

Regimental Therapies in Unani Medicine: A Supportive Approach for Treating Male Infertility

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Abstract: Male infertility is a rising concern globally. Unani medicine offers *Ilaj bil Tadbeer* (Regimental Therapy) as a non-invasive, holistic approach that aims to restore balance in the body and enhance reproductive health¹. Therapies like Hammam²(bath), Dalk³(massage), and Hijamah⁴ (cupping) are traditionally used to strengthen the reproductive organs, improve circulation, detoxify humors, and correct temperament imbalances. This review highlights the role of Hammam, Dalk, Hijamah, and Riyazat in improving sperm parameters, revitalizing reproductive strength, and correcting humoral imbalances.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Infertility, particularly male infertility, is a growing concern worldwide, affecting nearly 8–12% of couples globally, with male factors contributing to almost 50% of these cases. From a Unani perspective, male infertility is considered primarily a disorder of Mani (semen) or Quwwat-e-Bah (sexual power), often associated with derangement in Akhlāt (humors), Mizāj⁵ (temperament), and dysfunction of the reproductive organs (A‘zā-e-Tanasuliyyah). Unani medicine is a time-tested holistic system that not only focuses on symptom alleviation but addresses the root causes by restoring the natural balance of the body. One of its foundational principles is the maintenance of health through correction of lifestyle and body temperament. This is achieved by three main approaches: *Ilaj bil Ghiza* (dietotherapy), *Ilaj bil Dawa* (pharmacotherapy), and *Ilaj bil Tadbeer* (regimental therapy). *Ilaj bil Tadbeer* refers to non-pharmacological, regimen-based therapies intended to detoxify, revitalize, and strengthen the body's internal faculties⁶. These methods aim to regulate the functioning of the Quwwat-e-Mudabbira Badan (body's self-regulatory

system) and correct derangements in Mizaj. In male infertility, where factors like stress, sedentary lifestyle, accumulation of morbid humors (Fuzool Akhlāt)⁶, and sexual exhaustion play a crucial role, regimental therapies like Hammam (steam bath), Dalk (massage), and Hijamah (cupping) serve as vital therapeutic tools. These therapies help in: Enhancing blood and energy flow to reproductive organs, Detoxifying stagnant humors and metabolic wastes, Regulating hormonal secretions, Revitalizing the Quwwat-e-Bah (reproductive power) Historically, Unani scholars like Ibn Sina, Razi, and Ibn Nafis emphasized the use of these regimens to correct dysfunctions of reproductive and other organ systems. In modern times, regimental therapies are gaining global interest for their integrative role in chronic and functional disorders, including sexual health issues.

II. CONCEPT OF ILAJ BIL TADBEER (REGIMENTAL THERAPY)

Laj bil Tadbeer, literally meaning "treatment through regimen," is a cornerstone of Unani medicine. It encompasses a set of non-pharmacological therapeutic interventions designed to preserve health, prevent disease, and restore physiological harmony. The term "Tadbeer" refers to discipline, planning, and regulation—hence this form of therapy focuses on structured lifestyle modifications that influence the body's internal milieu and humoral balance (Tādīl-e-Akhlāt). Unani physicians like Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Razi emphasized that the human body functions under the influence of six essential factors (Asbāb-e-Sittah Zarūriyah), and any derangement in these can lead to disease. Ilaj bil Tadbeer seeks to realign these essential factors—especially sleep, physical activity, diet, mental health, air quality, and excretion—through personalized regimens, aiming to restore the body's Mizāj (temperament) to its natural state. In the context of male reproductive health, regimental therapies are particularly important in revitalizing Quwwat-e-Bah (sexual vigor), improving the production and quality of Mani (semen), and correcting dysfunctions like Qillat-e-Mani (oligospermia), Jiryan (spermatorrhea), and Zo'fe Bah (low libido). The following are key modalities under Ilaj bil Tadbeer that have been traditionally used in male infertility:

A. Hammām (Steam/Bath Therapy)

Hammām, also known as steam or bath therapy, is one of the oldest and most effective regimental therapies in Unani medicine. Steam bath houses trace their roots back to Central Asia, where they served not only as places for bathing but also as social hubs for relaxation, interaction, and occasionally, ritual practices. According to the classical Unani text *Al-Qānūn* by Ibn Sina, composed around 1000 BC, an appropriately administered Hammām therapy can offer substantial health benefits^{8,9}. Hammām therapy has the potential to rejuvenate an individual, leaving them as refreshed as a newborn¹⁰. It is a specialized form of therapy wherein the patient is exposed to heat, steam, or medicated water under controlled conditions to stimulate detoxification, balance body temperament, and strengthen organ systems.

