

Review Article

A conceptual framework of diet and its classification in Unani medicine

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ABSTRACT

Diet (*Ghidhā'*) occupies a central place in Unani medicine, serving not only as a source of nourishment but also as a fundamental means of preserving health and maintaining the body's temperamental balance (*I'tidāl-e-Mizāj*). Classical Unani scholars regarded dietary regulation as the first line of both disease prevention and treatment. According to Unani principles, the human body undergoes continuous metabolic change (*Taḥallul*), resulting in the constant depletion of tissues that must be replenished through appropriate nutrition (*Badal Mā Yataḥallal*). Food is transformed through the process of *Istihāla* by *Quwwat Ghādhīya* into *Akhlāt* (humours), which provide nourishment and support physiological functions. Unani literature classifies diet using multiple parameters, including the nature of the humours produced, nutritional value (*Quwwat-e-Taghdhiya*), quality of *Kaymūs* (Chyme), rate of digestion (*Hazm*) and absorption (*Nufūz*), temperament (*Kayfiyāt*), and production of waste (*Fuzūlāt*). Foods are further categorized as *Ghidhā'*, *Dawā'*, *Ghidhā' Dawā'*, and *Dawā' Ghidhā'*, reflecting their nutritional and therapeutic aspects. This paper reviews the classical Unani concept of diet and its systematic classification, highlighting its relevance in maintaining temperamental balance (*I'tidāl-e-Mizāj*) and promoting health. By revisiting these traditional dietary principles, the study emphasizes their potential value in contemporary preventive healthcare and integrative medicine.

Keywords: Diet, Dietotherapy, *Ghidhā'*, *Mizāj*, Nutrition, *Quwwat Ghādhīya*, Unani medicine

INTRODUCTION

Diet (*Ghidhā'*) is fundamental to human health and well-being. Diet reflects not only what we eat but also how it influences the body's overall functioning.¹ In Unani medicine, *Ghidhā'* is regarded as a primary means of nourishment (*Taghdhiya*) and plays a central role in maintaining balance (*I'tidāl-e-Mizāj*) and supporting normal physiological functions.²

According to Unani concepts, the human body is in a constant state of metabolic turnover, where continuous breakdown of tissues (*Taḥallul*) occurs due to internal metabolic processes and external factors. This ongoing loss is naturally compensated through food intake, a process known as *Badal Mā Yataḥallal*. The body, being

composed of *Arkān Arba'a* (fire, air, water, and earth), requires food with similar elemental qualities to ensure proper assimilation and utilization. Food undergoes transformation through *Istihāla* (metabolism), under the action of *Quwwat Ghādhīya* (nutritive faculty), which converts it into substances compatible with body tissues. As each tissue has its own temperament (*Mizāj*), its nutritional requirements also differ. The principle of *Mushābihat* (similarity) ensures that appropriate dietary substances help maintain tissue integrity, strength, and overall balance. Before becoming fully assimilated, food exists as *Ghidhā'-e-Bil Quwwa* (potential nutriment). Through the action of *Quwwat Mughayyira Saniya*, it is converted into *Akhlāt* (humours) and ultimately becomes *Ghidhā'-e-Haqiqi* (true nutriment), which directly nourishes the tissues and sustains normal bodily functions.^{3,4}

Recognizing the diverse effects of diet, Unani scholars have classified *Ghidhā'* on several bases, including the quality of humours produced, nutritional value (*Quwwat-e-Taghdiya*), quality of *Kaymūs*, rate of digestion (*Hazm*) and absorption (*Nufūz*), temperament (*Kayfiyāt*), and production of waste (*Fuzūlāt*).³⁻⁵ This comprehensive classification reflects the holistic and individualized approach of Unani dietetics, which is essential for the preservation of health and the management of diseases. This paper aims to explain the concept and classification of diet (*Ghidhā'*) in Unani medicine in a simple and clear way, and to show how it can help in maintaining a healthy lifestyle and supporting treatment.

LITERATURE SEARCH

A comprehensive search was conducted to explore dietary principles and its classification. The search terms used were dietary principles, food and nutrition, *Dawā*, diet, dietotherapy, drug, *Ghidhā'*, *Quwwat Ghādiya*, personalized nutrition and Unani Medicine. Classical Unani texts with their Urdu and English translations e.g., *Al-Qānūn fi'l Tibb*, *Kitāb al-Aghdhiyah*, *Kāmil al-Ṣanā'a al-Tibbiyya*, *Dhakhīra Khawārizm Shāhī*, *Kitāb al-Mi'a*, *Kitāb al-Murshid*, *Firdaws al-Hikma fi'l Tibb*, *Kitāb al-Kulliyāt*, *Kulliyāt Nafisi*, *Kitāb fi'l Mizāj*, *Kulliyāt Qānūn*, *Kitāb al-Hāwī fi'l Tibb*, etc. from the library of National Institute of Unani Medicine, Bangalore was the main source of information on general Unani dietary principles. Relevant research articles from PubMed, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate were also examined to better understand the concept of diet.

