



**International Journal of Biology, Pharmacy  
and Allied Sciences (IJBPAS)**

*'A Bridge Between Laboratory and Reader'*

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**USE OF IRANIAN TRADITIONAL MEDICINE FOR IMPROVEMENT OF ELDERLY  
QUALITY OF LIFE: A MINI REVIEW**

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Received 15<sup>th</sup> July. 2016; Revised 29<sup>th</sup> July. 2016; Accepted 26<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2016; Available online 1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 2016

**ABSTRACT**

Aging is an irreversible natural process through which physical and mental activities decline. Historically, geriatric health has been of paramount importance in Iranian-Islamic traditional medicine literature. Avicenna, Rhazus, and Jorjani are among the physicians who took advantage of personal hygiene, age-appropriate diet and physical activity to their patients benefit in their practice. According to Iranian traditional medicine, prevention is better than cure, and that physicians' main task was to educate people how to prevent themselves from getting diseases, especially in old age. In this review, we have tried to introduce some of the major guidelines used by these great physicians in geriatric medicine, with emphasis on disease prevention.

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Noteworthy, geriatrics, the care of aged people, differs from gerontology which is the study of the aging process itself. However, geriatrics is sometimes called medical gerontology.

**Keywords: Old age, Iranian Traditional Medicine, Health**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The chronological age of 65 years is as a definition of 'elderly' or older person. People 65 years and older has a large group in human society [1]. The chronic illnesses in this population are common and this people suffer from these illnesses. Elderly illnesses range from hearing loss, vision problems, and arthritis to incontinence, dementia and chronic health diseases [2-4]. These people are sensitive and may be influenced by lifestyle and environment. So, elderly quality of life can improve their life [5, 6]. In between, Traditional medicine has potent pattern for improvement of lifestyle of elderly[7-9]. Traditional medicine is used almost worldwide nowadays, as there has been a global increase in demand for its treatment[10, 11]. Irani-tebb or Irani Traditional Medicine, also called Tebb e Sonnati in Arabic, is one of the most famous traditional medicines [12, 13]. In traditional Iranian medicine, there are several major guidelines for improvement of life [14]. There are studies in elderly people on the use of traditional medicine. In these studies, physicians have proven that herbal medicine, especially described in old texts of Persian

litterateur, can treat different diseases of this group such as backache, dementia, heart disease, arthritis and etc [15]. Iranian scientists such as Avicenna, Rhazus, and Jorjani described the advantage strategy for prevention and treatment of diseases in all people, especially in elderly group[16, 17]. They believed that prevention is better than treatment. So, they focused on programs and strategies for prevention of diseases. In this descriptive review, some of the major guidelines in Iranian traditional medicine that are used by great physicians, with emphasis on disease prevention are described.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

In this study, we collected all information from manuscripts of Iranian traditional medicine such as Al-Canon fi al Tibb, Shefa, Al-Hawi, Zakhireh-i Kholaseh al-hekma, KhafiAlaei and Al-Mujaz. Also, we briefly mention Chinese traditional medicine for comparison of Iranian traditional medicine.

### **Definition**

Aging is a natural phenomenon through which physical and mental activities decline; however, this process could differ widely in each and every individual. Paresis,

alimentary malfunction, altered mental status; depression and self-depreciation are among the changes commonly seen in the elderly [18-20]. It is said in traditional literature that negligence to body and spirit could cause premature ageing and death. There are four stages in human life according to Iranian traditional medicine:

- **Thriver:** The first three decades of life during which the body thrives.
- **Maturer:** Mainly the fourth decade of life, during which the body growth completes and reaches maturation.
- **Middle Ager:** The fifth and sixth decades of life, during which physical and mental functions start to decline, but one is still capable of fulfilling daily tasks independently.
- **Old Ager:** From the sixth decade of life till death, through which physical and mental functions further decline, and daily tasks and self-care could not be carried out independently [10].

### **Temperament**

Temperament is defined as the peculiar or distinguishing mental or physical character determined by the relative proportions of the humors. According to traditional medicine, there are nine temperament traits: moderate, warm, cold, wet, dry, warm and dry, warm

and wet, cold and dry, cold and wet. Thomas and Chess have also proposed nine temperament traits in children based on a classification scheme developed by Birch: activity, regularity, initial reaction, adaptability, intensity, mood, distractibility, persistence and attention span, sensitivity.

