



## CONCEPT OF CONTRACEPTION IN UNANI MEDICINE: A VIEW

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Article Received on: 10/11/11 Revised on: 15/12/11 Approved for publication: 19/01/12

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### ABSTRACT

Different techniques of birth control have been described by Unani physicians in their treatises. Few of them are simple to practice and non-injurious. Some may appear farfetched ideas today and also injurious to health. While one is not expected to follow all the techniques, it certainly is possible even today, to follow some of these techniques which can easily be explained and might already have been followed by the rural people. Unani physicians paid adequate attention and have provide considerable valuable basic information on the anatomy and physiology of procreation leading to later developments in obstetrics and gynaecology. Semen, pregnancy, growth of embryo, delivery, infertility, abortion and contraception etc are the topics which have been greatly enriched due to the erudition of the ancient Unani physicians.

**KEYWORDS:** Unani physicians, Contraceptives, Pregnancy

### INTRODUCTION

Prevention of childbirth through artificial methods is not a new thing. In by-gone days, people used to try to prevent childbirth secretly through uncouth practices. The modern society has accorded respect to these means, has improved upon them and given them a philanthropic flavour. Contraception through continence is very difficult to achieve, and if there is no alternative to continence the health of numerous women will be spoiled by frequent pregnancies. Apart from this, if there were no bar against childbirth, then population will grow by leaps and bounds, many families will become poorer and their children shall remain half-clad, half-fed and ill-educated. The techniques of birth control can be classified by the stage of reproduction during which it is active. A form of birth control which prevents the sperm from fertilizing the egg is a contraceptive agent<sup>1,2</sup>. A form of birth control which acts after fertilization to prevent or interrupt the implantation of the embryo into the uterine lining is a contraceptive agent<sup>3</sup>. After implantation has occurred, an agent which ends gestation by terminating the pregnancy is an abortifacient<sup>4,5</sup>.

Unani physician treatises deal with drugs used primarily as of the following.

- Contraceptive: Any agent or measure used to prevent conception.
- Abortifacient: An agent or drug which may bring about abortion or expel.
- Emmenagogue: An agent or measure that induces menstruation.

These are used either as simple or compound drugs, orally as well as locally. Oral drugs are used in the form of decoction, pills, tablets and powder during or after menstruation. The drugs may be administered locally on male or female genital organs as follows.

- Application: Medicinal Preparation applied on male or female genital organs.
- Suppository: A medicinal preparation in solid form suitable for insertion into the vagina.
- Pessary: Plug or medicated device specially one worn in the vagina.
- Liniment: A thin ointment

- Douche: A jet of water or medicinal preparation for cleaning the vagina.
- Sitz bath: A fairly shallow hip bath in which a person is seated.
- Anointment: To smear with ointment or oil.
- Fumigation: To expose to gases or vapours from drugs.
- Paste: A medicinal preparation of a soft, sticky consistency, which is applied externally.

### Techniques for preventing the entrance of semen in the uterus<sup>6,7</sup>

- The man should separate from the woman at the time of ejaculation so that semen is discharged outside the uterus (coitus interruptus)
- Seminal discharge should be held-back before the separation. This is only possible by practice.
- The woman should insert some tablets or suppositories of drugs in the vagina to prevent the entrance of semen in uterus, so that the opening of the uterus is closed thereby and the seminal fluid prevented from entry into uterus.

### Techniques to be adopted if the semen has entered the uterus<sup>6,7</sup>

- The couple should retire quickly after the sexual union and the woman should sneeze, make loud voice and jump repeatedly on back side.
- The drugs may be applied to the uterus or they may be inserted in the form of pills based on these ingredients:
  - Nausadar (Ammonium chloride)
  - Shakar (Cane sugar)
  - Ushnan (Alkali plant)
  - and any other emmenagogues.
- The woman should sit on her tiptoes and rub her umbilicus with the thumb.

### Techniques to be adopted if the above mentioned measures have failed<sup>6,7</sup>

The woman should open the os of the uterus inserting a probe into it. For this purpose the wooden probe is advisable particularly of asl-al-khubbazi. As a precautionary measure a side of probe must be tied on the thigh with a thread so that it might not enter fully. The probe must be inserted slowly and if it does not serve the purpose at the first attempt, it should be repeated after 3 or 4 days. Some women use a wick of thin and soft paper instead of a wooden probe. The wick, soaked in ginger water is put in vagina. A side of the wick is tied

with a silken thread for withdrawing it from the vagina. This is useful and harmless method but has to be administered through an experienced midwife.

