



## A New Way to Understand Healthy Sexual life: Traditional Medicine's Point of View

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### Abstract

Health is an essential issue in our lives. According to Traditional Persian Medicine (TPM), having healthy sexual relationship is an important aspect in preventive medicine.

This study was performed by searching through Canon of Medicine by Avicenna, *Zakhireh Kharazmshahi* and *Kamel al-Sanaeh* in TPM as well as the medical literature. Sexual function and its role in a healthy life style were considered. We looked for sexual life and its relationship with eating, types of drinking, bathing, sleeping habits and times and periods of a day mentioned in those references.

In TPM, sexual life and intercourse are not only for pleasure. They are also important aspects of a healthy life style recommended to be performed with a certain frequency, in certain times, with a prologue and foreplay, and considering some limitations in drinking and eating. This study shows the essential role of a healthy sexual life according to TPM recommendations. Regarding the effects of a healthy sexual style in general wellbeing, it seems necessary to educate the public about related important issues in health clinics and primary care system.

**Keywords:** *Sexual Function, Traditional Iranian Medicine, Classical medicine, Preventive medicine*

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### Introduction

Maintaining "Health" and adhering to health strategies for a healthy lifestyle are important issues during a human life. Preventive medicine, as a separate discipline, has been born out of such necessities. Every year, certain financial resources of governmental budgets are being allocated to health issues. The more those in budgeting hold a holistic and informed view of sexual issues, the more the funds would be raised for prevention and public trainings.

In ancient times, Persian physicians carried out many experiments concerning the healthy sex and obtained important knowledge and professional skills as to human health. TPM dates back to over 800 years B.C. that Avicenna was the most

influential physician in that time. He lived in the medieval period (980-1037 A.D.) and authored his masterpiece in medicine as "Canon of medicine".

In that book, he adopted a health-oriented point of view toward public health, well-known as forerunner of preventive medicine. In recent times, researchers have taken up with a new interest in different medical topics in the "Canon". There are old "six principles of health" in the TPM which reflect the wisdom and insight of Iranian scholars in preventive medicine since more than a thousand years ago.

The six principles of health relate to everything that we face in our daily life, and also how things surrounding us not taken into consideration have

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certain effects on our health status. Nowadays due to the hasty modern lifestyle the human suffers from polluted water and air, sleeping disorders, untimely awakenings during stressful situations, improper foods, packaged beverages and drinks prepared with artificial flavors and colors, being some of the various issues. Another issue especially after the first years of marriage is sexual performance which may lose its attractiveness due to several factors.

Accordingly, in this article we deal with almost all aspects of sexual life from traditional point of view and especially based on Avicenna's critical recommendations to define a specific protocol for having a healthy sexual life.

### Methods

This study was a survey. The contents sexual lifestyle and intercourse are derived from the available reliable sources of TPM. These sources were *Kamel al-Sanaat al-Tibbyya* by Haly Abbas (949-982 A.D.), *Canon of Medicine* by Avicenna (980-1037 A.D.), *Zakhireye Khwarazmshahi* by Jorjani (1042-1137 A.D.), *Eksir-e-Azam* by Azam Khan (1810 A.D.), and other related but less famous textbooks in Persian medicine as well as a collection of classic articles in medicine and sex training points in sexology.

Issues like time of having meals, sleeping time, bath time and their relation to the time of intercourse, other items such as drinking cold or hot beverage, morning or night, calendar, dress and adornment, appropriate intervals, effects of extremes in sex and best position were searched and discussed. Then, the gathered information classified through major topics in the field of medicine and analyzed using "content analysis" method.

### Results

Following a careful deliberation and organization of data, we provided an exhaustive review of the most significant viewpoints concerning sexual lifestyle and intercourse from the TPM resources. The topics were divided into eleven main groups involving the affection of the sex on the body, sex and temperaments, sex and times of having meals

and drinking, sex and times of the day and the night, sex and the preliminary measures, sex and related positions, the frequency of intercourse, sex and the recommendations, sex and calendar, complications of excessive sexual action and the other items which have a positive impact on the sexual relationship. In this paper, major issues of these areas are presented and discussed.

### *The affection of the sex on the body*

TPM believes in "nature" and its function as an alert for human beings. Sexual intercourse has serious effects on human nature. This subject contributes to the vitality and development of the body and eliminates the mental conflicts. Sexual intercourse can make a man brave and courageous and enable him to control his reactions and calm himself in tense situations [1-2]. It also provokes one's true appetite [3]. In TPM, there are two types of appetites i.e. false and true. It is actually the true appetite that leads to human health.