While the typical temperament during childhood is wet, cold and dry is the dominant temperament in the elderly. The older the body ages, the drier it becomes to the point that death finally occurs due to overwhelming coldness and dryness of the temperament.

In the Al-Mujaz, Ghorshi states that the temperament of the elderly is cold and dry, but there also lies a harmful wet temperament as well.

Considering the fact that there are specific approaches tailored for each stage of life in the traditional medicine, we focus on approaches most recommended for the old age (sheikhokhiat) in this paper.

According to Chaqmini's Small Canon, in old age, temperament may vary even among organs. Although the dominant temperament during old age is cold and dry, sometimes wetness (the quality of being highly malleable), in this case called phlegm, becomes dominant, and thus the individual

should be approached accordingly in terms of therapeutic regimen and diet [21].

In the Canon of Medicine by Avicenna, he recommends the following principles for geriatric health care:

1. Use the elements that are warm and/or wet by nature (temperament)
2. Have proper sleep hygiene and try to stay in bed longer than young people;
3. Have smaller but more frequent meals and bathe more often than young people;
4. Try to urinate several times throughout the day;
5. Excrete mucus(phlegm) from the body(through defecation and urination)
6. Keep permanent laxity of gastrointestinal tract;
7. Have full body gentle oil massage;
8. Use fragrance oils with mild/warm aromatic taste;
9. Apply oil on the body after waking up, walking or riding

According to Avicenna, a healthy diet for elderlies consists of small frequent meals properly adjusted to their digestion system in a case-by-case basis. Elderlies should avoid spicy foods, foods that are known to be dry by nature and contain or induce phlegm and black bile. However, if they consumed such a

food, they should eat counter-regulatory food and use laxative to cleanse their body of those harmful foods. Milk is wet by nature with many beneficial health effects, and is recommended for elderlies, provided that they enjoy drinking it (tolerate it). Celery stalks, persicum, and plum (natural laxatives high in fiber) are perfect for elderlies, especially if they are eaten before meals. Figs alone, mixed with safflower seed, or cooked in diluted honey are another great options. Garlic and ginger jam are also good if one is used to having them with meals.

Collectively, a healthy diet for the elderly should include foods that are wet by nature. These food support digestive functions and counter-regulate the prevailing dry temperament of the elderly [22].

Hakim Aquili in Kholaseh al-Hekmah, besides emphasizing on the importance of small-sized frequent meals, recommends consuming foods that are light but high in nutrients such as fried eggs, lamb broth, and milk. He specifically recommends goat milk and donkey milk for elderlies. Moreover, he strongly recommends against sleeping on an empty stomach, because even one night of starvation in elderlies could have severe consequences. He also recommends persicum, celery leaf and its soup, but

advised against celery stalk for it is melanotic.

Eating lettuce with warm and dry modifiers is considered one of the best hypnotic remedies for elderlies. While oil enema is a beneficial method to prevent constipation, hot-oil enema should be avoided for it could ironically cause constipation [23].

Moderate exercise and massage that is adjusted to elderlies' physical conditions and habits are strongly recommended. Body habitus should also be considered for exercise routines, since bodies with wet temperament tolerate moderate exercise far better than slim bodies [23].

Cleansing the body of waste products is a must in elderlies and it is best done by keeping a mild diarrhea through enemas with elements warm and wet by nature [24].

Bathing, long sleep, gentle oil massage, drinking and eating foods compatible with one's temperaments are all considered beneficial in traditional geriatrics. The best time to take a bath is before taking laxatives, since bathing helps defecation.

While walking, horse riding and rocking are among healthy activities for elderlies, sexual intercourse is to be avoided and libido be controlled as much as possible in elderlies.

There is no need for laxatives if an elderly has bowel movement every other day.

However, laxatives could be helpful in longer intervals, especially if they are taken before meals [24].

