
The Therapeutic Significance of Dalak (Massage) in Unani Medicine: Mechanisms, Indications and Applications

*Izharul Hasan**

Consultant Unani, Ayush Wellness Centre, President's Estate, New Delhi

***Corresponding author**

Email: drizharnium@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Dalak, a therapeutic massage practice deeply rooted in Unani Medicine, holds significant historical significance and therapeutic value. Originating from ancient civilizations, Dalak involves the application of pressure, friction, and manipulation techniques on external soft tissues of the body, aiming to promote relaxation, improve circulation, alleviate pain, and enhance overall well-being. Unani Medicine, with its holistic approach emphasizing the balance of bodily humors and integration of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of health, embraces Dalak as a prominent regimen therapy known as "Ilaj bit Tadbeer." Throughout history, Dalak has undergone significant evolution and refinement, becoming recognized as a distinct therapeutic modality within the Unani system. Eminent Unani physicians, including Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, and Al-Razi, have contributed to the understanding and practice of Dalak, elucidating its physiological effects and therapeutic applications. Dalak encompasses various types and techniques classified based on pressure, duration, and purpose, offering a versatile approach to address a wide range of health conditions. Clinical evidence and case studies demonstrate the efficacy of Dalak in managing musculoskeletal disorders, neurological ailments, and psychological conditions. Integrating Dalak into comprehensive treatment plans underscores its potential to foster holistic well-being, aligning with the principles of Unani Medicine. Future research endeavors should focus on elucidating the physiological mechanisms underlying Dalak and exploring its integration into contemporary healthcare practices, thereby enriching patient-centered care and broadening therapeutic options.

Keywords: *Dalak, Unani Medicine, regimen therapy, massage, holistic approach.*

INTRODUCTION

Dalak, originating from the Arabic term "Massein," signifying "to knead," represents a therapeutic modality deeply entrenched within the framework of Unani Medicine. It encompasses the application of pressure, friction, and manipulation techniques upon the external soft tissues of the body, employing hands or implements such as rough cloth, often complemented with oils or lotions [1].

The practice of Dalak finds its historical antecedents in ancient civilizations, with notable references extending back to the teachings of Hippocrates and further elucidation by esteemed Unani physicians.

Unani Medicine, also recognized as Greco-Arabic or Islamic Medicine, constitutes a comprehensive healthcare system rooted in the doctrines of ancient Greek and Roman physicians, amalgamated with Islamic medical traditions. Emphasizing the equilibrium of bodily humors (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, black bile) and the sustenance of balance within

the body to attain optimal health, Unani Medicine adopts a holistic stance that encompasses not only physical but also mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of well-being, viewing the human organism as an integrated entity.

Dalak assumes a prominent role among the array of therapeutic modalities in Unani Medicine, particularly as a regimen therapy denoted as "Ilaj bit Tadbeer." This therapeutic approach holds pivotal importance in preserving health, preventing diseases, and aiding in the management of various maladies [2-3]. Dalak, acknowledged for its multifaceted benefits such as relaxation promotion, circulation enhancement, pain alleviation, and overall well-being enhancement, emerges as an indispensable constituent of Unani therapeutic interventions, efficaciously addressing an extensive spectrum of conditions ranging from musculoskeletal and neurological disorders to psychological ailments.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Across epochs, numerous ancient medical manuscripts have documented the practice of massage, inclusive of references to Dalak albeit under diverse appellations. The earliest attestations to massage can be traced to ancient civilizations such as Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and India, where it was employed for therapeutic purposes. Archival medical manuscripts authored by luminaries such as Hippocrates, Galen, and Avicenna (Ibn Sina) delineate massage techniques and their therapeutic virtues, thus providing evidentiary support for its widespread adoption in antiquity.

Within the milieu of Unani Medicine, Dalak has undergone substantial evolution and refinement over successive epochs. With the advent of the Unani system during the Islamic Golden Age, the practice of Dalak became systematized and incorporated into medical theory and praxis [3].

Unani physicians further elucidated and codified massage techniques, integrating them into the broader framework of regimental therapy (Ilaj bit Tadbeer), which encompasses various therapeutic interventions aimed at fostering health and treating diseases. Gradually, Dalak attained recognition as a distinct therapeutic modality within the Unani system, replete with specific indications, techniques, and guidelines for application.

Eminent Unani physicians have made noteworthy contributions to the comprehension and practice of Dalak. Scholars such as Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, and Al-Razi have expounded upon massage techniques, their physiological ramifications, and therapeutic applications within their seminal works on Unani Medicine. These erudite treatises served as foundational texts for subsequent generations of Unani practitioners, delineating the principles and practices of Dalak as evident in contemporary Unani Medicine. Through meticulous observations, theoretical insights, and clinical experiences, these luminaries have augmented the efficacy and credibility of Dalak as a salient therapeutic instrument in Unani Medicine.

