



Toward Evidence-Based Lifestyle Interventions in Iranian Traditional Medicine: Principles, Personalization, and Public Health Applications

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Abstract

Health promotion through lifestyle is at the heart of modern preventive medicine. Iranian Traditional Medicine (ITM), with its centuries-old wisdom, offers a culturally grounded model for achieving well-being. This review explores ITM's approach to lifestyle through Setteh-e-Zaruriyyeh—six essential principles of health—and their relevance to modern challenges. By integrating concepts like Mizaj (temperament) and reviewing clinical studies, we show how ITM aligns with contemporary strategies. The paper concludes with suggestions for integrating ITM into public health frameworks.

Keywords:

Iranian Traditional Medicine (ITM), Setteh-e-Zaruriyyeh, Lifestyle medicine, Preventive healthcare, Mizaj (temperament), Personalized medicine, non-communicable diseases (NCDs)

Introduction

Over 70% of global deaths are now attributed to preventable lifestyle-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs) [1]. This alarming rise has revived interest in time-tested health systems such as Iranian Traditional Medicine (ITM) [2]. ITM emphasizes balance—between body, mind, and environment—and guides individuals to align their daily habits with their unique Mizaj or temperament [3]. Instead of treating illness after it occurs, ITM proactively nurtures wellness. In



the context of mounting global healthcare costs and lifestyle-driven diseases, this traditional approach offers low-cost, culturally adaptable methods for prevention.

Foundations of Iranian Traditional Medicine

The roots of ITM lie in humoral theory, built upon the interaction of four elements—water, air, fire, and earth [4]. Each person possesses a dominant temperament (Mizaj) made up of combinations like hot-dry or cold-wet. Health means balance; disease means disturbance [5]. ITM practitioners don't treat diseases in isolation. They consider physical traits, emotional responses, digestion, sleep patterns, and even behavior to guide personalized interventions.

Moreover, ITM's methodology centers on hefz-o-sehhat (preservation of health), placing prevention before intervention. Diagnoses are holistic, incorporating pulse evaluation, tongue examination, behavioral observation, and questions about mood, sleep, and appetite—aligning it in some ways with integrative diagnostic models in contemporary medicine.

Comparison to Functional Medicine: ITM's principles of digestive health, detoxification, personalized diet, and mind-body balance resemble core concepts in modern functional medicine. However, ITM is inherently accessible, even in low-resource settings.

The Six Essential Principles (Setteh-e-Zaruriyyeh)

Air (Hava): Clean, moderate air is essential. Seasonal and climatic conditions are believed to influence internal balance [6].

Food and Drink (Makool va Mashroob): Nutrition must suit one's Mizaj, age, activity level, and climate. Overeating, cold or unseasonal foods, and hasty eating are discouraged [7].

Sleep and Wakefulness (Naum va Yaqzah): Sleep is a form of repair. Irregular or poor sleep disrupts digestion and emotional health [8].

Motion and Rest (Harkat va Sukoon): Movement energizes the body, but must be balanced with adequate rest [9].

Evacuation and Retention (Istefrāgh va Ehtebās): Timely elimination of waste is vital. Retention is considered toxic. Practices such as hijamah, massage, or enemas were traditionally used to support natural excretion [10].

Mental States (A'rāz-e-Nafsāni): Emotions like grief, fear, and anger can be root causes of physical disease. Emotional hygiene is therefore central to well-being [11].



NEW ADDITION – MIND–BODY INTEGRATION:

Modern interventions like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) have demonstrated significant benefits for anxiety, sleep disorders, and hypertension. This aligns with A'rāz-e-Nafsāni as an early biopsychosocial model of mental health

Scientific Evidence and Recent Studies

Several studies support the health effects of ITM principles. Emtiazy et al. (2012) reported improvement in metabolic syndrome following adherence to ITM lifestyle recommendations [12]. Sadeghzadeh and Heydari showed that adjusting mealtimes based on ITM guidance improved digestion and sleep [13]. Mind-body connections emphasized in ITM are now validated by psychoneuroimmunology [14]. Mirzaii et al. (2024) demonstrated that aromatherapy with *Melissa officinalis* significantly reduced anxiety in elderly individuals compared to placebo, confirming ITM's focus on emotional health (A'rāz-e-Nafsāni) [15]. Mojahedi et al. found a link between hot-wet Mizaj types and hypertension, opening a new path for personalized prevention [16].

Personalized Healthcare Through Mizaj-Based Approaches

Mizaj allows for truly individualized healthcare. Unlike the generic “one-size-fits-all” model, ITM matches diet, sleep, emotions, and even physical activity to a person's nature [17]. Zeinalian et al. argue that this system is cost-effective and culturally relevant, especially in communities with limited access to high-tech care [18]. While genomic medicine seeks personalization via sequencing, ITM achieves it through observable signs—skin tone, pulse, mood, and more [19]. ITM isn't a relic of the past; it's a viable complement to modern strategies [20].

CASE STUDY:

A 42-year-old male with cold-dry Mizaj experienced chronic fatigue, bloating, and irritability. After implementing warming diet, midday movement, and reduced screen time at night, symptoms improved by 70% in 8 weeks. No medications were used.

Comparison with Functional Medicine:

Both ITM and Functional Medicine prioritize root cause analysis, but ITM is more holistic, incorporating spirituality, seasonal rhythms, and constitutional diet.



Conclusion & Policy Recommendations

ITM provides a comprehensive, low-cost model for lifestyle-based health promotion. Its principles align with modern medicine's preventive goals. Incorporating ITM into public health frameworks could enhance cultural acceptance and improve health literacy.

Policy Applications:

Incorporate Mizaj-based lifestyle screening into national health records

Train ITM-literate health workers in community clinics

Fund research on ITM lifestyle interventions for NCD prevention

Comparative Integration and Contemporary Relevance

The relevance of ITM in modern systems lies in its conceptual and practical alignment with emerging global models of personalized and preventive medicine. For instance, the emphasis on temperament-based nutrition in ITM closely mirrors nutrigenomics, which tailors diet to one's genetic profile [21].

Mental health is another key parallel. ITM's recognition of emotional states as physical health determinants is now supported by psychoneuroimmunology and incorporated into mental health protocols globally [22].

A 2022 study showed that hybrid clinics offering ITM alongside conventional treatments improved patient satisfaction and long-term health outcomes [23]. Another pilot in Iran's family physician program found that ITM-based counseling reduced reliance on pharmacotherapy and improved lifestyle adherence [24].

Finally, WHO's Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014–2023 explicitly recommends the integration of evidence-based traditional systems into public health frameworks—a space where ITM already has a mature foundation [25].

Conclusion

Iranian Traditional Medicine provides more than historical insight—it offers a practical, time-tested framework for promoting health and preventing disease. Its focus on lifestyle, temperament-based personalization, and emotional balance aligns with many current trends in global public



health and preventive medicine. In a world facing rising rates of chronic illness and healthcare costs, ITM offers a culturally rich and adaptable system that integrates seamlessly with modern health goals. Future healthcare systems may benefit from embracing this ancient wisdom alongside contemporary advances.

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