### *Sex and Temperaments*

Traditional medicine believes in the existence of four temperaments: hot and wet, hot and dry, cold and wet and cold and dry. Each of these temperaments has a certain level of benefits for sexual act. Herein, extremes in sex habits (lack or excess) can have diverse effects on different temperaments [1]. A summary of each kind of temperament and their effect on having sex is listed as follows.

People with a white, white lead, soft and hairless pale skin, and narrow blood vessels, have a cold and dry temperament and produce low amounts of semen with thick consistency. They usually do not have autoerotism and also premature ejaculation does not occur. Frequent intercourse can damage their health [1].

Brunet people, with reddish, tawny, hairy, stiff and coarse skin with a chubby appearance and wide vessels, strong and prominent joints have hot and dry temperament. They tend to have a small amount of thick semen with high libido. They are very strong at sex but get easily exhausted and cannot continue. A person with

these characteristics can get excited with the least contact with the opposite sex or sexual imaginations and even may ejaculate [1]. Obese people who have less muscle mass with soft, white and hairless skin, joints hidden beneath fatty tissues with narrow vessels produce diluted semen. They usually have low libido, slow ejaculation and a cold, wet temperament. In case they have excess intercourse, they are prone to suffer backache and knee pain more than the others [1]. People with muscular obesity, red or tawny, hairy and hyperemic skin with wide, dilated vessels tend to have hot and wet temperament with high libido and frequent and fast ejaculations. They have an urge for more sexual activity. Only in this group of people having less sex can be harmful [1].

#### ***Sex and the times of eating and drinking***

TPM believes in four humors: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. The four humors are derived from the gastric and hepatic digestion of food. Also they believe in a “leading natural power in the body” which manages all the body interactions every moment. Intercourse is another kind of motion of the nature. Therefore, it is better for body nature to be kept busy for each of its functions. Thus, the best time for having sex is after hepatic digestion or 2-3 hours after taking meals [1-2]. On the other hand, it is clear that having sex is not advised in fasting and hunger states [1-3].

#### ***Sex and the times of the day and night***

The best time for having sex is the beginning of night. In this way, couple can have enough time for a long and deep sleep to restore the “body nature” and its lost power [1]. The most suitable time for intercourse is when the body feels comfortable; i.e. no feelings of cold or hot. Also there is a need for a moderate temperature and humidity. From the nature point of view, the best time for intercourse is when there is a natural desire and seminal vesicles are full [1].

#### ***Sex and the preliminary measures***

Having an attractive appearance such as wearing

a makeup or a nice hairstyle, cleanliness, being pleasantly scented, using kind words, foreplay and touching, using inspirational words, kissing and hugging are parts of what is advised in TPM for starting intercourse. It is also remarked that these actions continue to such an extent that would lead to a simultaneous orgasm and ejaculation. This can be ultimately important for each partner’s health [1, 4-5].

#### ***Sex and position***

The best position for having sex is when the woman rests in a supine, semi- sitting position and the man takes an above position, putting his thighs over hers. In this way, semen can exit easily and penetration takes place without pain and suffering [1]. The worst position is when the man lies on his back and the woman takes an above position. Semen exits with difficulty and seminal vesicles cannot be evacuated completely. Also, the vaginal secretions flow in an opposite direction toward the uterus and the tubes. Among these complications, the worse is the difficulty in movement for the man which is also the case in other unusual positions such as sitting or standing, while having sex. These positions are also prohibited in TPM [1].

#### ***Frequency of sex***

It takes three days for semen to be produced; therefore, it is advised to have intercourse once every three days [1-2, 6].

***Sex and the following recommendations:*** Since the body’s nature has had a serious motion, drinking cold water and other cold drinks are prohibited after intercourse. Cold beverages can be harmful for the body at this time. Instead, it is advised to take sweet and greasy fruits and foods. It is also advised to empty the bladder completely after having sex, avoid cold bath and exposure to cold weather [1].

#### ***Sex and calendar***

According to Islamic teachings, having sex is prohibited at the evening of some religious holidays (*Eid al Fetri, Mid Shaban Eid, and Eid al-*

*Adha*). Also it is prohibited at the three first and the three last days of each lunar month, during lunar and solar eclipse and the day and night of an earthquake. It is especially recommended to avoid intercourse at these periods of time when couples are planning for a pregnancy [4].

### ***Complications of excessive sexual act***

Having too much sex can be harmful to one's health. It makes the body dry and cold. It leads to a gradual decrease of the body's "Instinctive Heat" (the energy that is generated at birth and is used through a whole life) and finally, the person becomes weak and exhausted. If in this situation, he keeps on overdoing, the body will become totally cold, he would lose his hearing and vision, the legs becomes weak and his feet are no longer able to tolerate his body. Gradually, he feels tingling in his spine and suffers from tinnitus and vertigo. He may also experience painful cramps and constipation. His mouth and gums smell bad and he gradually becomes depressed [1].