Due to the dominant cold and dry temperament in elderlies, the best approach to address elderlies' health issues would be the one skewed towards wet and warm elements. Moderate bathing and skin massaging with fragrant oils that have warm aromatic taste such as lily and jasmine are strongly recommended. It is beneficial to roll in the bed, to do moderate exercise, and to be cheerful and happy. Elderlies should avoid things that resonate with old age such as grief, fear, perfumes with cold aromatic taste such as camphor and ipomoea, and sour foods. Rice and milk with honey or sugar is a useful meal for aged people. Hunger is harmful to their health. Some elders have dry temperament and it is helpful for them to eat Wild horehound (*persicum*) stew with olive oil or a blend of milk and yogurt. In addition, dried common fig in honey and water may be useful if used before the meal. Broth and wheat porridge with the little amount of cinnamon and ginger are also considered useful foods for the old people [25].

#### **Comparison with Traditional Chinese medicine and new medicine**

Traditional Chinese medicine is strikingly similar to Iranian dietary regimen

recommended for the elderly. According to Traditional Chinese medicine, the elderly should have a balanced diet which is a mix of flavors and mainly consists of plain warm soft well-cooked foods. The diet should be adjusted to the individual body needs and be consumed in appropriate portions. A wholesome breakfast, adequate lunch and small dinner is strongly recommended.

Regular walks, mouth washing and gentle abdomen massage after meals are also thought to be beneficial. Traditional Chinese medicine has programs for improvement of quality of life in elderly such as reduction of hypertension, improvement of renal action, diabetes mellitus and etc [26-28]. A sample menu for elderly cares home taken from UK institutions guideline is shown in Table 1.

Table 1- Example Menu 1 for Care Homes (<http://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/multimedia/pdfs/carehomemenus.pdf>)

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Early Morning	Tea or Coffee water	Tea or Coffee water	Tea or Coffee water	Tea or Coffee water	Tea or Coffee water	Tea or Coffee water	Tea or Coffee water
Breakfast	Prunes Cereals / Porridge Boiled Egg Toast with butter / spread Preserves Tea or Coffee Water	Grapefruit Segments Cereals / Porridge Toast with butter / spread Preserves Tea or Coffee Water	Fresh banana Cereals / Porridge Sausage and Tomato Toast with butter / spread Preserves Tea or Coffee Water	Orange Juice Cereals / Porridge Toast with butter / spread Preserves Tea or Coffee Water	Fresh Melon Cereals / Porridge Scrambled Eggs Toast with butter / spread Preserves Tea or Coffee Water	Fresh banana Cereals / Porridge , Toast with butter / spread Preserves Tea or Coffee Water	Orange Juice Cereals / Porridge
Mid Morning Snack	Tea or Coffee + Water Biscuits	Tea or Coffee + Water Biscuits	Tea or Coffee + Water Biscuits	Tea or Coffee + Water Biscuits	Tea or Coffee + Water Biscuits	Tea or Coffee + Water Biscuits	Tea or Coffee + Water Biscuits
Lunch	Lancashire Hot Pot Grilled Plaice & Parsley Sauce Vegetable Pakora (V) Boiled Potatoes Cauliflower / Peas Banana Custard Fresh Apple Tea or Coffee Water	Spaghetti Bolognaise Tuna Pasta Bake Vegetarian Lasagne (V) Side Salad Rhubarb Crumble & Custard Fresh Pear Tea or Coffee Water	Poached Salmon Roast Chicken Vegetable Chilli & Rice (V) Roast / Mashed Potatoes Cabbage / Green Beans Plum Sponge & Custard Fresh Orange Tea or Coffee Water	Cottage Pie Chicken Chasseur Vege Shepherds Pie (V) Boiled Potatoes Broccoli / Leeks Rice Pudding & Apricots Fresh Banana Tea or Coffee Water	Fried Cod Gammon & Pineapple Vegetable Flan (V) Chips //Mashed Potatoes Peas / Sweet corn Tinned Pears & Custard Fresh Grapes Tea or Coffee Water	Chicken Curry & Rice Beef Grill Steak & Rice Vegetable Curry &d Rice (V) Mixed Vegetables Crème Caramel Fresh Banana Tea or Coffee Water	Roast Beef Fish Pie Cauliflower Cheese (V) Roast / Mashed Potatoes Carrots / Sprouts Apple Pie & Custard Fresh Melon Tea or Coffee Water
Afternoon Tea	a Tea or Coffee + Water Scone & Jam Soft Cheese Sandwich Biscuits Fresh Orange	Tea or Coffee + Water Malt Loaf Biscuits Fresh Pear	Tea or Coffee + Water Ring Doughnut Soft Cheese Sandwich Biscuits Fresh Grapes	Tea or Coffee + Water Currant Bun Biscuits Fresh Plums	Tea or Coffee + Water Chocolate Éclair Soft Cheese Sandwich Biscuits Fresh Apple	Tea or Coffee + Water Custard Tart Biscuits Fresh Orange	Tea or Coffee + Water Sponge Cake & Cream Soft Cheese Sandwich Biscuits Fresh Pear

