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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POOR DIGESTION AND DISEASE IN PERSPECTIVE OF GRECO-ARAB MEDICINE

KEY WORDS: Digestion; disease; Greco-Arab Medicine; Innate heat; Nutritive Faculty.

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ABSTRACT

Ingested food undergoes extensive stage-wise processing inside the body so that it can provide nourishment to the tissues. This stage-wise processing of food in Greco-Arab medicine is known as digestion. Innate heat plays a vital role in digestion. In Greco-Arab medicine, digestion is a broad term that includes digestion as well as the metabolism of food. Physicians like Galen, Rhazes and Avicenna, etc. believed that good digestion plays a key role in corporal and mental well being. In the classical literature of Greco-Arab medicine various diseases are described that are caused by poor digestion. Several skin diseases like acne as well as mental diseases like depression etc. are related to poor digestion. This relationship between poor digestion and disease is attributed to the production of morbid matter. Relevant literary material is collected from the classical literature of Greco-Arab medicine. Present work is an attempt to analyze and systematize the relevant information regarding the relationship between poor digestion and disease.

INTRODUCTION:

Greco-Arab physicians like Hippocrates, Avicenna, Rhazes have explained process of digestion in a well defined manner in their encyclopaedias. They have given a special focus to relationship of health with proper digestion of food in the body. According to them maintaining an optimum digestion is crucial to the body's overall well being. All other functions can be undermined if body do not properly digest, absorb and eliminate the ingested food. (Sina, YNM)

DIGESTION:

In Greco-Arab Medicine physiology of digestion is slightly different from that of digestive physiology of modern medicine. In Greco-Arab Medicine digestion consists of processing of food in alimentary canal, liver, vessels and finally its assimilation in tissues. These are known as gastric, hepatic, vascular and tissue digestion respectively. (Sina, YNM; Jurjani, 2010; Baghdadi, 2005; Nafis, 1954) This processing of food includes its breakdown into stomach resulting in formation of chyme followed by absorption of chyme from intestines into liver via mesenteric vessels. This chyme is converted into humours in liver after processing. (Rushd, 1987; Majoosi, 2010) These humours are transported to tissues for their nourishment, growth and repair through vessels. During Transportation further processing of humours occurs in the vessels. (Arzani, 2002) In tissues these fluids/humours are assimilated i.e. converted into substance of tissues. Unlike the modern physiology digestion and metabolism are not considered two separate mechanisms in Greco-Arab physiology instead digestion includes metabolism too. The whole process of digestion is accomplished by four faculties. (Sina, YNM; Nafis, 1954) Innate heat is considered as a tool for Nutritive and its subservient faculties. (Masihi, 2008) Innate heat acts as an agent for digestion. For effective digestion innate heat should be at optimum level. (Nafis, 1954) The main aim of digestion of food is to provide nutrition or replenishment to the tissues by production of humours. It is a fact that no absolute food exists. There are always some of the constituents of food which are not acted upon by innate heat. (Masihi, 2008) This kind of constituents turns into wastes. In this way production of some waste is inevitable in each phase of digestion. (Razi, YNM) This production of waste increases when innate heat is weak. Optimum digestion plays a significant role in maintenance of health. (Sina, YNM) All the phases of digestion should be at optimum level to prevent diseases. However, hepatic digestion is most important because of formation of humours in this phase. (Rushd, 1987; Tabri SR, 2010)

DISEASE:

In Greco-Arab Medicine, disease is defined as an abnormal state of the human body in which body's functions gets disturbed. (Sina, YNM; Baghdadi, 2005) This disturbance in function may or may not be associated with any structural abnormality of tissues. Based on presence or absence of structural abnormalities in Greco-Arab Medicine Pathology, diseases are classified as Su'-i-Tarkib and Su'-i-Mizaj respectively. Sometimes, third category of disease i.e. Tafarruq-i-Ittisal is also described, although it is a type of structural abnormality. (Jurjani, 2010; Baghdadi, 2005; Majoosi, 2010) Alteration in Mizaj may or may not be associated with morbid matter. Many times tissue functions get disturbed by simple alteration in Mizaj i.e. Su'-i-Mizaj Sada whereas sometimes disturbance in tissue function may be due to collection of morbid matter i.e. Su'-i-Mizaj Maddi. Morbid matter because of its quality or quantity hampers tissue functions. (Jurjani, 2010; Masihi, 2008) Morbid matter may collect in the same tissue where it produces or may come from another tissue. Ineffective or poor digestion is one of the causes of production of morbid matter. (Sina, YNM)

