



Review Article

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Eczema (Nar-e-Farsi) and its line of treatment in Unani and contemporary medicine

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Abstract

Eczema which is now termed as a type of dermatitis is an age-old disease described and treated by unani and modern dermatologists since long. In medieval unani literature the term nar e farsi used for this disease which is Persian term means 'fire of Persia' it indicates the burning symptoms related to this disease. Unani tibb relates this disease to 'safra' i.e. yellow bile humor. The cause of the disease is not yet ascertained as some says irritation some relates this to atopy and contact allergies. Besides this curative treatment is still in obscure. Treatment is also not yet provided by Unani atibba (Unani Physicians) but they mention some principles to treat this chronic disease which make this less cumbersome and symptoms become largely abolished. Several types of drugs as musaffi-e-dam, muhallil e awram and soothing oils applied to treat the condition. Therapies are also used to alleviate the symptoms.

Keywords: Eczema, Nar-e-farsi, Musaffi-e-dam, Muhallil.

INTRODUCTION

The word Eczema is derived from a Greek word for boiling means tiny vesicles. These tiny vesicles are often seen at the early stage of the disease. Eczema, the most common type of dermatitis, also known as atopic dermatitis. Dermatitis means inflammation of the skin and is, therefore, strictly speaking a broader term than Eczema which is just one of several possible types of skin inflammation^[1]. Some dermatologists also use the term eczematous dermatitis.

In Unani medicine this disease is termed as Nar-e-Farsi as some of the atibba (Unani physicians) called this disease as of Persian origin. According to modern dermatologists, it is an inflammatory allergic disorder of the skin called dermatitis which may have various etiologies. Dermatitis may occur due to contact allergy or any type of irritation over the skin or it may result due to atopy. That's why these three broad categories are common types of dermatitis. In other words, it is defined as a catarrhal inflammation of a sensitive skin. Besides these three types, some less common types are also prevalent namely dyshidrotic eczema or pompholyx small vesicles are formed over palmer skin, neurodermatitis which have one or two patches results after repeated itching another is nummular eczema a coin like lesions over the skin one more is seborrheic dermatitis usually present over the skin where more sebaceous glands present like scalp and nose, and some time stasis dermatitis occurs in the legs and ulcer may form due to insufficiency of the venous circulation. Females and children are more commonly affected^[14].

The term "Eczema" is a Greek word made after joining Ec and Zeo. Where Ec means to join and Zeo means to boil something. So the word eczema means to boil comprising two parts "Ec" means 'out' and "Zeo" means 'boil'. So eczema means boiling out. The symptoms in this disease are the cause of this name as signs of inflammations and itching are prominent.

The terms 'Dermatitis' and 'Eczema' usually speak interchangeably. Some authors, however, prefer to use the term 'dermatitis' to denote all types of skin inflammations. They take the eczema as a type of dermatitis which is a broader term caters to eczema in it too.

Epidemiology: around 10% of people are affected with some type of eczema in the US. As far as the Asians are concerned around 13% of people are affected by this disease.

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WHAT IS UNANI CONCEPT

In old Unani classical books, there is not any compiled description of disease which can be related to eczema but some books mentioned it. As one famous term used is Nar e Farsi which is a Persian word that literally means the 'fire of Persia' as this disease is thought to be common among Persians so the name is given according to Ibne Abi Sadiq. Some of the atibba like Nafees said that the first person who treated this disease was a Persian tabeeb that's why the name nar e Farsi is given ^[4].

In Indian subcontinent several terms are being used for the disease two of the common terms is akoota and chajan. But nowadays these terms are becoming obsolete very fast as eczema is the commonest term used even among illiterate masses.

Unani physicians ascertain this disease to Safra or yellow bile. As per classical Unani literature, it is caused by Yellow bile (Safra) mixed with a small quantity of black bile (Sauda) mixed with sanguine (Dam) and usually occurs during epidemics. Some said Safra and sauda-e-muhtariqa (black bile) are the causes ^[11].

Presentation of Eczema painful eruptions, intense itching, and burning on the site of the lesion. Lesions may rupture and ooze permanently. Some atibba described the lesions as taoosi shutout as they resemble peacock color. Crusts also form on eruptions as they may be dry or wet and may be associated with fever.