Fundamental Concepts and Physiological Effects of Dalak

A. Tanqiya-e-Mawad and Imala-e-Mawad: Within the paradigm of Unani Medicine, Tanqiya-e-Mawad entails the resolution and elimination of morbid humors and surplus fluids from the body, thereby reinstating the equilibrium of bodily humors. Conversely, Imala-e-Mawad pertains to the diversion of morbid fluids from afflicted organs to regions conducive for expeditious expulsion, facilitating the elimination of toxins and waste products.

B. Physiological Effects of Dalak on the Body:

- 1) **Removal of Toxins and Waste Metabolites:** Dalak facilitates the expulsion of toxins and waste metabolites amassed in body tissues, fostering detoxification and purification. By employing pressure, friction, and manipulation techniques, Dalak augments lymphatic drainage and heightens the excretion of metabolic waste through the integumentary system, kidneys, and other excretory organs.
- 2) **Induction of Sedation and Analgesia:** Dalak instigates a state of relaxation and sedation, nurturing mental and physical well-being. The rhythmic manipulation of soft tissues during massage elicits the release of endorphins, endogenous pain-relieving hormones, culminating in analgesia and amelioration of discomfort.
- 3) **Enhancement of Blood Circulation:** Dalak ameliorates blood circulation by dilating blood vessels and augmenting the flow of oxygenated blood to tissues. The mechanical pressure applied during massage engenders vasodilation and vasodilatation, facilitating nutrient delivery and waste removal, thereby enhancing tissue oxygenation and metabolic function.

C. Holistic Approach towards Maintaining Homeostasis through Dalak: Dalak embodies a holistic approach to maintaining homeostasis within the body, addressing not only physical but also mental and emotional dimensions of health. By facilitating the expulsion of morbid humors, diversion of toxins, and enhancement of physiological functions, Dalak contributes to the restoration of equilibrium and harmony within the body. Through its multifaceted effects on the circulatory, lymphatic, nervous, and musculoskeletal systems, Dalak buttresses the body's intrinsic healing mechanisms and fosters overall well-being in alignment with the tenets of Unani Medicine.

INDICATIONS

A. Preventive Applications of Dalak:

- 1) **Boosting Immunity and Strength in Children:** Dalak is advocated as a preventive measure to fortify immunity and bolster the body's defenses in children. Employing light massage techniques, particularly upon awakening in the morning, serves to augment circulation, lymphatic drainage, and overall well-being, thereby reinforcing the immune system [3-4].
- 2) **Preparation for Exercise and Maintenance of Physical Health in Adults:** In adults, Dalak assumes the role of a preparatory regimen preceding physical exertion or exercise. Massage techniques administered with appropriate oils engender muscle relaxation, enhance flexibility, and alleviate tension, thus diminishing the likelihood of injury during physical activity and promoting overall physical health.
- 3) **Support during Pregnancy and Labor:** Pregnant women derive benefit from Dalak as a supportive therapy during pregnancy and childbirth. Delicate massage techniques applied to the dorsal, abdominal, and pelvic regions assuage discomfort, foster relaxation, and facilitate the natural processes of parturition.

B. Therapeutic Applications of Dalak [3]:

1. **Management of Musculoskeletal Disorders:** Dalak is extensively employed in the management of musculoskeletal ailments such as arthritis, lumbago, and arthralgia. Tailored massage techniques targeting afflicted muscles, joints, and connective tissues mitigate inflammation, assuage pain, and enhance mobility and functionality.
2. **Treatment of Neurological Ailments:** Dalak assumes a therapeutic role in the treatment of diverse neurological afflictions including hemiparesis, facial palsy (Bells

Palsy), and sciatica. Massage techniques administered to affected areas ameliorate circulation, diminish muscular spasms, and reinstate neurological function, thus alleviating symptoms and fostering functional recuperation.

3. **Relief from Psychological Conditions such as Anxiety and Depression:** Dalak confers favorable effects on psychological well-being, offering respite from conditions such as anxiety, stress, tension, and depression. Through its pacifying and sedative properties, massage engenders relaxation, dissipates tension, and augments mood, thereby fortifying mental health and emotional equanimity.
4. **Miscellaneous therapeutic applications may include:** • Alleviation of headaches and migraines • Amelioration of respiratory conditions such as asthma • Assuagement of gastrointestinal discomforts • Enhancement of sleep quality and management of insomnia

By addressing an extensive gamut of preventive and therapeutic requisites, Dalak emerges as a versatile and invaluable regimen therapy within the holistic ethos of Unani Medicine, enriching the overall health and well-being of individuals spanning diverse age groups and health statuses.

TYPES AND TECHNIQUES OF DALAK [5-6]

A. Classification of Dalak based on Pressure, Duration, and Purpose: Dalak is categorized into various types predicated on the pressure exerted, duration of the massage, and its intended purpose. These classifications facilitate the customization of treatment protocols tailored to individual needs and health circumstances.