The concept of Hammām has its roots in classical texts such as "*Al-Qānūn fi al-Tibb*" by Ibn Sīnā, where it is recommended for expelling waste products (Fuzlāt) from the body, softening the skin, opening the pores, and facilitating the movement of Ruh (vital energy) and Dam (blood). It is also described in *Zakhira Khwarazm Shahi* and *Kamil al-Sana'at*, especially for diseases involving cold and moist Mizāj.

➤ Types of Hammām:

- *Dry Hammām (Hammām Yābis)*: Use of dry heat to remove waste and improve circulation.
- *Wet Hammām (Hammām Ratab)*: Application of moist heat or steam, often combined with herbal decoctions.

- *Medicated Hammām*: Use of decoctions or oils like Baboona (chamomile), Rihan (basil), or Zanjabeel (ginger) to add therapeutic value.

➤ Physiological Effects:

- **Vasodilation**: Heat exposure leads to dilation of peripheral blood vessels, improving circulation especially in the pelvic and testicular region.
- **Excretion of waste**: Induces sweating which facilitates removal of toxins (Akhlāt-e-Fasida).
- **Muscle relaxation**: Reduces fatigue and tension in reproductive and pelvic muscles.
- **Nervous stimulation**: Enhances nerve response, which may benefit conditions like Bu'fi Bah (low libido) or psychogenic erectile dysfunction.
- **Balance of Mizāj**: Especially useful for those with cold and moist temperament affecting reproductive function.

➤ Application in Male Infertility:

In cases of Qillat-e-Mani (oligospermia), Jiryan (spermatorrhea), or Tasaal-e-Mazī (continuous seminal discharge), Hammām is used as a supportive therapy. When administered regularly: It enhances testicular perfusion and nourishment. It helps in clearing congestion and improving sperm parameters. It rejuvenates Quwwat-e-Bah (sexual energy) by balancing the humors and increasing vitality.

➤ Clinical Protocol

Duration: 15–30 minutes per session, 2–3 times weekly.
Herbs used: Decoctions of Suranjan Shirin, Ustukhuddus, or Baboona for anti-inflammatory and revitalizing effects.

➤ Precautions:

Avoided in persons with hot temperament or cardiovascular conditions unless medically justified.

➤ Modern Parallels and Integration:

Modern studies have shown that controlled heat exposure increases peripheral circulation, reduces oxidative stress¹¹, and improves hormonal regulation—all of which support the classical Unani claims. Hammām, thus, can be safely integrated with modern reproductive health interventions when guided properly.

B. Dalk (Massage Therapy):

Dalk, or therapeutic massage, is a fundamental component of Ilaj bil Tadbeer in Unani medicine. It involves the application of pressure and movement on specific parts of the body using hands or medicated oils¹². The purpose is to stimulate, relax, or strengthen the underlying tissues, nerves, and organs. This technique is deeply rooted in classical Unani texts like *Al-Qānūn fi al-Tibb* by Ibn Sīnā and *Kamil al-Sana'at*, where it is described not only for musculoskeletal issues but also as a general tonic (Muqawwī) for internal organs including the reproductive system.

➤ *Types of Dalk*¹³:

- *Dalk-e-Layyan (Smooth massage)*: For relaxation and improving subtle energy flow.
- *Dalk-e-Sulb (Hard massage)*: For muscular stiffness and sluggish circulation.
- *Dalk bil-Advia (Medicated massage)*: Massage with oils containing Unani herbs like Roghan-e-Baiza Murgh¹⁴, Roghan-e-Kunjad, for strengthening nerves and reproductive organs.

➤ *Physiological Effects*:

Improves blood and lymphatic circulation in the lower abdomen and pelvic area, enhancing nourishment to reproductive tissues. Stimulates nerve endings associated with the spinal cord and genital area, promoting better neuromuscular coordination. Removes stagnation of Fuzlāt (waste products) and balances the local Mizāj (temperament) of the testicular and pelvic region. Enhances testosterone response indirectly through better pituitary-gonadal feedback.

➤ *Role in Male Infertility*³:

In conditions such as: Qillat-e-Mani (oligospermia), Jiryan (spermatorrhea), Zo'fe Bah (low libido). Dalk is applied to: Strengthen the Quwwat-e-Bah (reproductive power), Stimulate *Quwwat-e-Mufarriqa* (distributive faculty) to ensure proper delivery of nourishment to testes, Act as a Muqawwī A'za-e-Tanasuli (tonic for genital organs).

➤ *Application Protocol*:

Oils used: Roghan-e-Kharateen (for erectile weakness), Roghan-e-Malkangni¹⁵ and Roghan-e-Kalonji.