Description of eczema in classical Unani literature

In history, it is mentioned around 2500 years ago, by the Ancient Greek tabib (physician) Buqrat (Hippocrates) was the first who told about the eczema-like condition. He also prescribed treatment for thick and scaly skin ^[15] Pillars of Unani medicine Muhammad Bin Zakariya Razi, Ali Ibn-e- Abbas Majoosi, and Ismail Jurjani mentioned that, in eczema, lesions are vesicular with filled Icons of Unani medicine Ibn-e- Sina, Ibn-e- Hubal Baghdadi, and Ali Ibn-e- Sahal Rabban al Tabari in their treatises mentioned "Nar Farsi," and "Jamra" both as the same disease as a single entity, although some of the atibba differ and described both separately. Ibne Sina said the terms used for various types of busoor, vesicles, or dry scaly skin which may be associated with itching or burning of the skin. Ismail Jurjani said at beginning some redlines appear before eruptions later on fluid-filled vesicles are erupted which felt like burning fire over skin mentioned that. Scales may also shed. Ali Ibn-e- Abbas Majoosi famous Hakeem termed eczema as a type of smallpox the check described eczema under the causes and symptoms of smallpox (check). Abul Mansoor al Hasan al Qamri also relates this disease prime symptom to burning he also described that in this disease blisters that contain fluid are also the presentation of this disease ^[5, 6, 7].

Etiology

According to "Ibn e Abi Sadiq" and Famous Hakeem Ghulam Jilani told that some Asbab-e- Dakhli i.e endogenous causes of eczema are common weakness (Zo'af-e- Aam), weakness of nerves i.e Zo'af-e- Aa'saab, gout i.e Naqras, arthritis i.e iltihab Mafasil, and helminths infestation i.e Deedan-e- Ama'. Famous unani hakim Ismail Jurjani associated this disease with 'Ghalba wa hidden-e- Khoon i.e. blood is full of hot temperament ^[5, 6, 7].

Some of the atibba as Kauser Chandpuri also associate this disease with Safra as severe itching and burning are common symptoms. but some are not gone with this notion as ali Ibn Abbas Majoosi said that affected madda dam is the cause. Hari Chand Multani stated that diabetes mellitus is also one of the predisposing factors for eczema. In a study conducted at the University of Colombo, safravi people are more prone to this condition ^[13].



Figure 1: Eczema on leg

Contemporary medicine etiology is not defined yet although several factors are reported by modern dermatologists. As far as the underlying pathology is concerned dysfunction of the barrier layer of the epidermis is the main cause behind the problem. The proper functioning of the barrier layer of the epidermis is essential for proper skin hydration. This barrier dysfunction of the epidermis leads to dryness of the skin. Various substances including household plastic and synthetic material-made products and chemicals, can more readily penetrate the skin due to this barrier dysfunction. People with eczema have

more susceptibility to infection especially after scratches. People with atopic dermatitis tend to have a more severe inflammatory responses to a variety of allergens ^[2].

Principles of Treatment

Atibba use the term usool e ilaj or kulliyat e ilaj for lines of treatment used to treat any of the diseases ^[16]. Here in eczema the primary principle is to remove fasid madda or morbid material for that Musaffi e dam advice and muaddil-e-safra adwia are the main drugs. The removal of morbid material fasd i.e. bloodletting is also an ideal procedure. Internally laxatives are also given to remove this. To soothe skin, musakkinat is given besides these local applications of emollients also applied. The modern dermatologists told avoidance of allergens like harsh chemicals, soaps, detergents. Besides this keeping, the skin hydrated by applying emollients and moisturizers is highly recommended as dry skin makes the condition worse. They recommend steroids to reduce inflammation. Some of them also used immunosuppressants ^[17, 18, 19].

In all of the skin ailments local applications of the drugs are needed and advised. Lukewarm water is of primary importance it hydrates skin and soothe the also. For this daily washing of the lesion should be done ^[4]. Besides this musakkin, murkhi and mohallil adwia advised which soothe the symptoms, relieve pain and heal inflammatory conditions. For these actions roghan narjeel (oil of *Cocos nucifera*), roghan gul (*Rosa damascene*), roghan zaitoon (*Olea europea*) Roghan e kamela (*Mallotus philippinensis*) is applied. Local application of zimad prepared with zinc oxide (Isfidaj), Litharge (Murdar sang), *Santalum album* Linn. (Sandal Safed) mixed with Arq-e- Gulab or sirka saib (apple cider vinegar) is to be applied they lessen the hikka i.e.itching ^[5, 6].

Local Therapy

- To make the inflammation abolish the locally topical application of Mohallil, musakkin murakhi Mudammil, Murakkhki Drugs are advised to be applied. For example Roghan narjeel, roghan gul Unani atibba emphasised the use of drugs having above-mentioned qualities locally like Roghan-e- Gul (Oil of *Rosa damascene*), Roghan-e- Kameela (Oil of) Roghan-e- Zaitoon (Oil of *Olea europea*). Modern dermatologists recommend phototherapy specially in refractory cases. Coal tar preparations (some use shale tar) are also used as they reduce itching and inflammation ^[5, 6, 18, 19].

CONCLUSION

The common occurrence of eczema needs proper attention which still demands proper and curative treatment. Unani medicine has its own potential to treat and abolish diseases completely without the harmful effects of drugs. So scientific community should explore its potential to alleviate this cumbersome disease. This paper is only to present some of the aspects of disease which may be stimulating effect to do further in eczema's permanent cure.

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