CONCEPT OF DIET (GHIDHĀ')

The term diet is derived from the Latin word *Diaeta*, meaning “mode of life.” Diet refers to the food and drink consumed for the sustenance of life and plays a crucial role in maintaining physiological balance and overall health. In Unani medicine, *Ghidhā'* (diet) is considered essential for the nourishment, maintenance, and growth of the human body.¹

According to Unani physiology, the structural components of the body are continuously subjected to breakdown and dissolution (*Taḥallul*) as a result of metabolic activities, environmental factors, and physical exertion. To maintain the integrity and proper functioning of the body, the materials lost during this process must be replenished. This replenishment is achieved through food, which provides *Badal Mā Yataḥallal*, meaning the replacement of substances that are constantly lost from the body.⁴

The human body, according to Unani philosophy, is composed of *Arkān Arba'a* (the four elements): fire, air, water, and earth. Since the body is formed from these elements, the food consumed should also contain the same elemental components so that it can be properly transformed and assimilated into body tissues. After ingestion, food undergoes a metabolic transformation

known as *Istihāla*, through which it gradually becomes part of the body's tissues and organs. This process is carried out by *Quwwat Ghādiya* (the nutritive faculty), which converts the ingested food into substances resembling the body's own components.^{4,6}

Different tissues in the body possess distinct temperaments (*Mizāj*), and therefore their nutritional requirements differ. For example, muscles constitute nearly two-thirds of the body mass and are predominantly characterized by a *Ḥārr Raṭb Mizāj* (hot and moist temperament). When muscular tissues undergo dissolution, their proper replacement requires foods with a similar hot and moist temperament. In the same way, other tissues are replenished by nutrients that share similar qualitative properties. This principle of replacement by similarity is important for maintaining the balance of temperament, bodily strength, and structural stability.⁷

Before food is completely transformed into body substances, it is considered potential nutriment, as it has the capacity to become part of body tissues but has not yet fully resembled them. Through the action of *Quwwat Muḥayyira* (the transformative faculty), this nutriment is converted into blood, after which it is called *Ghidhā'-e-Haqiqi* (real nutriment). At this stage, it closely resembles the materials lost from body tissues and effectively contributes to their nourishment.⁴ Thus, commonly consumed foods such as bread, meat, eggs, fish, fruits, vegetables, pulses, and cereals are regarded as potential nutriments. Through metabolic processes they are ultimately converted into humours, which serve as the immediate source of nourishment for body tissues and help maintain health and physiological balance.^{3,4}

DIETARY SUBSTANCES DESCRIBED BY ANCIENT UNANI SCHOLARS

Ancient Unani scholars described the four dietary substances i.e. *Dawā'* (Drug), *Ghidhā'* (Diet), *Ghidhā' Dawā' ī* (Diet cum drug): (Diet cum drug) *Dawā' Ghidhā' ī* (Drug Cum Diet) which are as follows:^{2,3}

Dawā' (Drug)

Drug is a substance that alters the body's temperament and pathological states in order to benefit the recipient. For example- *Abhal* (*Juniperus communis* L.), *Aak* (*Calotropis procera*), *Badranjboya* (*Melissa officinalis*), *Ustukhudus* (*lavandula stoechas*, Linn) *Marzanjosh* (*Origanum vulgare* L.), *Zarawand Mudharaj* (*Aristolochia rotunda* L.), *Zarawand Mudharaj* (*Aristolochia rotunda* Linn.), *Aslussoos* (*Glycyrrhiza glabra* Linn), *Banafsha* (*Viola odorata* Linn), and *Halila* (*Terminalia chebula*) etc.^{5,8-11}

Mode of action of drugs

Drugs exert their influence through *Kayfiyāt* (quality). After entering the body, a drug can reveal its intrinsic properties (*Ḥarārat*, *Burūdat*, *Ruṭūbat*, and *Yubūsāt*) under

the influence of *Harārat Gharīziyya* (innate heat). A drug does not become an integral part of the tissues, because its *Śūrat Naw'īyya* (specific form) does not change within the body. Any substance must change from its original or specific form to the *Akhlāt* (humours) in order to integrate into the body; drugs do not go through this process. Similar to the phenomena of tarahhul seen in food remnants, a medication may only partially attach to tissues. Because the material component (*Mādda*) of drugs is considered morbid (*Raḍḍi*), it lacks the capacity to completely merge with bodily tissues. After expressing its qualitative action, the drug is ultimately eliminated from the body.^{3,12}

Ghidhā' (Diet)

The substances that become a part of the human body or organ and provide *Badal Mā Yataḥallal* after being administered and undergoing *Istihala* (metabolism) e.g. egg, fish, fruits, vegetables, pulses and cereals etc.^{3-5,8,12}

Mode of action of diet

Food has its impact primarily through its *Mādda* (material contents), which are referred to as nutrition. The processes through which substances provide nourishment to the human body are collectively termed *Asar-bil' Mādda* (material effects). Food enters the stomach, where it undergoes primary transformation under the influence of *Harārat Gharīziyya* (innate heat). This heat breaks down the ingested material into smaller components and delivers them to the liver. The liver refines these components to create *Akhlāt Maḥmūda* (healthy humours), which serve as the basic components for the formation, maintenance, and repair of bodily organs. Following their synthesis, the humours are transported via vascular channels to various tissues. Their assimilation into the organs occurs through the coordinated activity of the nutritive faculty (*Quwwat-e-Ghādhīyyah*) and its subordinate faculties; namely, the *Jādhiba* (absorptive faculty), *Māsika* (retentive), *Hāḍima* (digestive), and *Dāfi'a* (expulsive) faculties. These faculties regulate the processes of absorption, retention, conversion, and elimination of nutritive material within the tissues. With this integrated system, the humours combine with tissue components to compensate for the continuous loss of matter, a process known as *Badal mā Yataḥallal*. Thus, food acts as the primary source of nourishment, ensuring the preservation of structural integrity and physiological balance in the human body.^{3,4,13,14}

