach should be rectified, and balance the in-temperament of stomach.

- a) In the case of a *su-e mizaj garam saada* (hot and simple temperament), *thanday mashroobat aur jawarishaat* (cold drinks and cold temperament stomach strengthened medicine) should be used.
 - First *Khamira sandal* 6 gram then powdered of *zarishk* 3 gram, *sumaq* 3 gram mix in *sharbat-e-anaar* 24 ml used twice a day.
 - *Jawarish Amla*, *jawarish Anaren* each 6 gram twice a day after meal.
- b) In case of *Su-e- mizaj barid saada* (simple cold in-temperament) use warm temperament-bearing compounds.
 - *Majoon falasfa* 6 grams twice a day.
 - *Jawarishjalinoos* 6 grams, *jawarish ood* or *jawarish podina* 6 grams after meal.
 - *Murabba-e-zanjabeel* 12 grams at bed time with Luke warm water.

2) *Maida par safrakakasrat-e-insabab* (Excessive bile excretion in the stomach)^{9,10,15,16,12}

Sometimes, excessive consumption of hot and sweet foods or exposure to hot weather can lead to an excessive formation of bile. Some of this bile may spill into the stomach, leading to the formation of vapours that ascend to the brain, causing headaches.

Symptoms

Twitching and spasms in the stomach, and a sensation of burning, irritation, and pressure is felt at the stomach's location. Additionally, other symptoms of excess bile include a bitter taste in the mouth, increased thirst, yellowish discoloration of the face, and complaints of nausea and vomiting. Generally, there is relief from pain for some time after bile vomiting.

Treatment Principles and Treatment

Firstly, cleanse the stomach through vomiting. For this purpose, use *sikanjbeen* and warm water. Afterward, administer *gate'a-e-safra wa musakkin* (bile rectifier and tranquilizer) medicine.

Formulation: Take 6 grams of *zulal-e-tamarhindi*, 15 nosh of *sheera-e-aloo Bukhara*, and prepare in *arq e kasni* or *arq e mako*. Mix it with 24 ml of *sikanjbeen lemoon* and use it in the morning and evening.

After *tanqia* (purging), strengthen the stomach and brain. For this purpose, use *qabizruboob* (astringent concentrate juices) that also have cooling properties, such as *rub-e-anaar*, *rub-e-bihi*, *rub-e-gora*. For brain strengthening, massage the head with *roghan-e-gul* (rose oil) or *roghan-e-aas*.

3) *Maida par saudakakasrat-e- insabab* (Excessive black bile excretion in the stomach)^{9,10,11,12}

Most physicians refer to "*sauda* (black blie)" as excess acidity in the stomach, as *sauda* tends to be acidic. When it dissolves, it turns into vinegar. This vinegar is that harsh liquid which is known as acidic acid. Consequently, due to its acidity, it causes burning and irritation to the stomach and it leads to the formation of ulcers in stomach and duodenum. To confirm this, physicians have specified a particular symptom: if a patient of this condition is made to vomit on sandy ground, the sand starts bubbling up just like sand reacts to the acid.

Symptoms

Burning sensation, stomach irritation, severe headaches, and dryness are indicative of the condition. Temporary relief from the headache is achieved through vomiting.

Treatment principles and treatment

Induce vomiting with *Kharbakh*, *Turb*, and *Tukhm-e-Shibbat* is recommended. For stomach cleansing after vomiting, the use of *Joshanda aftimoon* is highly beneficial.

Joshanda Aftimoon formulation: *Aftimoon* 14 grams, *Bisfaij* 6 grams, *Badranjboya* 6 grams, *halela Siyah* 6 grams, *saqmoniya* 6 grams. Prepare a decoction, strain it, and mix it with 24 ml of *sharbat-e-banafshan*. Doses twice a day.

Formulation *forkasrat-e- insababsauda* (Excessive black bile): *Suda Khurdani*, *Sahagah Briyan*, *Noshadar*, *JawaKhar*, *Asal al-Sous*, *Satawar*, and *Dana AlaiichiKhurd*. Prepare a powder and take 6 grams in the morning and evening.

Qurse alkali 2, twice a day before meal and *Qurse satawari* 2, twice a day after meal.

4) Maida mein lesdar balgham ka ijtimā (Accumulation of viscous phlegm in the stomach)^{9,10,11,12,17}

In this condition, thick, viscous, and spoiled phlegm adheres to the walls of the stomach (*khaml-e-maida*), leading to the following symptoms.

Symptoms

Pre-headache indigestion or regurgitation, frequent gas production leading to eructation, intensified pain with stomach distension, increased salivation, nausea, and temporary pain relief following phlegm vomiting.