#### Religious Views On Birth Control

Religions vary widely in their views of the ethics of birth control. The Roman Catholic Church accepts only Natural Family Planning and only for serious reasons<sup>8</sup> while Protestants maintain a wide range of views from allowing none to very lenient<sup>9</sup>. Views in Judaism range from the stricter Orthodox sect to the more relaxed Reform sect<sup>10</sup>. Hindus may use both natural and artificial contraceptives<sup>11</sup>. A common Buddhist view of birth control is that preventing conception is ethically acceptable, while intervening after conception has occurred or may have occurred is not<sup>12</sup>.

In Islam, contraceptives are allowed if they do not threaten health, although their use is discouraged by some<sup>13</sup>. The Quran does not make any explicit statements about the morality of contraception, but contains statements encouraging procreation. Prophet Muhammad also is reported to have said "marry and procreate"<sup>14</sup>.

#### Zakhira Khawarizm Shahi Al Jurjani (Urdu Translation)

- The man should anoint the glans penis with Kunjad oil before the sexual intercourse. In this way semen is not retained in the uterus.
- The safest way is to wrap the penis with a fine and thin piece of cloth, then insert and ejaculate in the vagina. After the sexual act the piece of cloth should be removed thereby so that the semen might come out.

#### Precautions should be adopted during the use of contraceptives

- The women should avoid soup of cold, bitter and astringent substances.
- The women should avoid cold water, water melon, peach and other flatulent things.
- The women should take bath everyday with lukewarm water.
- The women should take soft and digestive diet e.g. eggs, onion soup etc. onion and saffron should also be mixed in these soups. Almond oil, meat and claws of the young birds are also suitable.
- The women should douche her abdomen and uterus with the decoction of softening drugs.

#### Few Unani Drugs Use In Birth Control<sup>15</sup>

**Botanical Name:** *Allium ampeloprasum*

**English Name:** Leek

**Unani Name:** Gandana, Kurras

**Parts Used:** Seeds, leaves juice

**Actions:** Emmenagogue, stimulant, contraceptive, foeticidal.

**Dosage:** Oral 3 gm

**Chemical Constituents** Essential oil with alliacins, a disulphide compound as a main ingredient. Fatty acid composition of the seed oil has oleic acid and protein.

**Usage:** For contraception used in form of pessary. For abortion and as emmenagogue in form of douch and pessary.

**Botanical Name:** *Allium cepa*

**English Name:** Onion

**Unani Name:** Piyaz, basal

**Parts Used:** Root, seeds

**Actions:** Emmenagogue, anti-inflammatory, disinfectant, antispasmodic, hypoglycaemic, contraceptive

**Dosage:** External use as required

**Chemical constituents:** Glucainins, pectin, flavonol

**Usage:** In the form of liniment on genital in males for the purpose of contraception and in the form of vaginal douche in female as emmenagogue.

**Botanical Name:** *Ajuga chamaepitys* Schard

**English Name:** Ground pine, yellow bugle

**Unani Name:** Kakronda, Kamafitoos

**Parts Used:** Leaves dry or green, leaves juice

**Actions:** Emmenagogue, Laxative, Anti-inflammatory, Diuretic, Abortifacient.

**Dosage:** Leaves juice 25-100 ml. for external use as required.

**Usage:** Local in form of vaginal douche and vaginal suppository.

**Botanical Name:** *Anacyclus pyrethrum*

**English Name:** Spanish pellitory

**Unani Name:** Aqarqarha

**Parts Used:** Flowers, leaves and root.

**Actions:** Silagogue, stimulant and sedative

**Dosage:** 1 gm

**Usage:** Used locally as paste or suppository in combination with such other agents for contraception.

**Botanical Name:** *Anethum sowa kurz*

**English Name:** Sowa, Indian dill

**Unani Name:** Soya, Shibbat

**Parts Used:** Seed, oil

**Actions:** Carminative, stimulant, stomachic, emmenagogue, contraceptive, antipyretic

**Dosage:** 10-15 gm

**Chemical constituents:** D- limonene, dihydrocarvone, a-pinene, a-terpinene, p-cymene, a-bergamotene, b-terpineol, nonanol, decanal.