Frequency: 3–5 times a week, depending on condition. Technique: Circular motion over lower back, groin, thighs, and scrotal support areas. Care is taken to avoid rough handling. Duration: 15–20 minutes per session.

➤ *Modern Insights and Integration*:

Research has demonstrated that massage therapy may improve infertility¹⁶ by reducing stress hormones like cortisol, Increasing serotonin and dopamine levels, Enhancing testicular blood flow and reducing oxidative damage to sperm. Massage also helps in psychogenic infertility, where anxiety or stress impairs sexual function.

C. *Hijāmah (Cupping Therapy)*:

Hijamah, commonly known as cupping therapy, is a significant regimen-based modality in the Unani system of medicine. The term "Hijamah" is derived from the Arabic word Al-Hajm, which translates to "sucking." This therapy is primarily categorized into two types: Hijamah-bish-Shart (wet cupping, involving scarification) and Hijamah-bila-Shart (dry cupping, without scarification).

Historical references to cupping therapy are found as early as 1550 B.C. in the Ebers Papyrus of ancient Egypt. The Greek physician Hippocrates also recommended cupping for various ailments, particularly for musculoskeletal issues. In the Unani framework, Hijamah is carried out using

specialized cups—traditionally made from animal horns, though modern versions include glass, plastic, or silicone—that adhere to the skin to create a vacuum. This suction, either through heat or mechanical pumps, is intended to extract accumulated waste materials (madda fāsida), restore dislocated organs, redirect imbalanced humours, or enhance circulation at targeted sites.^{17,18} Unani scholars also emphasized the importance of timing in administering Hijamah. The procedure is ideally performed in the middle of the lunar month, as it is believed that bodily humours reach their peak agitation during this period. Additionally, afternoon hours are considered the most beneficial time for conducting this therapy, based on classical guidelines.

➤ *Types of Hijāmah*:

- *Hijāmah Bilā Shart (Dry Cupping)*: Application of vacuum without incision, used for stagnation, pain, and energy balancing.
- *Hijāmah Ma'a Shart (Wet Cupping)*: Followed by minor incisions to allow the release of impure blood (dam-e-fāsid), used to detoxify and improve organ function.

➤ *Unani Perspective*:

According to classical Unani scholars like Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and Jalīnoos (Galen), Hijāmah helps remove morbid humors that interfere with the Quwwat-e-Tanasuliya (reproductive faculty), Quwwat-e-Mudabbira Badan (regulatory power of the body), and maintains the balance of Akhlāt (humors). By eliminating harmful substances¹⁹, Hijāmah helps in: Reviving reproductive strength (Taqwiyat-e-Bah), Improving semen quality, Enhancing libido and sexual performance.

➤ *Cupping Points Relevant to Male Reproductive Health*:

- Qamahdūwah (Base of neck): For general detox¹⁹ and hormonal balance.
- Lumbar region (lower back): Stimulates kidneys and sexual organs.
- Pubic region and thighs: Directly enhances blood flow to the testes and penis.
- Points around the liver and spleen: Support blood formation and digestion, indirectly boosting semen quality.

➤ *Benefits in Male Infertility*⁴:

Qillat-e-Mani (Low sperm count), Jiryan (Spermatorrhea), Su-e-Mizāj-e-Bah (Imbalanced sexual temperament)

➤ *Mechanisms Include*:

Detoxification of reproductive tissues, Improved blood perfusion and oxygenation to testes, Hormonal rebalancing, including testosterone regulation, Reduction of oxidative stress and inflammatory mediators, Stimulation of nerve endings and reflex zones that influence the hypothalamus-pituitary-gonadal axis.

➤ *Procedure and Safety:*

Performed by trained Unani physicians, Cups are applied for 5–10 minutes, incisions are minimal and superficial, Carried out once or twice monthly, preferably on an empty stomach and specific days (17th, 19th, 21st of lunar month), Post-procedure care includes rest, light diet, and use of antiseptic herbal washes.

➤ *Scientific Correlation:*

Recent studies support the benefits of cupping in improving sperm motility, hormonal balance, and vascular function⁴. It also reduces psychological stress and enhances general well-being—factors often overlooked in conventional infertility treatments.

D. Riyāzat (Exercise Therapy):

Riyāzat, or physical exercise, is a fundamental component of regimental therapy (Ilāj bil Tadbeer) in Unani medicine. It refers to purposeful, regulated physical activity undertaken to maintain or restore the balance of humors (Akhlat) and enhance the Quwwat-e-Tanasuliya (reproductive faculty). Classical Unani physicians like Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) emphasized that moderate and tailored exercise plays a vital role in: Expelling waste materials (Fuzlāt) through perspiration, Improving digestion (Hazm), Stimulating organ functions, especially reproductive organs, Strengthening Quwwat-e-Nāzi'a (expulsive power) and Quwwat-e-Jāzbā (attractive power)²⁰ Hippocrates, Galen, Al-Razi, and Ibn Sina extensively elaborated on the health-promoting benefits of Riyazat (exercise) in their respective medical writings^{21,22}.

