



THE IMPORTANCE OF RADA'AT (BREASTFEEDING) IN UNANI SYSTEM OF MEDICINE: AN EXPLORATION OF MATERNAL AND INFANTS WELL BEING

By

Rukhsar^{1*}, Ataullah Khan², Absar Ahmad³, Mohammad Saquib³, Umme Kulsoom⁴

¹Post Graduate Scholar, ²Professor & H.O.D., ³Reader, ⁴Lecturer

Department of Tahaffuzi-wa-Samaji Tib, State Takmeel-ut-Tib College & Hospital, Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh- 226002



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Abstract

The World Health Organization recommends exclusive breastfeeding as a cost-effective and beneficial way to protect baby health throughout life. It has unique biological and emotional impacts on both mother and newborn. Breastfeeding holds a vital place in the *Unani* system of medicine, deeply rooted in its holistic philosophy of health and well-being. *Unani* scholars have long emphasized the significance of *Halaat-e-Tifl* (infant conditions) and *Hifz-e-Sehat* (preservation of health) through natural means, among which breastfeeding is considered the most essential for early nourishment and immunity. This paper explores classical *Unani* perspectives on breastfeeding, highlighting its physiological, psychological, and immunological benefits for both infant and mother. It examines the ideal duration of breastfeeding, qualities of optimal milk, and maternal dietary guidelines to ensure healthy lactation. Moreover, the paper draws parallels between ancient *Unani* recommendations and modern scientific findings, underscoring their relevance in contemporary maternal and child health practices. The Arabic term "*Tibb*" translates to "medicine," whereas the name "*Unani*" is thought to originate in Greek. *Unani* physicians have also given importance to these measures and discussed Newborn, infant and childcare in detail. They have mentioned about breastfeeding and colostrum and their importance for maintenance of good health in maternal, infants and children care. *Abu Sahal Maseehi* in his book *Kitabul Miya't* and *Ali Ibn-e-Abbas Majoosi* in his treatise *Kamil-ul-Sanat* compared milk to blood. The review paper successfully sheds light on the important role of breastfeeding in *Unani* medicine. It offers a comprehensive view of how *Unani* medicine approaches maternal and infant health, emphasizing the significance of breastfeeding beyond just nutrition.

Keywords: *Rada'at*, Breastfeeding, Infant well-being, Maternal Health, *Unani* Medicine

INTRODUCTION

Breastfeeding has major health benefits for both mothers and children. The World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Children Funds (UNICEF) has recommended that all neonates to be breastfed within 1 hour of birth and also advised early initiation of breastfeeding including exclusive breastfeeding up to 6 months of life prevents around 20% newborn deaths and 13% under 5 deaths.^{1,2,3} In India only 65% of children are exclusive breastfed and 45% receive breastfeeding within one hour of birth.^{2,4} Breastfeeding is one of the most effective strategies to keep a child healthy and alive. WHO recommendations, less than half of infants under 6 months old are exclusively breastfed. National data from National survey family health-5 (2019-2021) 63.7% children

are exclusive breastfed. Breast milk is the best nourishment for newborns. It is safe, hygienic, and contains antibodies that defend against a variety of common pediatric diseases. Breastmilk provides all of the energy and nutrients that an infant requires in the first few months of life, and it continues to give up to half or more of a child's nutritional needs in the second half of the first year, and up to one-third in the second year.^{5,6} It has every nutrient needed for healthy growth and development of a baby from birth to 6 months of life. The World Health Organization (WHO) also recommend continued breastfeeding up to two years of age⁷ or beyond and it has been estimated that optimal breastfeeding of children younger than two years, could annually save the lives of over 80,000 children under five years of age. As per National family health survey^{8,9} ensuring exclusive breastfeeding for



six months is the most effective intervention known to minimize infant and child deaths, with the potential to cut the under-five mortality rate by 13%. In order to achieve the greatest possible benefits, breastfeeding must be exclusive (that is, it must consist solely of breast milk, with the exception of vitamin drops if necessary), started within an hour of delivery, and sustained for the first six months.^{10,11,12} A newborn's primary source of sustenance is human milk, which is widely acknowledged to be good for the developing youngster. The development of gut immunity, the transmission of various immune components, and the anti-inflammatory effects are some benefits of nursing. Human Milk might be crucial for the intestinal development of the baby as well as for promoting immune system activation.^{13,14,15}