Ghidhā' Dawā' ī (Diet cum drug)

The substances that are primarily used as a diet but also have therapeutic or medicinal properties. These substances contain more dietary constituents than drug constituents. For example, bottle guard, pumpkin, cucumber, muskmelon, watermelon, *Mā' al-Asal*, *Mā'al Jubn*, *Mā'al-Sha'īr*, broth, half fried egg, wheat, chick pea, *Mā'al-Fawākih*, *Rummāniyya*, *Zirishkiyya*, *Sumāqiyya*, *Humaziya* and, *Tuffāhiyya* etc.^{3-5,8,15}

Mode of action of diet cum drug

These substances act on the body through both their *Kammiyat* (quantity) and *Kayfiyāt* (qualitative) properties. After entering the body, the nutritive components of *Ghidhā' Dawā' ī* substances lose their *Śūrat Naw'īyya* (original specific form) and are converted into *akhlāt* (humours). However, their therapeutic components retain their original specific form and continue to express the same qualities they naturally possessed before. *Lehsun* (garlic) is considered a *Ghidhā' Dawā' ī* (nutritional medicine). It provides both nutritive value and medicinal benefits. While its nutritive components are converted into blood after digestion, its medicinal components retain their original properties and continue to exert therapeutic effects in the body, such as strengthening, warming, and supporting overall health.^{3,12}

Dawā' Ghidhā' ī (Drug Cum Diet)

The Substances that are primarily used as drugs but also contain dietary components. For example, *Zeera*, *Kalonji*, *Kaahu*, *saunf*, *cinnamon dhaniya*, *ilaichi*, *haleela* and *baleela baqala* (purslane), *mint*, etc.^{3-5,8,14,15}

Mode of action of drug cum diet

These substances act on the body through both their *Kayfiyāt* (qualitative) and *Kammiyat* (quantity) properties. After entering the body, the therapeutic components of *Dawā' Ghidhā' ī* substances maintain their *Śūrat Naw'īyya* (original specific form) and continue to show the same natural qualities they possessed before. In contrast, the nutritive components, once inside the body, lose their original specific form and are transformed into *Akhlāt* (humours). For example, *Kahū* (lettuce) is considered a *Dawā' Ghidhā' ī* substance. The blood produced from lettuce still contains certain parts of the lettuce that do not lose their specific form; their original qualities remain intact even after digestion and conversion. Therefore, the qualitative effect observed in the body is actually due to the *Ajzā-e-Dawā' īyyah* (medicinal components) of lettuce, while the nutritive components have already abandoned their original form and transformed into blood. Most medicinal components are found in *Masālihahjāt* (spices), while nutritive components are found largely in *Ghidhā' Ghalīz* (viscous food).³

CLASSIFICATION OF GHIDHĀ' (DIET)

There are so many aspects on which ancient Arab and Unani scholars defined the different types of *Ghidhā' ī* i.e., rate of digestion of nutriment, quality of blood producer, and according to nutritional value etc.^{4,5,8,15-18} This classification of diet has been summarized in the Table 1.

Classification of diet according to the blood produced

There are three types of *Ghidhā' ī* (Diet/Food) according to the substance (*Madda*): *Ghidhā' ī-e-Laṭīf* (Light Nutriment

or Fine/thin consistency blood producing diet). *Ghidhā'-e-Kathīf'* *Ghidhā' Ghalīz* (Viscous Nutriment or Thick consistency blood producing diet). *Ghidhā'-e-Moatadil* (Moderate Nutriment or Moderate consistency blood producing diet).^{3,12}

Ghidhā'-e- Laṭīf (Light Nutriment)

Foods that are capable of producing blood of thin consistency blood or humours are known as *Ghidhā'-e-Laṭīf*. Its purpose is to reduce the thickness, viscosity, and blockages present in the body. These foods provide relatively less nourishment even when consumed in large quantities, which makes them suitable for people who perform less strenuous work. They are also recommended for individuals who tend to develop renal calculi and vascular obstructions in the body.^{3,4} Unani scholars have described three categories of such foods:

First category: Foods that produce thin blood

These foods are themselves are of low viscosity and hence in turn produce less viscous blood. These foods are beneficial for those with reduced *Harārat-e-Gharīziyya* (innate heat), viscous blood production, brain, liver, or spleen obstructions, or accumulation of *Balgham* (phlegm) in joints. For example- whole wheat bread, chick, partridge, soft, non-viscous small fish, pumpkin, and green gram etc.^{4,19,20}

Second category: Foods that produced less viscosity by their innate heat

These substances are basically *Ghalīz* (viscous) in nature; however, owing to their intrinsic heat and acrid nature, they exhibit a *mulattīf* (attenuating) effect that facilitates the dilution and thinning of the *Akhlāt-e-ghalīza* (viscous humours) within the body. Examples- onion, carrot, radish, beetroot etc.^{4,19,20}

Third category: Foods that dilute and lighten thick humours and blood

These substances act as diluting thick or viscid humours (*Khilt-e- Ghalīz*) and making them thinner and easier to move through the vascular system. When the blood or other humours (Phlegm, Black Bile, or Yellow Bile) become too thick or viscous, they can lead to blockages, poor circulation, and the accumulation of waste. These types of food help "cut" through this thickness and restore a healthy flow. Examples include barley water, watermelon, dried figs, pistachios, walnuts, honey, whey (*Mā' al-Jubn*), salt-containing foods, salty fish, garlic, celery, cumin vinegar, *Sikanjabeen* (oxymel), lemon, sour and pomegranate etc.^{4,19,20}