Evening Meal	Pea Soup & Bread Roll Macaroni Cheese Sandwiches - Ham / Salmon Side Salad Fresh Fruit Salad & Ice-Cream Tea or Coffee Water	Tomato Rice Soup & Bread Roll Jacket Potato & Baked Beans Sandwiches – Turkey / Egg Side Salad Stewed Apple Yoghurt Tea or Coffee Water	Carrot & Coriander Soup & Bread Roll Cheese And Tomato Pizza Sandwiches – Beef Salad / Tuna Side Salad Melon Chocolate Mousse Tea or Coffee Water	Cream Of Mushroom Soup & Bread Roll Sardines & Tomato on Toast Sandwiches - Egg / Turkey Side Salad Canned Peaches/ Fruit Salad Ice-Cream Tea or Coffee Water	Potato & Leek Soup & Bread Roll Sausage Tomato & Bread Sandwiches – Cheese And Pickle / Salmon Side Salad Fresh Fruit Salad Yoghurt Tea or Coffee Water	Butter Bean & Tomato Soup & Bread Roll Jacket Potato, Cheese & Coleslaw Sandwiches – Beef Salad / Tuna Side Salad Fresh Fruit Salad Cheesecake Tea or Coffee + Water	Vegetable Soup & Bread Roll Prawn Salad & Bread Sandwiches – Egg / Turkey Side Salad Trifle Fresh Grapes Tea or Coffee Water
Nighttime Snack	Hot Drink Biscuits Water	Hot Drink Jam Sandwich / Biscuits Water	Hot Drink Biscuits Water	Hot Drink Jam Sandwich / Biscuits Water	Hot Drink Biscuits Water	Hot Drink Jam Sandwich / Biscuits Water	Hot Drink Biscuits Water

According to a cohort study done in Europe (HALE project) which investigated the single and combined effect of Mediterranean diet, being physically active, moderate alcohol use, and nonsmoking among individuals aged 70 to 90 years, adherence to a Mediterranean diet and healthful lifestyle is associated with a more than 50% lower rate of all-causes and cause-specific mortality [29]. The modified Mediterranean diet score was used in this study which has eight components: ratio of monounsaturated to saturated fat, legumes, nuts and seeds, grains, fruit, vegetables and potatoes, meat and meat products, dairy products, and fish. Intake of each component was adjusted to daily intakes of 2500 kcal (10.5 MJ) for men and 2000 kcal (8.5 MJ) for women [30].

### CONCLUSION

In this review, major guidelines in Iranian traditional medicine in different manuscript of old Iranian scientists were investigated and focused on elderly group. According to these manuscripts, traditional medicine has advantageous protocols for improvement of lifestyle of elderly. Use the elements that are warm and/or wet, urination for several times throughout the day, Excrete mucus (phlegm) from the body, avoid spicy foods, use goat milk and donkey milk, Moderate exercise and massage are some protocols for improvement of aging life that were recommended by Iranian old scientists such as Esmail Jorjani, Hakim Arzani, Hakim Aquili, Avicenna and etc. So, it may be to prevent of different diseases in elderly by using of major guidelines that introduced in Iranian traditional medicine. It is important

for elderly people to be knowledgeable about these guidelines to improve their lifestyle so that they acquire safe and comprehensive healthcare.

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