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## Concept of insomnia (Sahr) and its basic principles of management in unani system of medicine: A review

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### Abstract

The whole world is facing very serious problems with life style disorders and non- infectious diseases like diabetes mellitus, hypertension, psychological disorders, osteoarthritis, spondylosis, diabetic foot, muscular disorders etc. now days, insomnia (sahr) is a common problem throughout the world, and is defined as difficulty in initiating or maintaining sleep or non-restorative sleep, associated with significant morbidity. Unani scholar and researcher clear that Sleeplessness increases with age due to increase formation of melancholic humor in advance stages. Sleep strengthens vital force (Quwā Haywāniyya), pneuma (Rūh), and promotes proper digestion of food. Sleep provides Freshness of organs by abolishing tiredness and prepares the body for further work which is necessary for normal health and maintenance of the power of body [1]. Insomnia leads to stress, fatigue, anxiety, excessive resolution of body fluid which leads to reduction of defensive mechanism of the body thus it leads to health deterioration. In this review paper we aims to define insomnia, what are the causes of insomnia, sign and symptoms of insomnia, complications and basic principle of management.

**Keywords:** Sahr, pneuma, humor

### Introduction

The word sleep is originated from Old English slēp (noun), slēpan (verb), which means the natural periodic suspension of consciousness during which the powers of the body are restored [3]. In Cambridge dictionary sleep is defined as the resting state in which the body is not active and the mind is unconscious [4]. And insomnia is defined as the condition of being unable to sleep, over a period of time. In Unani Medicine insomnia is termed as Saher and its one of the important factor (Yaqza) mentioned in six essential factors (Asbāb Sitta Darūriyya) of life, which works throughout the life in every individual. These essentials factors are; Hawā' al-muhit (environmental air) (b) Ma'kul-o-Mashrūb (food and drinks), (c) Harkat-o-Sukūn badnī (bodily movement and repose), (d) Harkat-o-Sukūn nafsānī (psychic movement and repose), (e) Nawm-o-Yaqza (sleep and wakefulness) and (f) Istifrāgh wa Ihtibās (evacuation and retention) [6]. Temperament (Mizāj) is one of the basics or fundamentals of Unani system of medicine. Every human being has been furnished a specific temperament through which an individual performs his functions properly. If it is disturbed, body becomes more susceptible to develop such diseases having same temperament as that of an individual. Beside the principle of temperament this system of medicine also based on humoral theory, which states that health is attributed to the equilibrium of akhlāt (Humors) in the body, while disease is due to the quantitative and qualitative changes in it. The concept of Sahr (insomnia) is primarily noticeable as a result of the imbalance in the temperament of brain (due to hot and dry temperament) and secondarily due to some other medical disorders.

**Historical background:** Various scholars have described the definition, causes, clinical features and complications of Insomnia (sahr) in their books. Ibn Sina states that the excessive awakening is known as sahr. Hakeem Azam Khan defines its meaning and says that the causes of insomnia is mainly due to simple hotness and dryness (harārat wa yabūsat) in brain, and little's due to morbid phlegm, yellow and black bile. Jurjani says that sleeplessness and excessive awakening is called sahr. Allama Kabīruddin states that, Insomnia leads to dissolution of power which weakens the brain and also causes poor digestion [2].

**Etiology:** Insomnia is more common among women, middle-aged and older adults, shift workers, and patients with medical or psychiatric disorders [7]. About one in three people has regular difficulty in sleep in their lives. Approximately 50% of older adults complain of

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Difficulty in sleeping. Poor sleep results in increased risk of significant morbidity and mortality [9]. The disease is considered as multifactorial in etiology, but primarily due to imbalance in the temperament of the brain which becomes hot and dry. Secondarily this disease occurs due to some other medical or mental illness. The following etiological factors are involved in the causation of insomnia; Psychiatric disorders such as depressive illness, any anxiety, and fear and substance misuse [10]. Emotional disorders, stress, physiological discomfort like indigestion, pain excess amount of yellow and black bile in the body, formation of morbid phlegm, high body temperature and even environmental condition like noise, light, or extreme temperatures (hot or cold) that interfere with sleep stress etc. are probably the principle causes of insomnia. Acidic or alkaline nature of Akhlāt-e-Badan (body humors), Harārat wa Yabūsat, Aurame Sawdawi or Sartani of brain [8]. Exaggerates sleeplessness especially in old aged persons brain [5]. Sleep apnea, snoring, periodic leg movements and restless legs syndrome are the frequent complaints of older people responsible for disturbance in their sleep.