➤ *Unani Rationale for Exercise in Reproductive Health:*

Unani scholars state that inactivity or sedentary lifestyle leads to accumulation of cold and moist humors (Balgham) and weakens the body's natural faculties (Quwā-e-Tabī'iyya), especially: *Quwwat-e-Musawwira* (Formative power):

essential for semen production. *Quwwat-e-Mudabbira Badan* (Regulatory power): maintains harmony and organ function.

➤ *Riyāzat Helps In:*

Enhancing blood circulation to reproductive organs, Increasing basal metabolism, supporting nutrient assimilation, Reducing stress and psychological burden, which are known contributors to Qillat-e-Mani (oligospermia) and Jiryan (spermatorrhea), Promoting hormonal balance, especially testosterone and LH/FSH levels. Unani medicine advocates moderate, non-strenuous, and individualized exercise plans, such as: Walking or brisk walking (3–5 km/day), Horse riding, recommended for stimulating the lower abdomen and pelvis, Swimming, to tone the body and regulate humoral temperament. Mild jogging, improving cardiovascular and sexual health, Stretching and breathing exercises, to balance temperament (Mizāj).

➤ *Precautions:*

Exercise should be done after digestion (2–3 hours post-meal), Avoid over-exertion as it may deplete Rūḥ (vital spirit) and semen, Type and duration must be based on Mizāj (temperament) and health status, Hot and dry individuals: advised light exercises. Cold and moist individuals: need stimulating, warming exercises.

➤ *Modern Correlation:*

Modern research supports Riyāzat in male fertility by: Increasing testosterone levels, Enhancing sperm quality²³ and morphology, Improving erectile function and sexual stamina, Reducing oxidative stress and inflammatory markers. Studies have shown that regular aerobic and resistance exercises, when done in moderation, can boost reproductive hormone levels and improve semen parameters significantly.

Table 1 Comparison of Unani Regimental Therapies in Male Infertility

Therapy	Mechanism of Action	Key Benefits	Unani Perspective	Modern Correlation
1. Hammam	Heat & steam improve blood flow, detoxification	Enhances testicular perfusion, reduces stress, improves libido	Balances cold/moist Mizāj, expels Fuzlāt	Increases circulation, reduces oxidative stress
2. Dalak	Massage stimulates nerves, enhances local circulation	Boosts testosterone, improves sperm motility	Strengthens Quwwat-e-Bah, tones A'za Tanasuli	Relieves stress, improves hormonal feedback
3. Hijamah	Removes waste blood, detoxifies, rebalances hormones	Improves sperm quality, regulates hormones, relieves stagnation	Detoxifies Akhlāt, revives Quwwat-e-Bah	Improves testicular function, reduces inflammation
4. Riyazat	Physical movement promotes metabolism and circulation	Improves semen quality, boosts energy and hormonal health	Prevents accumulation of cold humors	Enhances testosterone & reduces stress

III. CONCLUSION

Regimental therapies (Ilāj bil Tadbīr) hold a pivotal role in the Unani system as supportive, holistic interventions for managing male infertility. Classical techniques such as Dalk (therapeutic massage), Hijāmah (wet cupping), and Hammām (steam therapy) not only align with the principles of humoral balance but also show promising outcomes when evaluated through modern clinical and physiological lenses. Therapeutic massage enhances local circulation, boosts testosterone, and improves sperm motility by relieving muscular tension and facilitating hormonal balance. Wet cupping supports detoxification, reduces oxidative stress, and promotes Leydig cell activity, which is critical for testosterone synthesis. Steam therapy improves pelvic blood flow, reduces psychological stress, and addresses cold temperaments (Buroodat) that may impair reproductive functions. When integrated with Ilāj bil Ghizā (dietotherapy) and Ilāj bil Dawa (pharmacotherapy), these regimens synergistically enhance sperm quality, sexual strength, and hormonal health. Their non-invasive nature, cost-effectiveness, and physiological relevance make them valuable adjuncts in reproductive care. With growing clinical validation, these time-tested therapies warrant further research and structured incorporation into integrative treatment protocols for male infertility. Future clinical trials are essential to standardize protocols and validate efficacy, promoting Unani regimental therapies as adjuncts to mainstream reproductive healthcare.

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