**Usage:** Use orally as well as locally in form of pessary.

**Botanical Name:** *Aristolochia rotunda*

**English Name:** European birthwort, Round Aristolochia

**Unani Name:** Zarawand Mudahraj

**Parts Used:** Root

**Actions:** Resolvent, antidote, Stimulant, deobstruent, and emmenagogue.

**Usage:** Oral use has been recommended for the purpose of contraception.

**Botanical Name:** *Artemisia absinthium*

**English Name:** Green ginger, wormwood

**Unani Name:** Afsanteen

**Parts Used:** Whole plant

**Actions:** Antihelminthic, emmenagogue, resolvent, abortifacient.

**Usage:** Used in the form of vaginal douche as well as pessary.

**Botanical Name:** *Butea monosperma kuntz*

**English Name:** Flame of the forest, Bengal kino, Bastard teak

**Unani Name:** Dhak, Plas, Tesu

**Parts Used:** Seeds

**Actions:** Antehelminthic, contraceptive

**Dosage:** 5-10 gm

**Usage:** Used orally as well as locally in the form of pessary with honey for contraception.

**Botanical Name:** *Cinnamomum camphora*

**English Name:** Camphor tree

**Unani Name:** Kafoor

**Parts Used:** Extracts

**Actions:** Stimulant, sedative, anti-spasmodic, carminative, contraceptive in male

**Dosage:** 125-250 mg

**Usage:** Used orally for contraception in males

**Botanical Name:** *Centaurea centaurium*

**English Name:** Yellow Knapweed, Great Centuary

**Unani Name:** Qantooriyoon kabeer

**Parts Used:** Whole plant

**Actions:** Emmenagogue, abortifacient, decongestive, astringent

**Usage:** Local in form of douche and pessary

**Botanical Name:** *Helleborus niger*

**English Name:** Black Hellebore, Christmas rose

**Unani Name:** Khirbaq Siyah, Khirbaq e aswad

**Parts Used:** Root

**Actions:** Emmenagogue, cathartic, antihelminthic, abortifacient, foeticidal

**Dosage:** External use as pessary, 2-3 gm

**Usage:** In the form of vaginal suppository for abortion and for the purpose of emmenagogue.

**Botanical Name:** *Nymphaea alba*

**English Name:** White water lily

**Unani Name:** Nilofar

**Parts Used:** Flower, seeds, root

**Actions:** Flower cooling effect on blood, contraceptive, antifertile, cardiotoxic

**Dosage:** Green flower 7-10 gm

**Usage:** Used orally with other ingredients in form of compound drugs as contraceptive and antifertility for male and female both.

**Botanical Name:** *Peucedanum sativum*

**English Name:** Parsnip

**Unani Name:** Jangli Gajar, Gajor e Dashti

**Parts Used:** Seeds

**Actions:** Emmenagogue, diuretic, abortifacient

**Dosage:** 5-7 gm

**Usage:** In form of pessary for abortion.

Ibn e Sina in the third volume of Al-Qanoon has mentioned some drugs and devices for contraception as..

#### Regarding Abortion

A physician may advise the woman for abortion in the following conditions:

- A female teenager who has a danger to her life.
- A woman having a disease of uterus.
- A woman with weak bladder; Z (If becomes pregnant, the bladder bursts and she suffers with enuresis).

#### A. Contraceptive Devices

- Intercourse should be avoided during the days when there is a possibility of conception. The posture should also not be such which results in pregnancy.
- At the time of ejaculation they should practice interruptus coitus. In case there is still a fear of pregnancy, the woman should, after intercourse jump backwards seven or nine times, for it usually results in the flowing out of semen.

#### B. Contraceptive Drugs

For preventing pregnancy following drugs may be used.

- Before intercourse Qatran (Tar pinus roxb) may be inserted in the vagina as a pessary.
- Penis should be anointed with Qatran.
- The application of Balsam oil and Asfidaj (white lead) is applied on penis and in vagina is also helpful.
- The woman may put as a suppository in vagina the pulp of pomegranate and alum after the intercourse.

- Woman may during safe period put in her vagina the seeds of cabbage and its buds and also uses the same before and after intercourse. It ensures prevention of pregnancy if Qatran and extract of mint are also added to it.
- If a suppository made by pulp of colecynt, white bryony, iron rust, sulphur, scammony and seeds of cabbage is used, it prevents pregnancy.
- Use of the leaves of white poplar as a suppository after menstruation is helpful in prevention of pregnancy. Its action becomes strong if the oil of white poplar is added to it.
- Suppository of black pepper is also useful.
- If sesame oil is applied on the glans penis before intercourse there will be no pregnancy.
- If the woman takes orally 90 ml of sweet basal juice, it will prevent pregnancy.

Hibatullah bin Jami Israili (d. 1198 A.D) was associated with the court of sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi (1171-1193 A.D). He mentions some contraceptive devices in his "Kitab al Irshad li Masalih al Anfus wal Ajsaad" which are as follows.

- Application of juice extracted from onion on genital organs before intercourse is effective to avoid pregnancy.
- If woman uses a suppository prepared with mint (*Mentha arvensis*) and *Allium ascalonicum* after menstruation, she will be safe from pregnancy.
- Suppository of myrrh, galbanum, common rue, hellebore and leaves of *Aegle marmelos* Corr having the same effect.
- It is said that if broad bean seeds taken on an empty stomach is very helpful in avoiding pregnancy.
- Application of any oil on male genital organ before the intercourse prevents conception.

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