Ghidhā'-e-Kathīf' / Ghidhā'-e-Ghalīz (Viscous nutriment)

The term *Ghidhā'-e-Ghalīz* (viscous food) refers to food that can produce thick or viscous blood. These items are

typically *khushk* (dry), *sulb* (hard), and *lazij* (viscous). Due to their dense composition and high nutritive value, they offer substantial nourishment even when consumed in relatively small amounts. *Ghidhā'-e-Ghalīz* is most appropriate for Individuals who engage in physical exercise because they usually have dilated vessels. During winter season, viscous and dense foods are consumed because the digestive faculty is stronger during this period, and in therapeutic contexts as well. However, these foods are contraindicated in individuals predisposed to calculi formation or vascular obstruction. Hard-boiled eggs, thickly boiled milk, red meat, animal tripe, *Fālūda*, firm and gelatinous fish etc are the examples of *Ghidhā'-e-Ghalīz*.^{4,19,20}

Ghidhā'-e-Moatadil (Moderate nutriment)

These types of foods neither increase nor decrease the viscosity of blood rather maintain it. For example- partridge, squab, chicken and lamb meat, half-boiled eggs, figs, grapes, Kasni, lettuce, and mint etc.⁴

Classification of food according to their nutritional value

There are two types of *Ghidhā'* (Diet/food) on the basis of amount of blood that is becoming part of the organ: *Kathīr al-Taghdhiya Ghidhā'* (Highly nutritious diet), *Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Ghidhā'* (Less nutritious diet) and *Kathīr al-Taghdhiya Ghidhā'* (Highly nutritious diet).

The *Ghidhā'* which provides more nourishment to the body are called *kathīr al-taghdhiya*. The amount of nourishment depends on the quantity of that part of nutriment which is capable of converting into blood and *Ghalīz Ghidhā'* has more quantity of such part as compared to *laṭīf aghdhiya*. Therefore, all *Ghalīz aghdhiya* and the *Ghidhā'* which generate small amount of waste when get digested completely are considered as *kathīr-al taghdhiya*. For example- red meat, firm fish, fava beans, lentils, fresh dates, and fresh milk etc.^{4,20}

Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Ghidhā' (Less nutritious diet)

The *Ghidhā'* which provides less nourishment to the body are called *Qalīl al-taghdhiya*. It includes *laṭīf ghidha* and *Ghidhā'* that has either *rutūbat* or *yubūsat* in excess and also that *Ghidhā'* which produces more waste.

For example- meat of partridge, deer, rabbit and other aged animals, millet, pistachio, astringent foods, raisins, fish, pumpkin, plums, turnip, beetroot, carrot, and diluted wine etc.^{4,20}

Classification of diet according to quality of chyme

There are two types of *Ghidhā'* (Diet/Food) based on the quality of blood it produces: *Jayyid al-kaymūs Ghidhā'* (Good chyme forming diet), *Radī al-kaymūs Ghidhā'* (Bad chyme forming diet) and *Jayyid al-kaymūs Ghidhā'* (Good chyme forming diet).

This type of *Ghidhā* produces good chyme or normal blood in respect of its quality and quantity and has other humours in a proportion suitable for the body. Examples include half boiled egg, fresh fish, whole wheat bread, chicken, partridge, lamb meat, fresh goat milk, goat liver, veal, apple juice and aromatic wine etc.^{3,4}

Radī al-kaymūs Ghidhā (Bad chyme forming diet)

This type of *Ghidhā* produces bad chyme or abnormal blood which is not good in quality or quantity both. For example- spleen of cattle, meat of camel/rabbit, meat from mountain goat, cow, bull, camel, rabbit, mutton, well roasted eggs, brain, aged cheese, and semi-ripe fruits such as pears and apples etc.^{3,4}

Additionally, *Ghidhā laṭīf*, *Ghidhāe Ghalīz* and *Ghidhā-e-Moatadil* are classified based on the quality of the chyme they produce and their respective nutritional values:

Ghidhā laṭīf can be classified as: *Ghidhā-e-laṭīf kathīr al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. meat soup, half boiled egg yolk. *Ghidhā-e-laṭīf kathīr al-Taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. lungs. *Ghidhā-e-laṭīf Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. pomegranate, apple. *Ghidhā-e-laṭīf Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. vegetables.

Ghidhā e Ghalīz can be classified as: *Ghidhā-e-Ghalīz kathīr al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. boiled egg. *Ghidhā-e-Ghalīz kathīr al-taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. fresh meat. *Ghidhā-e-Ghalīz Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. cheese and *Ghidhā-e-Ghalīz Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. dry meat.

Ghidhā-e-Moatadil can also be classified as: *Ghidhā-e-Moatadil kathīr al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. lamb meat. *Ghidhā-e-Moatadil kathīr al-taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. meat of camel, *Ghidhā-e-Moatadil Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Jayyid al-kaymūs* e.g. turnip and *Ghidhā-e-Moatadil Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Radi al-kaymūs* e.g. cauliflower.^{3,12,15}

Classification of diet according to the rate of digestion

There are two types of *Ghidhā* (Diet/Food) based on the its rate of digestion: *Sarī-ul-Haḍm Ghidhā* (Easily digestible food) and *Baṭī-ul-Haḍm Ghidhā* (Slowly digestible food).