### ***Other items with positive impact on sexual relation***

A proper diet is very useful in making one fit for having a good sex. Taking foods such as yellow dry peas, beans, lamb and soft-boiled salted eggs can produce large amounts of warm and wet blood. Massaging with fragrant oils like Ores, Lily and Narcissus oils is also advised. There is a long list of seeds such as turnip seed, flaxseed, carrot seed, pepper seed as well as useful medical plants like *Tribulus terrestris* L., and spruce fruit (pistachio, hazelnut) that are helpful to enhance libido [1, 7].

### **Discussion**

Sex has an enormous impact on human health in ways not previously understood. For example, research has demonstrated that male and female bodies have innate physiological and hormonal differences that result in different responses to alcohol, drugs, and treatment. In fact, the constitution of a body has inherent differences when compared, from cellular metabolism to blood chemistry. Researchers now claim that

"every organ in the body -not just those related to reproduction- has the capability to respond differently on the basis of sex" [8].

From a classical medicine standpoint, there are some restrictions or special recommendations for having healthy sex. The main concept is that sex should be enjoyable and it can be practiced with no limitations in the time and location. The quality of sex is important. When a couple enjoy from each other, it is enough without any limitation [9]. However, if sex becomes repetitive and lacks enough fun, some solutions are suggested. In conventional medicine, the key for improvement is finding ways to strengthen a couple's relationship. In this regard, it is recommended to make a change in the lifestyle which can improve the libido.

One of the proposed solutions is to perform aerobic exercises or walking that can result in sweating. This type of exercise should be continued until it can affect the individual's emotions and have a positive change of his self image. It also leads to a better mood which can further improve sexual health [10].

The other important issue is about the daily life and work. We should guide people to learn certain skills to increase their adjustment with social and occupational issues. The more one can adjust himself with his surroundings and unpredictable circumstances, the more the stress can be reduced and as a result, the libido would gradually improve [11].

Another topic is bilateral relationship and talking to one's sexual partner. When the couple easily talks with each other about every aspect of their life, their emotion about each other and their relationship would become stronger and deeper. Naturally, this deep relationship improves their sexual life [11]. It is also important to talk about sexual act. When a couple talk clearly about their interests, what they like or dislike, this type of conversation can also improve the relationship [11]. It is recommended that the couple make plans for their sexual acts. If they feel that their relationship is getting boring, they should change the plan to get back to the previous enjoyable conditions [12].

Having a variety in sexual acts is refreshing. It is sometimes suggested to have sex in a different ambiance to prevent boredom. New settings can bring new flavor to an old relationship for a long time [13].

Sexual relationship is a mutual interaction. Any decrease in sexual desire in one of the couple can result in insufficient motivation in shaping and constructing a sexual relationship. This can damage the cycle of sexual enjoyment and lead to frustration and a feeling of being rejected in the sexual partner. At the same time the other couple who is suffering from a low libido feels that he or she cannot excite one another and would not be able to perform a romantic sex. These emotions gradually build up tension and stress between a couple. These tensions will negatively affect their sexual desire and lead more and more to a vicious cycle. [14, 9, 10].

A couple must also understand the fluctuation of libido in a menstrual cycle. These changes are transient and a couple would gradually be able to find the right time [15].

It is important for a couple to educate themselves about a healthy sexual life. They should be advised that having sex is not the only goal of living together. The couple must pay attention to other issues between themselves. They should try to know each other well in order to improve their marital relationship. It is suggested to make time for a long walking or jogging together, having a long sleep without stress (especially working couples), kissing each other when entering or leaving the house and having a private dinner in a restaurant can lead to an increased sense of well-being and being loved in the couple and invigorate their relationship [10, 16].

From TPM point of view, sex is not just for fun, but plays an essential role in a couple's health. The quality of sex is important to save health. TPM believes that both male and female produce semen, which is the most delicate end product of the humors [9].

If a couple has a proper sex, semen is exerted readily and improves their health. Sex can improve the healthy life if the couple does it in the

right time, right location and right position.

### **Conclusion**

The family foundation is based on several essential factors such as mutual love, having children, economic stability and also a proper sexual relationship. Everyday life is full of stress and one of the best means for getting relaxed is having good sex. It seems necessary to take a sexual function history from all patients who attend medical centers for various medical problems. This is only possible if the physicians recognize the importance of this issue, know its role in maintaining one's health and become familiar with the above mentioned subjects. This study represented the essential role of a healthy sexual life in general wellbeing according to the TPM recommendations. In this regard, it seems absolutely necessary to educate the public about these important issues by the media and health care centers. From TPM points of view, sex is a main aspect of the healthy life that can improve it as well.

### **Competing interests**

The authors do not have any financial/commercial competing interest in the study presented here.

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