In classical literature of Greco-Arab Medical System, Breastfeeding is known as *Rada'at* (رضاعت). Many *Unani* scholars such as *Ibn sina*, *Buqrat*, *Jalinoos* and many more have emphasized much upon importance of breastfeeding and colostrum to prevent the infant from various infection and diseases. According to *Unani* philosophy, Human body is composed of four khilt (humours) viz., *dam* (sanguinous), *balgham* (phlegmatic), *safra* (bilious), *sauda* (melancholic); In *Unani* medicine, milk production (*rada'at*) is considered to be a product of the "*khilt*" (or humoral balance) within the body. The concept of *khilt* refers to the balance of the four humors — *Dam* (blood), *Balgham* (phlegm), *Safra* (yellow bile) and *Sauda* (black bile) — and the qualities of hot, cold, wet, and dry that influence various physiological processes.^{16,17} Colostrum, or first milk; also known as *Al-Liba* (اللباء) and *Samagah* (صمغ) which is secreted up to 3 days after a child birth.¹⁸ Colostrum is yellowish in color and is rich in *lahmiyat* (proteins) and *shahmiyat* (fats) for the nutrition of child. About *rada'at*, *Jalinoos* said that proper diet should be given to mother for good production of milk he advised (*jau* or *gandum* ki roti) twice a day and avoids spices, sour and garam masala like *heeng*, *rai*, *ajwain* etc to mother because these all are produced *mirgi* like symptoms to baby and baby skin prone to pustules and macules also.^{16,17,19}

METHODOLOGY

The review adopts a qualitative approach, synthesizing classical *Unani* texts with modern medical understanding. The paper draws upon historical manuscripts, scholarly interpretations, and interviews with contemporary *Unani* practitioners to explore how breastfeeding is viewed in this traditional system. The methodology incorporates both theoretical and practical insights into *Unani* practices, analyzing them within the context of current health standards.

UNANI DESCRIPTION

Buqrat (Hippocrates) established the fundamental principles of this technique and given the concept of *Akhlat*. In *Unani* system highly supports breastfeeding, as it is a holistic method of caring for an infant. Milk production according to *Khilt* in *Unani* Medicine:

Humoral Balance (Khilt):

1. **Dam (Blood):** *Dam* plays a crucial role in the production of milk. *Unani* physicians believe that milk is formed as a result of the transformation of blood into a liquid form that is suitable for the nourishment of the child. The blood, specifically its qualities, must be in a balanced state for optimal milk production.^{16,20}
2. **Balgham (Phlegm):** *Balgham* is considered to contribute to the consistency and quality of milk. Excessive *balgham*, however, is believed to result in milk that is thick, heavy, or of poor quality. Therefore, maintaining a balance of *phlegm* is essential for producing nourishing milk.
3. **Safra (Yellow Bile):** *Safra* is related to the warmth and digestive power within the body. A balanced amount of bile helps in proper digestion, which in turn aids in the formation of nutritious milk. If there is an imbalance in *Safra* (either too much or too little), it can negatively affect milk production and quality.
4. **Sauda (Black Bile):** *Sauda* is believed to have a cooling effect on the body. In *Unani*, excess *Sauda* is seen as harmful to both the mother's health and milk production. Imbalance in *Sauda* can lead to conditions like dryness or depletion, which can result in reduced milk production.^{16,21} *Buqrat* viewed breastfeeding as a natural continuation of intrauterine nourishment. He believed that just as the fetus receives nutrition through the umbilical cord in the womb, breast milk provides a natural, tailored sustenance for the newborn after birth. He emphasized that breast milk is the first and best food for infants. If milk is unhealthy, excessively hot, or bilious, children can also acquire stones from it. This persistent notion led to the misconception that infectious illnesses, such as smallpox or measles, only ever affect children once.^{16,21}

JALINOOS (Galen says) The finest food for a child is their mother's milk, therefore nursing guidelines are crucial for mothers. Since the mother's milk is the closest to the blood that the fetus grew from, he suggested that newborns be fed it frequently. Breastfeeding should only be done two or three times a day in the beginning. Carrot seeds and other suitable vegetables are quite helpful if milk is scarce. Additionally, fennel roots and seeds, as well as black cumin seeds, were added to the soup. According to the first studies, milk production is constant throughout the day, but the volume of milk is usually higher in the morning and gradually decreases as the day goes on. To speed milk synthesis and increase daily milk production the key is to remove more milk from the breast and to do this quickly and frequently so that less milk accumulates in the breast between feeding. The milk of its mother is the most suitable food for the child. The mother must be healthy. If the mother is sick, then the milk of such a midwife should be given, Who has these qualities-The height should be correct. The body should be strong and also with good morals. The age should be from twenty-five to one year.