Sarī-ul-Haḍm Ghidhā (Easily digestible)

Nutriments that the *Quwwat Hāḍima* (digestive faculty) processes more efficiently are digested at a faster rate, are known as *Sarī'al-Haḍm* (easily digestible). This category typically includes foods that are soft, moist, and possess a moderate temperament. In fact, nutrients characterized by a hot and moist temperament are inherently *Sarī'al-Haḍm* because they offer minimal resistance to the digestive faculty. Examples include moong daal khichdi, *mā' al-*

sha'īr (barley water), chicken soup, and soft-boiled eggs.^{4,20}

Baṭī-ul-Haḍm Ghidhā (Slowly digestible)

The nutriments which are hard, dry and fatty in nature and also those which are very hot or very cold are digested very slowly and are considered *baṭī ul-haḍm*. For example- siri paya, duck's meat, and red meat.⁴

Classification of based on rate of absorption

There are two types of foods based on their rate of absorption: *Sarī-ul-Nufuz Ghidhā* (Rapidly absorbing food), *Baṭī-ul-Nufuz Ghidhā* (Slowly absorbing food) and *Sarī-ul-Nufuz Ghidhā* (Rapidly absorbing food).

Sarī-ul-Nufuz Ghidhā (Rapidly absorbing food) refers to foods that are easily digestible and quickly utilized by the body's system, providing rapid nourishment. Foods that contain a higher amount of moisture and viscosity tend to be rapidly absorbed into the body. Moist animal and plant-based foods enter the system quickly; for example, meats with higher moisture content are rapidly absorbed. Similarly, foods like mulberry and sweet plum are also considered rapidly absorbing food due to their higher moisture and viscosity. Other examples include honey and alcohol.⁴

Baṭī-ul-Nufuz Ghidhā (Slowly absorbing food)

Baṭī-ul-Nufuz Ghidhā (Slowly absorbing food) refers to foods that are digested and absorbed slowly in the body. These foods take a longer time to enter the system and provide nourishment gradually. Foods that are dense and comparatively dry in nature tend to be absorbed more slowly. Such foods remain in the digestive system for a longer duration before being utilized. Examples include lentils, broad beans, hard-boiled eggs, meat of older animals, spinach, and radish.⁴

Classification of foods based on gastric emptying rate

There are two types of food based on their gastric emptying rate: *Sarī-ul-Munhadir* (Rapidly descending diet) or *Sarī-ul-Nuzūl* (Diet remaining in stomach for short period). *Baṭī-ul-Munhadir* (Slowly descending diet) or *Baṭī-ul-Nuzūl* (Diet remaining in stomach for longer period) and *Sarī-ul-Munhadir* (Rapidly descending diet) or *Sarī-ul-Nuzūl* (Diet remaining in stomach for short period).

Rapidly descending food refers to foods that pass quickly through the stomach and remain there for a short period of time.

These foods are easily digestible and are rapidly moved forward in the digestive tract, providing quick but short-lived nourishment. e.g., honey, alcohol, milk, soft fruits, and light soups, Mulberry, and sweet plum.⁴

Baṭī-ul-Munhaddir (Slowly descending diet) or *Baṭī-ul-Nuzūl* (Diet remaining in stomach for longer period)

Baṭī-ul-Munhaddir refers to foods that remain in the stomach for a longer duration and pass slowly through the stomach. These foods are digested slowly. These foods take more time to pass through the stomach and provide sustained nourishment to the body. Examples include foods prepared from pure wheat flour, broad bean, lentils, brain, roasted eggs, liver, heart, sesame seed, pear, and fresh & viscous alcoholic drinks.⁴

Classification based on waste matter produced

There are two types of *Ghidhā'* (Diet/Food) based on the waste it produces: *Kathīr ul-Fuḍūl* (Produces more waste), *Qalīl ul-Fuḍūl* (Produces less waste) and *Kathīr ul-Fuḍūl* (Produces more waste).

Foods that have low nutritive value and produce excessive waste products during digestion are known as *Kathīr ul-Fuḍūl Aghdhiyah*. All foods possessing a moist temperament (*Ratb Mizaj*) are considered *Kathīr ul-Fuḍūl*. Examples include duck breast meat, viscera and brain of all animals, wild birds, fresh chickpeas, meat of all milk-producing animals, and meat of animals that live a calm or sedentary life.⁴

Qalīl al-Fuḍūl (Produces less waste)

Foods that provide good nutrition while producing minimal metabolic waste (*Fuḍūl*) in the body are called as *Qalīl al-Fuḍūl Aghdhiyah*. These foods are easily digested and well utilized, leading to minimal formation of metabolic by products.

Examples include the meat of birds, animals that live in dry regions, and animal that perform heavy physical activity.

Such animals usually consume diets that produce little waste, and therefore their meat is considered *Qalīl al-Fuḍūl*.⁴

Classification based on spoiling nature of food

There are two types of *Ghidhā'* (Diet/Food) based on its spoiling nature: *Sarī-ul-Fasād Ghidhā'* (Rapidly spoiling food), *Baṭī-ul-Fasād Ghidhā'* (Slowly spoiling food) and *Sarī-ul-Fasād Ghidhā'* (Rapidly spoiling food).

Foods that do not descend quickly from the stomach and mix with impure humours tend to spoil rapidly. For example, watermelon, mulberry, and pumpkin.