Treatment Principles and Treatment:

Formulation to induce vomiting: *Tukhme turb* 6 grams, *tukhm e shaljam* 6 grams, *khurdal* 6 grams boil all the things in water add *namaktuaam* 6 grams, *bora-e-armani* 3 grams, *sikanjbeen-e-asli* 24 ml and induce vomiting with it.

After cleansing the stomach, *Majoon falasfa* 6 grams, twice a day, *Jawarish jalinoos* 6 grams twice a day after meal, *Murabb-e-zanjabeel* 12 grams at bed time.

5) Maide main ghaleezriyahkaijtimā (Accumulation of dense vapours in the stomach)^{9,10,11,12,16,17}

Sometimes headache is caused by noxious and unpleasant vapours which trapped in head.

Symptoms

Before the headache, there will be complaints of pain and tension in the stomach. The onset of this headache starts from the temple area and then spreads throughout the head. During periods of calmness in stomach pain, the headache also subsides. Consumption of flatulent and heavy foods often exacerbates the headache.

Treatment Principles and Treatment

Badiyan 4 grams, *Satarfarsi* 4 grams, *Barg-e-sudab*, *Nankhuan* 4 grams, *Zeerasafed* 4 grams, as decoction used twice a day.

Ikseer-e-riyah 3 grams, *jawarish kamooni kabir* 6 grams with *Arq-e-nankhuan* 60 ml twice a day after meal.

6) Zoaf-e-maida wa zaka'wat-e-hiss (Weakness of the stomach and hypersensitivity)^{9,10,11,12}

The stomach quickly accepts spoiled substances due to its weakness and becomes easily irritated due to hypersensitivity. Even good food and humours become spoiled in the stomach, causing distress. Nervous connection between the stomach and brain results in the brain getting involved in the discomfort, causing headaches.

Symptoms

Before headache, complaints of pain and tension in the stomach. This discomfort begins from the crown of the head and then spreads throughout the entire head. The headache subsides when gastric pain diminishes. After consuming heavy and gas-inducing foods, the headache increases.

Treatment Principles and Treatment

Prescribe to consume foods prepared in diluted forms of *aab-e-angur*, *aab-e-reebas*, *aab-e-simaq* and *aab-e-anar* (grape juice, sumac water, rebus water, and pomegranate juice). Additionally, provide mild calming medicines such as

khamira khashkhash 6 grams or *sharbat-e-khashkhash* 24 ml twice a day.

For the purpose of strengthening the stomach, use stomach tonics such as *Jowarish Amla* 6 grams before meal and *Jawarish Maqwi-e-Maida* 6 grams after meal.

7) Muzmin Qabz (Chronic constipation)^{9,10,11,12,16,17,18}

Headaches can also arise from constipation as it leads to the build up of toxins in the body, disrupting the equilibrium of the four humours (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile). This imbalance can adversely affect the brain, manifesting symptoms such as headaches. Additionally, constipation may cause the retention of waste products, potentially compromising overall health and triggering headaches.

Symptoms

All stomach functions slow down. Appetite diminishes, and digestion is disrupted. Some patients also complain of nausea along with pain. And as a result of defecation, there is some level of relief in the headache.

Treatment Principles and Treatment:

First restoring the balance of humors in the body. This is achieved through the use of laxatives and purgatives, which help eliminate morbid matter from the intestines and other areas of the body.

Murabba halela 100 grams, *maweez munaqqa* 50 grams, *gulqand* 50 grams. Remove the seed of *halela* and combine all the ingredients and use 24 grams with lukewarm water at bedtime.

Sana-e-makki 4 grams, *gul-e-surkh*, 6 grams, *gul-e-banafsha* 4 grams, *gul-e-nilofar* 6 grams. Boil all the ingredients in 250 ml milk, sieve it, and add *shaker shurkh* (refined sugar) 24 grams. Use it at bedtime.

Itrifalzamani 9 grams, *itriphal mullayan* 9 grams, *qurse mullayan* 2 tablets, *Safoof-e-mullayan* 6 grams, *sharbat-e-deenar* 24 ml, *majoon-e-injeer* 6 grams, as needed one of these medicine should be used with lukewarm water at bedtime¹⁶.

3. Conclusion

Traditional Unani medicine provides valuable insights into the management of gastrointestinal headaches by addressing underlying gastric factors. By rectifying stomach temperament and restoring humoral balance, Unani medicine aim to alleviate headaches associated with gastric disturbances. This holistic approach underscores the significance of gastric health in headache management, suggesting potential integration of Unani medicine into modern healthcare practices. However, further research and clinical validation are essential to establish the efficacy of Unani treatments and their incorporation into contemporary medicine system.

Declaration of interest: none

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