

## College of Unani Tibb and Alternative Medicine

### Module 10 part 1: Effects of food and drinks, retention and elimination

#### What this module covers:

##### Effects of:

- foods and drinks
- retention and elimination

#### Effects of Food and Drink Consumption

Foods and drinks effect the body in three ways;

1. By the quality (temperament) of the food or drink - producing either warmth or coolness without becoming part of the body.
2. By the reaction to its elements (building blocks [in modern terminology e.g. amino acids]) – food loses its own characteristics and transforms to that of an organ.
3. By the reaction to the essence of its substance(or its chemical constituents) - actions of its specific composition (its chemistry), not its temperament, which results from its distribution within the body without any similarity to the body.

Ibn Sina says:

*[food has an effect of it either being]*

*A Qualitative agent* - A thing has the quality of becoming hot or cold when it enters the human body and thus produces heat or cold without being assimilated in the body.

*A Elemental agent* - It is when the nature of a thing undergoes change and it adopts the form of any organ of the human body. But sometimes it happens that throughout the process of taking on the form of an organ a thing retains its original qualities which are stronger than those of the human body. For example, blood produced from lettuce remains colder than the human temperament even after becoming blood and is suitable for becoming a part of any organ of the human body. Similarly, blood produced from garlic has an opposite quality.

*Or a Substantial agent*

It is the agent which acts by its specific form which determines its distinctiveness, and not by its quality [temperament] of being with or without having the likeness of a body. By quality, I mean one of those four qualities i.e. heat, cold, moistness and dryness.



The elemental agent is that whose element undergoes change directing power to the body first by replacing the worn out tissues and secondly by augmenting the innate heat through increased blood supply. Thirdly, it also acts through its remaining quality.

Substantial agent is that which acts through its specific form which emerges after the temperament, when there has been a co-mingling of the elements which gives rise to something unified ready to assume a new entity and a new form, over and above the elements.

All nutritional substances eventually bring about a heat change in the body when it changes into blood.

Ibn Sina says:

The body alters both the substance of the medicinal food and its property. The change first occurs in the property. Some medicinal foods first change into heat and thus heat the body, for example, garlic, while some of them first change into cold and thus make the body cold, such as lettuce. When the transformation into blood becomes complete, most of its action is to produce heat by increasing blood. [However] .. a slight cold remains in the blood formed from lettuce and a slight heat in the blood formed from garlic, though for a short time.

Ibn Sina says:

We mean by hot effect or cold effect on the body that the effect is on the body's innate heat after the substance has reacted with the heat of the body. We may also mean another thing, and that is the general quality of the substance such as when we say the sulfur is hot.

### Quality of food

Some foods are more medicinal and others are more nutritive, and some are closer in their characteristics to blood humor (e.g. certain meats) while others are less (e.g. bread). While medicine can be very unlike food as recognized by the body.

Food changes the body by its quality and quantity, In terms of the quantity, an excess food produces indigestion, obstruction and then putrefaction. However, reduced food quantity can produce weakness.

Excess of food produces coolness unless it putrefies, then it gives heat because it is generated by abnormal heat and produces abnormal heat

## Light and Heavy foods

Light food is that which produces thin blood while heavy food is that which produces thick blood. These foods can be rich or poor in nutrition.

Examples of light food, rich in nutrition, is half fried or boiled yolk of eggs. They are rich in nutrition because most of its essence gets converted to nutrients.

Examples of heavy food which is poor in nutrition is cheese, dried meat and egg-plant. This is because only a small portion of these foods actually gets converted into blood.

Examples of light food which is poor in nutrition are legumes with moderate texture and quality, and fruits such as apples, pomegranates.

Examples of heavy food which is rich in nutrition are boiled eggs and beef.

The above foods produce either good or bad chyme.

Ibn Sina says:

Examples of the light food which is rich in nutrition and good in chyme are half fried yolk of egg, extract of meat.

Examples of the light food which is rich in nutrition but bad in chyme are lungs and meat of young ones of pigeons.

Examples of light food which is poor in nutrition and good in chyme are lettuce, apple and pomegranate.

Examples of light food which is poor in nutrition and bad in chyme are radish, mustard, and most of the vegetables.

Examples of heavy food which is rich in nutrition and good in chyme are boiled egg and meat of a year old lamb.

Examples of heavy food which is rich in nutrition and bad in chyme are beef and flesh of duck.

Examples of heavy food which is poor in nutrition and bad in chyme are dried meat.

## **References**

*Ibn Sina's Canon of Medicine* (10th century).

Abu-Asab, M., Amri, H. and Micozzi, M. (2013) *Avicenna's medicine: A new translation of the 11th-century canon with practical applications for integrative health care*, Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press.

## **Further reading and online resources**

*Ibn Sina's Canon of Medicine* (10th century).