Baṭī-ul-Fasād Ghidhā' (Slowly spoiling food)

Baṭī-ul-Fasād refers to those foods which are decomposed slowly due to their dense, heavy, or viscous nature for example-beef and ox meat.⁴

Classification based on kaifiyat (Quality) or temperament

There are four types of food based on their qualities: *Ghidhā' Hār* (Hot temperament diet), *Ghidhā' Bārid* (Cold temperament diet), *Ghidhā' Raṭb* (Wet temperament diet) and *Ghidhā' Yābis* (Dry temperament diet).³

Ghidhā' Hār (Diet of hot temperament)

Ghidhā' Hār (hot temperament diet) refers to foods that increase the body's internal heat (*Ḥarārat Gharīziyya*) after digestion. These foods help generate heat in the body. They mainly provide nourishment and strength, but also have medicinal properties, so they work as both food and medicine.³ Examples include wheat bread, chickpeas, fenugreek, dates, raisins, honey, cruciferous vegetables, mutton, and fermented drinks like yellow wine.⁴

Ghidhā' Bārid (Diet of cold temperament)

Ghidhā' Bārid (cold temperament diet) refers to foods that have both nutritional and medicinal properties with cooling effects. The nutritional part of these foods is converted into blood after digestion, while the medicinal part helps reduce body heat (*Taqīl-i-Harārat*).³ These cooling foods are generally low in nutritional value.⁴ Example include flatbread made from barley flour, barley water, pumpkin, cucumber, chicory, poppy seeds, apple, pomegranate, pear, and all sour and astringent substances.⁴

Ghidhā' Raṭb (Diet of wet temperament)

Ghidhā' Raṭb (wet temperament diet) refers to foods that increase moisture (*ruṭūbat*) in the body after digestion or leave extra moisture in the body tissues.^{3,21} These are called moist foods. These foods are usually easy to digest because the body absorbs them quickly and easily. Example include watermelon, muskmelon, cucumber, mulberry, spinach, pumpkin, lettuce, soaked almonds, soaked chickpeas, jujube, and poppy seeds.⁴

Ghidhā' Yābis (Diet of dry temperament)

Ghidhā' Yābis (dry temperament diet) refers to foods that produce dryness in the body.¹² These foods contain medicinal properties as well, due to which they may increase dryness beyond the normal state of balance in the body. Because of their dryness and thickness, such foods are not easily digested. As a result, the body is unable to receive complete nourishment.³ Examples include lentils, dry sattu, all roasted and fried foods, and foods containing excess vinegar and spices.⁴

Classification of food based on humoral production

There are four types of foods based on their humour production: *Muwallid-i-Dam* (Haemopoietic/ Sanguine-producing food), *Muwallida-i-Balgham* (Phlegm producing food), *Muwallida-i-Safra* (Bile producing food)

and *Muwallida-i-Sawdā'* (Melancholic/black bile humour producing food).

Muwallid-i-Dam (haemopoietic/ sanguine-producing food)

Haemopoietic foods are hot and moist in temperament.³ These foods nourish the body, help in the formation of blood, and also support normal metabolic processes. They keep the body warm and help in reducing the discomfort caused by external heat. They also maintain warmth in the internal organs. As a result, they assist in the proper functioning of the three faculties: *Quwwat-e-Tabaiya* (natural faculty), *Quwwat-e-Nafsaniya* (psychic faculty), and *Quwwat-e-Haiwaniya* (vital faculty). Additionally, they give the skin a healthy glow as well as the attractiveness.⁴

Muwallida-i-Balgham (Phlegm producing food)

Phlegm-producing foods are cold and moist in temperament. They nourish cold and moist organs. For example, the brain requires phlegm for its nourishment. When blood is insufficient, these foods are utilized for the nourishment of the organs. Moreover, these foods help maintain adequate moisture in the organs, preventing them from becoming dry due to continuous movement and friction. Bland, viscous, and watery foods tend to produce balgham. Examples include cucumber, fish, and the milk.^{3,4}

Muwallida-i-Safra (Bile producing food)

Bile-producing foods are hot and dry in temperament. They nourish hot and dry organs, such as the lungs. These foods make the blood less consistent and help cleanse the intestines by removing stool and sticky phlegm. They also tend to produce dryness in the body. Pungent, salty, and astringent foods are considered bile-producing. Examples include black pepper, cumin, salt, garlic, onion, eggplant and turnip.^{3,4}

Muwallida-i-Sawdā' (Melancholic/black bile humour producing food)

Melancholic humor-producing foods are cold and dry in temperament. They make the blood thick and more viscous. They nourish cold and dry organs, such as the bones.³

These foods also increase appetite, thereby increasing the desire for food. Examples include vinegar, sorrel, lemon, quince seed and pear.⁴

Classification of foods based on elemental production

There are four types of foods based on their element production: *Ghidhā'e Ardi* (Earthy nutriment), *Ghidhā'e Mai* (Watery nutriment), *Ghidhā'e Reehi* (Gass producing nutriment) and *Ghidhā'e Nari* (spicy nutriment).³

Ghidhā'e Ardi (Earthy nutriment)

Earthy nutriment refers to foods in which earthy components are dominant. Such foods tend to produce black bile and are therefore considered earthy in nature. A common example is lentils.

Ghidhā'e Mai (Watery nutriment)

When watery components are dominant in food, the humour produced from it is phlegm. Such food is known as watery nutriment e.g. milk, watermelon, chicory, and cucumber.