Her child should be one or two years old. The diet of the midwife should be moderate and light. The food should include animals and birds.^{22,23}

According to *Sheikh Ibn Sina*, breastfeeding should be avoided if the milk has a tendency to be sour. To promote milk flow and lessen the burden on the infant, a tiny amount of milk should be expressed prior to each feeding, particularly in the morning. Additional stimulation of milk production can be achieved by massaging the breasts. Nursing moms should eat healthily, exercise moderately, and stay away from vegetables that can interfere with lactation, such as watercress, mustard, wild basil, and mint. It is crucial to get enough sleep and to refrain from strenuous labor or overdoing it. Sweet wines and grape juice, as well as getting enough sleep, are good for nursing moms if there are no contraindications. The baby usually benefits from a little crying before feeding.¹⁶

Fiṭām (Weaning): Soft, readily chewable foods should be added to milk feeds gradually when the baby's incisor teeth start to erupt. Two years should be the average length of time spent nursing.

Murziyah (Wet-nurse): A wet nurse should be hired if the mother is unable to nurse the child for personal reasons, health concerns, or milk abnormalities. Certain requirements must be met by the wet nurse in terms of age, physical health, breast health, milk quality, and the amount of time since her own delivery. Her own child should ideally be about the same age as the one she is nursing. The wet nurse should live a healthy lifestyle that includes moderate activity and a diet rich in nutritious milk, such as wheat, fruit, lamb, or goat meat from sensitive animals. Sexual activity should be avoided during the nursing time since it can activate menstrual blood, taint the milk, lower its quantity, and increase the likelihood of a subsequent pregnancy. Pregnancy when nursing diverts mother nutrients away from the breastfeeding baby, resulting in insufficient nutrition for both the baby and the fetus. A wet nurse's ideal age range is 25 to 35 years old, when women are at their peak physical strength. Her milk should be of moderate volume and consistency, with a white hue and no greenish, yellowish, or reddish tinge. The milk should have a pleasant odor and a sweet flavor, with no bitterness, salinity, or sourness. It should be uniform, ample, and not too watery, thick, cheesy.¹⁶

INFANTS AND MATERNAL HEALTH BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING

A. Infant Health:

Globally, around 5.6 million children died before reaching their fifth birthday, of those 2.6 million or 46% died in the first 30 days of life. Approximately 7000 newborn died every day most of which occurred within 7 days after birth.²

Early initiation of breastfeeding and exclusive breastfeeding for 6 months of life prevents neonatal death and can reduce to neonatal infections like sepsis, tetanus, pneumonia and diarrhea.^{11,24}

According to *Unani* principles, The mother's breast milk is the best source of nutrition for the infant. The mother's milk, which is essentially a continuation of the nourishment the baby acquired from her menstrual blood while she was still in the womb, is naturally the most appropriate for the baby's growth and development. If the milk is sour, breastfeeding should be avoided. A tiny bit of milk should be expressed before each feeding, particularly in the morning, to stimulate milk flow and relieve tension on the baby. The baby often feels calmer after breastfeeding.¹⁶ Breastfeeding also helps in the development of a strengthening the immune system in infants, preventing diseases and promoting proper physical and cognitive mental growth and improving infant child morbidity and mortality.^{6,25}

1. **Nutritional Benefits:** Breastfeeding offers a wide range of benefits for infants, both short-term and long-term. Here are some key ones:
 - a. Nutritional Benefits, Perfect nutrition: Breast milk contains the ideal balance of nutrients for a baby's growth and development.
 - b. Easily digestible: It's easier for infants to digest compared to formula. Colostrum lowers the danger of microbial translocation, speeds up intestinal development, and increases infection resistance.¹⁰
2. **Immune System Boost:**
 - a. Antibodies: Breast milk contains antibodies (especially IgA) that help protect infants from infections.
 - c. Lower risk of illness: Breastfed babies have fewer respiratory infections, ear infections, and diarrhea.⁶
3. **Developmental Benefits :** Brain development: Breastfeeding is linked to slightly higher IQ scores in later childhood.^{26,27}

Bonding: Skin-to-skin contact and close interaction help strengthen the emotional bond between mother and baby.