Causes Of Poor Digestion:

One of the most important causes of poor digestion is inefficient/weak innate heat as it causes weakness of faculties like absorptive, retentive, digestive and expulsive etc. Another important cause of poor digestion is mismatching between food and age, occupation, habit and season's requirement etc. (Nafis, 1954; Masihi, 2008) Any derangement in temperaments of alimentary canal, liver or of whole body will cause weakness of associated faculties resulting in poor digestion. Use of moisture producing foods and practice of moisture producing regimens/activities in excess like sleeping etc. will result in poor digestion. (Sina, YNM)

Poor Digestion And Disease:

Poor digestion is related with production of wastes caused by weak Hararat-e-ghariziyya (innate heat). Weak innate heat causes weakening of digestive faculty. So, larger part of food spares the action of digestive faculty, instead get converted into waste by the action of Hararat-e-ghariba (morbid heat). (Rushd, 1987) Also, expulsive faculty becomes weak due to weak innate heat causing accumulation of these wastes within the tissues. These wastes act as morbid matter upon collection inside the body over a period of time. These may collect inside the any cavity of organ, in the substance of tissue or any other channel available to them like in vessels. (Rushd, 1987; Kabiruddin, YNM) Once they get collected they further

decrease innate heat resulting in more production of wastes. In this way a vicious cycle sets in. This morbid matter needs to be removed from body. Since body has its own protective mechanisms, so to avoid any harm to body in general and to vital organs in particular, many a time morbid matters are expelled out of the body by expulsive faculty through natural passages or orifices, or simply transferred from vital organs to other organs, hard to soft organ or to the organs having tendency to attract morbid matter like skin etc. (Sina, YNM; Jurjani, 2010) If body is unable to expel morbid matter out of the body due to weakness of expulsive faculty then the morbid matter gets collected and affects the tissues either by their quality, quantity or by both and resulting in Su'-i-Mizaj Maddi. (Rushd, 1987)

Digestion, being a series of action, any disturbance in its one phases will affect the next phase e.g. Poor gastric digestion results in production of abnormal chyme (not good in quality). (Arzani, 2002) This type of chyme is capable of causing diseases in two ways; One, by forming excess vapour. These vapours ascend towards the brain and cause disturbance in various psychic functions. (Razi, 2008; Razi, 2004; Tabri AH, 1997) Second, this type of chyme will not transform into humours of good quality. Such humours are not suitable for tissue nourishment. Derangement in Mizaj of tissues occurs if they are nourished by such humours e.g. Poor hepatic digestion may result in formation of phlegmatic blood. Since every organ derives its nutrition from humours so temperament of organs will become phlegmatic due to availability of phlegmatic blood to them. Since humours transform into approximate principle after vascular digestion, so, any disturbance in the vascular digestion prevents transformation of humours into approximate principle instead, they turn into abnormal humours and get accumulated. Accumulation of these humours, give rise to various cardio vascular disorders. (Sina, YNM) Many scholars believed that poor tissue digestion may result in various skin diseases. (Jurjani, 2010) Sometimes, morbid matter could not get a way out then transferred to skin for its removal. They get trapped in the skin pores and result in skin eruptions. (Sina, YNM; Jurjani, 2010)

How To Improve Digestion:

Improvement in digestion can be achieved by improving innate heat. It is better to avoid over eating and keeping a considerable gap between two meals so that previous meal get digested before intake of next meal. (Nafis, 1954) Quantity and quality of food should be taken according to individual's requirement in respect of age, occupation, habit and season etc. (Sina, YNM) Avoidance of over thinking or worry, moderate physical exercise and a good and timely sleep help to improve digestion. (Jurjani, 2010; Baghdadi, 2005)

CONCLUSION:

Process of digestion depends upon quality of ingested food and condition of digestive faculty of the person. Bad quality of food and weak digestive faculty results in incomplete processing of food i.e. poor digestion. (Sina, YNM) Part of food that left unprocessed turns into waste or morbid matter. These morbid matters by their quality, quantity, nature, location and rate of elimination etc. produce various diseases. (Rushd, 1987; Tabri SR, 2010; Kabiruddin, YNM)

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