Siman Mufrit: Concept, Pathophysiology and Management in Unani System of Medicine, A Review

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Abstract

In Unani literature obesity is termed as siman mufrit and farbahī by Unani scholars. Siman Mufrit is classified as a balghamī (phlegmatic) disease. Literally siman mufrit means excess of shaḥm (fat). Excess of shaḥm is due to burūdat (coldness) and ruṭūbat (wetness). The factors which increase the burūdat and ruṭūbat in the body are cold foods and drinks, cold medicines, rest, sleep, excess of food, moderate degree of pleasure, ḥammām especially after meals etc. According to Jālīnūs, farbahī is caused either due to innate cold temperament or due to excessive adoption of bārid tadābῑr (cold regimens). He mentioned that, the māddῑ (material) cause of excessive body fat is presence of dusūmat (viscous substances) in blood and fa‘ila (active) cause is burūdat due to which dusūmat of blood, solidifies and gets deposited in the form of shaḥm. Almost every great Unani scholar has devoted some pages to this old age enemy in their classical texts. They have given detailed description and discussion of siman mufrit and its various pathological conditions, pathophysiology along with its management.

Keywords: Siman mufrit; Shaḥm; Māddῑ; Fa‘ila

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Introduction
The synonyms used by different Unani scholars in their treatises for obesity are: Siman mufrit, motāpā, and afrāt-i-farbahῑ [1]. Siman mufrit (obesity), as a health problem got attention of great Unani scholars since ancient time. Siman mufrit (Obesity) is an oldest recognized disease in Unani system of medicine. The very first, it was Hippocrates (Bucrāṭ, 420 BC) who gave detailed description of obesity in his famous book “Fasūl-i-Bucrāṭia”. Moreover, he was the first physician who realized the dangers of obesity. He stated that ‘sudden death is more common in those who are naturally fat than in the lean’. He correctly identified the energy balance equation. He said that it is very injurious to health to take more food than its requirement, when, at the same time one uses no exercise to carry off this excess [2,3]. Almost every great Unani scholar has devoted some pages to this old age enemy in their classical texts. They have given detailed description and discussion of siman mufrit and its various pathological conditions, pathophysiology along with its management.

Siman mufrit; concept
Literally siman mufrit means excessive of shaḥm (fat). Excess of shaḥm is due to burūdat (coldness) and ruṭūbat (wetness) [4]. Siman Mufrit is classified as a balghamῑ (phlegmatic) disease. The mizaj (temperament) of balgham is bārid-ratab (cold-moist) and predominance of kḥilt-i-balgham, increases the burūdat and ruṭūbat in the body. Thus, dominance of balgham in the body is considered as a predisposing factor for obesity.

It occurs due to excessive deposition of shaḥm (fat) as the mizaj (temperament) of shaḥm is bārid (cold) hence dominance of burūdat (coldness) in the body occurs. So a vicious cycle is likely to be started in the body as bārid mizaj (cold temperaments) will lead to deposition of shaḥm and deposition of shaḥm will lead to further burūdat (coldness) in mizaj (temperament) [5,6].

Etiology according to Unani system of medicine
• Bārid mizaj (cold temperament): Bārid mizaj people are at higher risk of getting obese. Due to bārid mizaj (cold temperament) oily constituents of dam (blood) tend to deposit in the form of shaḥm (fat). Khilt-i-balgham (phlegm humour) predominates in the body of Bārid mizaj people and hence it is considered as the predisposing factor in the causation of siman mufrit (obesity). Ancient hakims have correlated bārid mizaj and siman mufrit [7].
• Varāsatῑ and Khalqῑ Asbāb (hereditary and congenital causes): The chance of development of obesity is higher among people with a family history of obesity.
• Rāḥat (excessive rest and lack of exercise): This causes more input of energy than expenditure/output resulting in storage of extra energy in the form of fat.
• Kathrat-i-ghidhā’ (excessive eating) especially muraghghan ghidhāyen (oily foods).
• Sarwat wa Ghina (luxurious lifestyle)
• Soft clothes and soft bedding for sleeping
• Farḥat (excess of joy) and
• Intake of excessive alcohol especially after meals[5,7,8,9,10,11,12].

Before starting the pathophysiology of Siman mufrit (obesity) in Unani system of medicine, we should know about the concept of shaḥm (fat) in Unani system of medicine, as Siman mufrit means excess of shaḥm.

Concept of shaḥm (fat) in Unani system
There is detailed description about origin, constitution, functions, benefits, harms of fat in classical Unani literature. Ancient Unani scholars have described fat under heading of shaḥm and they have also described different types of shaḥm (fat).

Many Unani scholars considered that shaḥm
(fat) is the end product of metabolism of food and referred as nudi jazila (metabolic waste product). After metabolism it reaches to different organs of the body and provides nutrition [5,13,14]. Ibn Rushd has said shahtm (fat) as end product of pukhtay dam (mature blood) which provides nutrition to the organs and presence of shahm (fat) in a’atdāl (appropriate amount, moderation) is the sign of good health and nutrition [13].

Ibn Sīnā had described types of shahtm, according to him, shahtm is of two types: Samīn and Rawāj

(a) Samīn - which is liquid at normal body temperature and
(b) Rawāj - which is solid at normal body temperature [5,15].

In kāmil al-Ṣanā’a, Majūsī has also described mainly of two types of shahtm: Samīn and Widak. These form covering over the vessels and nerves. First these are formed in blood, then they move towards those organs which possess bārid mizāj (cold temperament) and get absorbed to them due to the similarity in their temperament that is why most of the fatty deposition occurs at ṣurb (omentum).