According to Unani doctrine, normal sleep will occur because of a particular rutūbat but each and every rutūbat is not responsible for inducing sleep. It is the only yabūsat which is responsible for deranging the brain temperament as a result disequilibrium of naum (sleep) will occur, leading finally to sahr. Excessive use of hot and dry food materials leads to formation of hot and dry humors, which is responsible for causation of insomnia [8]. Persistent insomnia can produce an important burden for the individual and for society, as evidenced by reduced quality of life, impaired daytime functioning and increased absenteeism at work. The basic mechanism beside these is the dryness and hotness of the organs (mainly brain) by dissolving Akhlāt (humors), Harārat gharīziyya (innate heat) and Rūh (pneuma) [11]. Which leads to dilution of power (quw'a) [12]. Persistent insomnia is also associated with increased risks of depression and chronic use of hypnotics [13].

**Symptoms:** Sleepiness during the day, Subjective feeling of delayed sleep onset, disturbed sleep maintenance or persistent non restorative sleep, General tiredness, Irritability, Problems with concentration or memory. Insomniacs also complaints foul smelling from mouth, increase appetite, indigestion, dull colour of skin [2].

**Diagnosis:** The diagnosis of insomnia is based on a subjective complaint of difficulties falling or staying asleep or nonrestorative sleep that is associated with marked distress or significant daytime impairments. Several indicators are useful to quantify the severity and clinical significance of insomnia. Recognition, that psychological and behavioral factors play an important role in insomnia.

**Complication:** Disorientation, Muscle fatigue, and spasm in the body. Production of abnormal biliary and melancholic humors. Excess dissolution of pneuma (rūh) and innate heat (Harārat gharīziyya) which leads to disturbed digestion and decreases the production of blood and rūh [2].

**Basic principles of treatment:** In present day scenario the most common conditions regarded for visiting a clinic or hospital includes headache, anxiety, insomnia, stress and depression [14].

**1. Removal of cause:** In insomniacs patient firstly remove the predisposing and precipitating factors such as food like astringent and salty, which are responsible for formation of yellow/ black bile and phlegm (balgham shor). Avoid heavy and strenuous exercise to reduce dryness of the brain. Avoid tea or coffee in night time and take light meal 4-5 hours before sleep [15].

**2. Correction of dryness of brain:** following regimes are used for correction of dryness of the brain;

(a) '**Ilāj bi'l ghidhā**' (**Dietotherapy**): murattib and barid diets are used in the management of insomnia.

(b) '**ilāj bi'l Tadbir** (**Regimenal Therapy**): **Natūl (irrigation)**: for moistening the brain, ancient physicians used this regimen in the treatment of insomnia [16].

**Dalk (Massage):** It is a systematic manipulation of body tissue with the hands or tools. In Unani system of medicine medicated massage is indicated for the promotion of health as well as therapeutic purposes mainly in Psychosomatic and Neurological disorders such as insomnia.

**Riyādat (Exercise):** Physical exercise has great importance for maintenance of good health and for treating certain diseases. It relieves from insomnia, depression and anxiety.

(c) '**ilāj bi'l dawā**' (**Pharmacotherapy**): Nardostachys jatamansi was used by Sushruta to produce tranquility and sedation in conditions of insomnia and restlessness (Handa 1994). According to Ibne Sina, Kuhal munawwim is excellent for sahr. Opium is very useful for those insomniacs, who have lost their powers due to sahr, opium induces sleep and thereby restores lost powers. Thorn apple (Datura stramonium) in small dose induces moderate sleep. Compound formulation like Sharbate banafsha, sharbate khashkhash and sharbat kahu are very beneficial in insomnia. Roghane Zamad khawab aawer, zamad munawwim are very useful as paste when locally applied on forehead. Roghane kaddu, and Roghane laboob sabaa are effective in sahr [17, 18]. Bacopa monniera has been used as a mild sedative, for insomnia epilepsy and other neurological disorders [19].

**Sahr Yabis-** Roghan-e-Kaddu, Roghan-e-Qinnab, Roghan-e-Banafsha, Roghan-e-Badam, Roghan-e-Khashkhash, Roghan-e-Laboob Sab'a, Roghan-e-Kahu [20, 21].

**Conclusion:** Ancient Unani Physician like Hippocrates, Rāzi, Ibne Sīna etc described the Sahr and its management. Hippocrates describe that insomnia produces disorientation and spasm [22]. Now a days due to various psychological and environmental condition (like anxiety, depression, noise, mental illness, and chronic diseases), its one of the leading problem in the world. According to Unani doctrine, normal sleep will occur because of a particular rutūbat (moistness of body), and dryness (yabūsat) is responsible for altered temperament of body. Dryness is also due to excessive hotness of the body. Dryness and hotness of organs (mainly brain) leads to dissolution of normal humors of body and formation of abnormal humors like morbid phlegm, biliary and melancholic humor. Correction of dryness of brain with help of diet, various regimes (like massage, exercise, irrigation therapy) and Various Unani drugs are very effective in management of Insomnia.

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