Ghidhā'e Reehi (Gass producing nutriment)

When gaseous components are dominant in food, the humour produced from it is dam (blood). Such food is called *Ghidhā'e Reehi*. Examples include dates and musk melon.

Ghidhā'e Nari (Spicy nutriment)

When heat-producing components (fiery components) are dominant in food, it is called Spicy Nutriment. The humour produced from it is bile.³

Classification of foods based on their functions

There are four types of foods based on their function in the body: *Mufattiḥ-i-Sudad Ghidhā* (Deobstruent food), *Musaddid/ Maulid-e-Sudad Ghidhā* (Food that cause obstruction), *Qābiz Ghidhā* (Astringent food) and *Muwallida li'l Riyāḥ Ghidhā/ Aghdhiya al-Nāfikha* (Flatulence-inducing foods).^{4,21}

Mufattiḥ-i-Sudad Ghidhā (Deobstruent food)

These foods help clear blockages and improve the flow within the organs. They are usually light and easy to digest. Examples include watermelon, beans, poppy seed juice, beetroot, garlic, onion, chickpea water, pure honey, and *Sikanjabeen* (a vinegar and honey drink).^{4,21}

Musaddid/ Maulid-e-Sudad Ghidhā (Food that cause obstruction)

These foods are heavy and sticky in nature and can cause blockages in the body. They are difficult to digest and may slow down normal body functions. Examples include dried dates, *siri paya*, fatty foods, okra and aged paneer.^{4,21}

Qābiz Ghidhā (Astringent food)

These foods help reduce diarrhoea and slow down bowel movements. They are commonly used in digestive problems like diarrhoea. Examples include slightly unripe guava, amaranth seeds, barberry, dry paneer, and the apples.²¹

Muwallida li'l Riyāh Ghidhā' Aghdhiya al-Nāfikha (Flatulence-inducing foods)

These foods can increase gas in the body and may lead to gas-related problems. In people who already have digestive issues, they can make the symptoms worse.

Examples include beans, roasted chickpeas, mung beans, fresh figs, apples, grapes, turnips, and cabbage.²¹

Classification of food based on composition

There are two types of food based on their composition: *Ghidhā' al-Mufrad* (Simple food) and *Ghidhā' al-Murakkab* (Compound food).

Ghidhā' al-Mufrad (Simple food)

Simple foods are those foods that are consumed on their own, without adding any other substances.

Examples include wheat, barley, lentils, rice, pearl millet (bajra), corn, broad beans, chickpeas, sesame seeds, flaxseeds, fish, milk, paneer, curd, eggs, carrot, turnip, garlic, onion, radish, fenugreek, mustard, poppy seeds, watermelon, cucumber, pumpkin, eggplant, figs, grapes, apple, pear, pomegranate, plum, dates and jujube.⁴

Ghidhā' al-Murakkab (Compound food)

When one or more food items are combined together, they form a new food substance. Such foods are referred to as compound foods.

The combined ingredients interact with each other and produce effects that may differ from those of the individual foods when consumed separately e. g., honey water, meat broth, oxymel, and apple juice etc.²¹

Classification of food according to taste

There are seven types of foods based on their taste: *Shīrīn Ghidhā'* (Sweet food), *Namkīn Ghidhā'* (Salty food), *Dasim/ Roghnī Ghidhā'* (Fatty/ oily food), *Hirrif Ghidhā'* (Pungent food), *Hāmiḍ/ Tursh Ghidhā'* (Sour food), *Tufā/ Phikī Ghidhā'* (Bland/ Tasteless food) and *Āfis/ Kasīli/ Qābiz Ghidhā'* (Astringent food).

Shīrīn Ghidhā' (Sweet food)

Sweet taste shows balanced temperament. These foods are generally good for body and are highly nourishing. Sweet foods give mild moisture to body. However, if eaten in excess, they may slowly increase heaviness and thickness. For e. g. dates, *Fālūda*, muskmelon, fig, and beetroot.^{4,12}

Namkīn Ghidhā' (Salty food)

Salty foods have mainly dry and slightly burnt nature (*Yābis sōkhta*), with little moisture mixed in. They produce more heat in body than sweet foods. e. g. include salt, pickles, preserved food made with salt, salted fish and meat.¹²

Dasim/ Roghnī Ghidhā' (Fatty/oily food)

These foods contain a higher number of gaseous components along with some moisture. Compared to sweet foods, they produce less heat in the body. Fatty foods also reduce appetite and have low nutritional value. Examples- butter, oil, and fatty meat.^{4,12}

Hirrif Ghidhā' (Pungent food)

Pungent foods have a hot and dry temperament, along with lightness (*laṭāfat*). They have low nutritional value. Examples- black pepper, ginger, and clove.^{4,12}

Hāmiḍ/ Tursh Ghidhā' (Sour food)

Sour foods have a cold temperament with some moisture. They have both cooling and mild heating effects, so they act as breaking and thinning agents. When sour foods mix with thick undigested matter in the stomach, they break it into smaller parts and make it lighter and easier to digest. Examples include lemon, vinegar, and sour grapes.¹⁶

Tufā/ Phikī Ghidhā' (Bland/tasteless food)

Bland foods have moist and cold temperament e. g. rice.¹⁶

Āfis/ Kasīli/ Qābiz Ghidhā' (Astringent food)

Astringent foods have cold temperament and have a constricting effect on body tissues, e. g., Quince seed.¹⁶

Table 1: Classification of diet in Unani medicine.