Samīn is a thin fat which is attached on muscles. Widak is another type of shahtm (fat) present between the muscles and is thicker than Samīn. They are very helpful to those organs which possess ḥār and yābis mizāj (hot and dry temperament) for their normal functioning [5,16,17].

Jālīnūs has said in his famous book Kitāb fil mizāj that there are two types of fat; shahtm and Samīn (a type of thin fat).

M. kabīr al-Dīn has mentioned that shahtm and Samīn are white and full of rughni maddā (oily substances). It is usually found in membranes. He has also quoted with the reference of Abū Sahl Masīhi and Ibn Nafis that Samīn is a type of shahtm (fat) which is soft and having less ability to get solidified [6].

According to Ibn rushed, fat is of two type: shahtm – thick fat and samīn – thin fat. And he has said that maddā (material) cause for both is rughni ajzā’ (oily constituents) of dam (blood) hence confirming their wet temperament [13].

Pathophysiology of Siman mufrit

As mentioned above, obesity is termed as siman mufrit and farbahi by Unani scholars [1]. Literally, siman mufrit means excess of shahtm (fat). Excess of shahtm is due to burūdat (coldness) and ruṭūbat (wetness). The factors which increase the burūdat and ruṭūbat in the body are cold food and drinks, temperamentally cold medicines, rest, sleep, excess of food, moderate degree of pleasure, ḥammām (sauna) especially after meals etc [10]. According to Jālīnūs, farbahi is caused either due to innate cold temperament or due to excessive adoption of bārid tadābir (cold regimens). He mentioned that, the maddā (material) cause of excessive body fat is presence of dusūmat (viscous substances) in blood and fa’ila (active) cause is burūdat due to which dusūmat of blood, solidifies and gets deposited in the form of shahtm. This deposition of fat occurs only in bārid a’ḍā’ or when an organ’s mizāj is altered towards burūdat [7]. According to Ibn Nafis, the dusūmat present in the blood, is of two types latīf and kathīf: the latīf (lighter) part of dusūmat is metabolized into ghidhā (nutrition) and ṭab’i harārat (energy) of laḥmi a’ḍā’ (muscular organs) whereas; the kathīf (heavier) part goes towards the barīd a’dā’ (organs) or aghshiya (membranes) where it is solidified due to the burūdat (cold) and deposited in the form of shahtm (fat) [1].

Line of treatment (Uṣūl-i-‘ilāj) in Unani system of medicine

The treatment of Siman Mufrit is based on the following principles:
1. Correction of the sū'i-mizāj.
2. Elimination of the existing causes.
3. Use of advia mulattifa [5,18].
4. Adoption of those tadābῑr, which produce harārat (hotness) and yubūsat (dryness) in the body like
   a. Use of mu’arriq adwiya (diaphoretics)
   b. Ḥammām yābῑs
   c. Massage with hār and muḥallil (Resolvent) oils like roghan qust, roghan soya etc.
   d. Taqlῑl ghidhā (Dietary restrictions)
   e. Use of hār wa muhallil (Resolvent) drugs like falafali, dawaul luk etc.
   f. Riyāḍat kathῑra (Vigorous exercise).
   g. Stay in hot and dry places.
   h. Reduction in sleeping hours [5,12,15,17,19,20].

Ibne Sina describes the mechanism of action of above Uṣūl-i-‘ilāj in the following three ways:
1. They make raqῑq (less viscous) khilṭ-i-badan (body humours) and decreases the In’a qād-i-khilṭ (thrombosis of blood), which is one of the important causes to resists the decrease in viscosity of blood.
2. By ʾishāl (diarrhoea/purgation) and ʾidrār (diuretics/ emmenagogue), the excessive Akhlāt (humour) are removed from the vessels, so the pressure in vessels is decreased and hence tamaddud is improved which retains vascular flexibility (vasodilatation).
3. By producing hiddat (hotness/immaturity) in blood, it will not be absorbed in the body and hence load of excessive blood and kasῑf part of dusūmat dam (heavier part of the blood), i.e. fat, will also be decreased in the body [5].

Furthermore, he suggests prescribing an appropriate method which should prevent the absorption of food completely, so that more food particles will be excreted through the stool and urine. For this purpose, advia mulayyina (laxatives) are more suitable as advia mulayyina decreases the Quwwat Jaḍhiba (absorption property) of intestines for the food. So, the drugs which possess actions like mulattif (demulcent), mudir (diuretics), mushil (purgatives) and mulayyin (laxatives) are more useful in reducing the obesity [5,15].
Treatment (‘Ilāj)
Taking into consideration all the above facts, management of siman mufriṭ can be conveniently summarised into following categories;
1. ‘Ilāj Bi’l Ghidhā’ (Dietotherapy)
2. ‘Ilāj Bi’l Tadbῑr (Regimenal Therapies)
3. Ilāj Bi’l Dawā’ (Pharmacotherapy by both Mu-frad dawā (single drugs) and Murakkab dawā’ (compound formulations)

Conclusion
The two main causes of modern day’s obesity epidemic are; calorie dense diet and sedentary life style. After careful study of available Unani literature about obesity we have concluded that as the described etiological factors of obesity are almost similar to those of modern day’s obesity epidemic, so explaining the management of the same can provide a better, safe and cheap option.

Conflict of Interest
None.

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None.

References