Psychological and Emotional Impact: The act of breastfeeding in *Unani* medicine is not only viewed from a physiological perspective but also from an emotional standpoint. The practice is seen as essential for strengthening the bond between mother and child, fostering psychological well-being for both.²⁷

4. **Long-term Health:** Lower risk of chronic diseases: Breastfed babies may have a reduced risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and certain childhood cancers. Healthier gut microbiome: Breastfeeding supports the development of beneficial gut bacteria.¹⁰
5. **Lower Risk of SIDS** Studies show that breastfeeding lowers the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).^{24,28}

B. Maternal Benefits: *Unani* medicine views health as a balance of the four humors: Dam, Balgham, Safra, And Sauda. Breastfeeding is seen as both natural and beneficial, contributing to this balance. Breastfeeding confers significant physiological, psychological, and long-term health benefits for mothers. Research evidence highlights the following key maternal advantages:

1. **Tafreeh-i-badan (Body relief):** Breastfeeding helps release the excess production of milk, maintaining the body's balance.¹⁶
2. **Tanqeeyah-i-mawad (Elimination of waste):** It helps in excreting waste fluids from the mother's body, thus detoxifying it.^{16,21,22}
3. **Prevention of Humoral Imbalance:** Keeps the temperament (*mizaj*) in check by avoiding stagnation of milk and regulating hormonal changes.¹⁶
4. **Prevention of diseases:** Prevents breast engorgement, mastitis, and other related disorders.²⁸
5. **Restoration of uterine health:** Believed to help contract the uterus post-delivery and reduce lochia (postpartum discharge) quickly. Breastfeeding is believed to help the mother regain her strength after childbirth, maintain a balance of the humors, and reduce the risk of postnatal complications such as uterine infections or excessive bleeding. *Unani* texts advocate for the role of breastfeeding in enhancing maternal health and rejuvenating vital organs.²⁸
6. **Metabolic Regulation:** Breastfeeding enhances maternal metabolic health, contributing to improved glucose homeostasis and insulin sensitivity, particularly in women with a history of gestational diabetes. Reduces chances of type 2 diabetes and heart disease in the long term.^{26,29}
7. **Weight Management:** Lactation increases energy expenditure, which may support postpartum weight loss and reduce long-term obesity risk.^{30,31}
8. **Psychological & Emotional well-being:** Enhances the mother-child bond, contributing to the mother's mental and emotional stability. Breastfeeding is associated with reduced incidence of postpartum depression, likely mediated by hormonal mechanisms (oxytocin, prolactin) and enhanced maternal-infant bonding.³²
9. **Cardiovascular Diseases:** Longer durations of breastfeeding are associated with lower risks of hypertension, hyperlipidemia, and cardiovascular events.³³
10. **Lactational Amenorrhea:** Exclusive breastfeeding delays the return of ovulation, contributing to natural birth spacing through the Lactational Amenorrhea Method.
11. **Hormonal support:** Oxytocin release helps uterus contract and return to pre-pregnancy size. Prolactin helps in emotional bonding and reduces stress.^{30,31,34}
12. **Reduced risk of diseases:** Lowers risk of Breast and Ovarian cancers.^{29,33,34}

CONCLUSION

Overall, the research review paper successfully sheds light on the important role of breastfeeding in *Unani* medicine. It offers a comprehensive view of how *Unani* medicine approaches maternal and infant health, emphasizing the significance of breastfeeding beyond just nutrition. By

blending ancient traditions with contemporary health issues, this paper provides an important resource for scholars, healthcare providers, and practitioners of traditional medicine. Future research could build on this work by further integrating modern scientific findings with traditional *Unani* perspectives to offer a more comprehensive understanding of breastfeeding's role in maternal and infant health. The *Unani* system of medicine places significant emphasis on breastfeeding as a foundational practice for promoting maternal and child health. Rooted in centuries-old principles, *Unani* teachings highlight the nutritional, immunological, and psychological benefits of breast milk, aligning closely with modern medical findings. This exploration reinforces that breastfeeding is not only a natural and essential process but also a therapeutic practice supported by *Unani* concepts of temperament (*mizaj*), humoral balance and holistic care. By integrating *Unani* perspectives with contemporary public health strategies, there is great potential to enhance awareness, encourage traditional practices, and improve overall maternal and child well-being in culturally relevant and sustainable ways.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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