Classification of diet in Unani medicine	
According to blood produced	<i>Ghidhā' Laṭīf</i> (Light nutriment)
	<i>Ghidhā' Kathīf/ Ghidhā' Ghalīz</i> (Viscous nutriment)
	<i>Ghidhā-e-Moatadil</i> (Moderate nutriment) ^{3,12}
According to nutritional value	<i>Kathīr al-Taghdhiya Ghidhā'</i> (Highly nutritious diet)
	<i>Qalīl al-Taghdhiya Ghidhā'</i> (Less nutritious diet) ^{4,20}
According to the quality of chyme	<i>Jayyid al-kaymūs Ghidhā'</i> (Good chyme forming diet)
	<i>Radī al-kaymūs Ghidhā'</i> (Bad chyme forming diet) ^{3,4}
According to the rate of digestion	<i>Sarī-ul-Haḍm Ghidhā'</i> (Easily digestible food)
	<i>Baṭī-ul-Haḍm Ghidhā'</i> (Slowly digestible food) ⁴

Continued.

Classification of diet in Unani medicine	
According to rate of absorption	<i>Sarī-ul-Nufuz Ghidhā'</i> (Rapidly absorbing food) <i>Baṭī-ul-Nufuz Ghidhā'</i> (Slowly absorbing food) ⁴
According to gastric emptying rate	<i>Sarī-ul-Munhadir</i> (Rapidly descending diet) or <i>Sarī'al-Nuzūl</i> (Diet remaining in stomach for short period) <i>Baṭī-ul-Munhadir</i> (Slowly descending diet) or <i>Baṭī al-Nuzūl</i> (Diet remaining in stomach for longer period) ⁴
According to waste matter produced	<i>Kathīr ul-Fuḍūl</i> (Produces more waste) <i>Qalīl ul-Fuḍūl</i> (Produces less waste) ⁴
According to spoilage rate	<i>Sarī-ul- Fasād Ghidhā'</i> (Rapidly Spoiling Food) <i>Baṭī-ul- Fasād Ghidhā'</i> (Slowly Spoiling Food) ⁴
According to <i>kaifiyat</i> (Quality) or temperament	<i>Ghidhā' Hār</i> (Hot temperament diet) <i>Ghidhā' Bārid</i> (Cold temperament diet) <i>Ghidhā' Raṭb</i> (Wet temperament diet) <i>Ghidhā' Yābis</i> (Dry temperament diet) ^{3,4}
According to humoral production	<i>Muwallid-i-Dam</i> (Haemopoietic/ Sanguine-producing food) <i>Muwallida-i-Balgham</i> (Phlegm producing food) <i>Muwallida-i-Safra</i> (Bile producing food) <i>Muwallida-i-Sawdā'</i> (Melancholic/black bile humour producing food) ^{3,4}
According to elemental production	<i>Ghidhā'e Ardi</i> (Earthy nutriment) <i>Ghidhā'e Mai</i> (Watery nutriment) <i>Ghidhā'e Reehi</i> (Gass producing nutriment) <i>Ghidhā'e Nari</i> (Spicy nutriment) ³
According to functions	<i>Mufattiḥ-i-Sudad Ghidhā'</i> (Deobstruent food) <i>Musaddid/ Maulid-e-Sudad Ghidhā'</i> (Food that cause obstruction) <i>Qābiz Ghidhā'</i> (Astringent food) <i>Muwallida li'l Riyāḥ Ghidhā'/ Aghdhiya al-Nāfikha</i> (Flatulence-inducing foods) ^{4,21}
According to composition	<i>Ghidhā' al-Mufrad</i> (Simple food) <i>Ghidhā' al-Murakkab</i> (Compound food) ^{4,21}
According to taste	<i>Shīrīn Ghidhā'</i> (Sweet food) <i>Namkīn Ghidhā'</i> (Salty food) <i>Dasim/ Roghnī Ghidhā'</i> (Fatty/ oily food) <i>Ḥirrīf Ghidhā'</i> (Pungent food) <i>Ḥāmiḍ/ Tursh Ghidhā'</i> (Sour food) <i>Tufā/ Phīkī Ghidhā'</i> (Bland/ tasteless food) <i>Āfis/ Kasīli/ Qābiz Ghidhā'</i> (Astringent food) ^{4,12,16}

CONCLUSION

The classical Unani classification of diet reflects a thoughtful and systematic understanding of the relationship between food, health, and disease. By distinguishing between *Ghidhā'* (diet), *Dawā'* (drug), *Ghidhā' Dawā'ī* (diet with medicinal properties), and *Dawā' Ghidhā'ī* (drug with nutritional value), Unani scholars recognized that food serves not only as a source of nourishment but also as a therapeutic tool. Their classification of foods according to temperament, nutritional value, digestion, absorption, humoral effects, and waste production demonstrates an individualized approach that remains relevant today. In an era where preventive healthcare, personalized nutrition, and lifestyle-based interventions are receiving increasing attention, these principles offer valuable insights for contemporary dietetics and integrative medicine. While further scientific validation is needed to strengthen their evidence base, the holistic and individualized concepts of Unani dietetics provide a meaningful framework for

promoting health, preventing disease, and supporting clinical management. Integrating these traditional dietary principles with modern nutritional science may help develop more comprehensive and culturally relevant approaches to healthcare.

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