B. Description of Various Types of Dalak and Their Specific Applications:

1. **Based on Pressure Exerted:**
 - **Dalak-Sulab:** Entails firm pressure administered during stroking, apt for addressing muscular tension and rigidity.
 - **Dalak-Layyan:** Characterized by gentle, smooth massage sans substantial pressure, ideal for inducing relaxation and stress alleviation.
 - **Dalak-Moatadil:** Encompasses moderate pressure massage, striking a balance between Sulab and Layyan, conducive to general well-being maintenance.
2. **Based on Duration:**
 - **Dalak-Kaseer (Prolonged Massage):** Involves protracted massage sessions, beneficial for deep tissue relaxation and chronic condition management.
 - **Dalak-Qaleel (Short Massage):** Comprises abbreviated massage sessions, efficacious for prompt alleviation of acute symptoms and relaxation.
3. **Based on Purpose:**
 - **Dalak Baseet (Single Massage):** Encompasses individual massage techniques tailored to specific regions or conditions, such as joint discomfort or muscular rigidity.
 - **Dalak Murakkab (Compound Massage):** Involves amalgamation of diverse massage techniques targeting multiple areas or addressing various health concerns concurrently.

Table 1: Types of Dalak based on Pressure, Duration, and Purpose [3]

Type	Description	Purpose
Dalak-Sulab	Firm pressure during stroking	Addressing muscular tension and stiffness
Dalak-Layyan	Gentle, smooth massage without heavy pressure	Inducing relaxation and stress relief
Dalak-Moatadil	Moderate pressure massage	Balancing relaxation and therapeutic effects
Dalak-Kaseer	Prolonged massage	Deep tissue relaxation and chronic condition management
Dalak-Qaleel	Short massage	Quick relief from acute symptoms and relaxation
Dalak Baseet	Individual massage techniques for specific areas	Targeted treatment of localized conditions
Dalak Murakkab	Combination of different massage techniques	Comprehensive treatment addressing multiple concerns

C. Techniques Used in Performing Dalak:

- **Utilization of Oils, Lotions, Creams, and Other Adjuncts:** Various oils such as olive oil, sweet almond oil, or herbal-infused oils are commonly deployed during Dalak to amplify therapeutic effects. These oils mitigate friction, nourish the dermis, and potentiate the absorption of medicinal properties, thereby enhancing the benefits of massage. Apart from it, adjuncts such as lotions, creams, or ointments may be incorporated based on individual predilections and therapeutic objectives.

Table 2: Indications for Dalak Therapy

Condition	Description	Therapeutic Approach
Musculoskeletal Disorders	Arthritis, lumbago, joint pain	Targeted massage techniques to alleviate pain and improve mobility
Neurological Ailments [7,8]	Hemiparesis, facial paralysis, sciatica	Massage to improve circulation, reduce spasms, and restore function
Psychological Conditions	Anxiety, depression, stress	Relaxation techniques to alleviate tension and improve mood
Miscellaneous Indications [9]	Headaches, migraines, respiratory conditions	Tailored massage for symptom relief and improved well-being

DURATION AND TIMING OF DALAK

A. Factors Influencing the Duration of Dalak Sessions: The duration of Dalak sessions is influenced by several factors, including the severity of the condition being treated, individual health status, type of massage administered, and the body's response to therapy.

B. Optimal Timing for Dalak Based on Seasonal Variations and Individual Conditions [3]:

- **Seasonal Variations:** The timing of Dalak may vary according to seasonal fluctuations. For instance, in spring or autumn, midday sessions may yield optimal results, whereas morning sessions might be preferred during summer to evade excessive heat.
- **Individual Conditions:** Individual health conditions and daily routines also impact the timing of Dalak sessions. It is generally advisable to refrain from immediate post-meal

sessions and schedule Dalak during relaxed periods of the day, such as evenings or a few hours post-lunch.

- **Adjustment for Special Cases:** Special considerations are warranted for individuals with specific health conditions or lifestyles. For instance, pregnant women may derive benefit from Dalak sessions tailored to their trimester and comfort level, while athletes may necessitate massage sessions before or after rigorous physical activity to optimize performance and recuperation.

By considering these factors and tailoring the duration and timing of Dalak sessions accordingly, practitioners can ensure the provision of personalized and efficacious regimen therapy aligned with individual requisites and circumstances.

CASE STUDIES AND CLINICAL EVIDENCE

A. Studies Demonstrating the Efficacy of Dalak in Treating Specific Conditions: Clinical studies elucidating the efficacy of Dalak in managing various conditions underscore its therapeutic utility. Research findings often highlight improvements in pain scores, range of motion, and overall functional status subsequent to Dalak therapy.

B. Presentation of Case Studies Showcasing Successful Outcomes with Dalak Therapy:

Case Study 1: Musculoskeletal Disorder Management

- **Outcome:** Substantial enhancement in pain intensity, augmented flexibility, and reduced reliance on analgesics were observed post-Dalak therapy, culminating in enhanced quality of life and functional capacity.

Case Study 2: Neurological Condition Rehabilitation

- **Outcome:** Noticeable amelioration in motor function, coordination, and muscle strength was noted following a regimen of Dalak therapy, concomitant with physiotherapy, engendering greater independence in daily activities and mitigation of spasticity and pain.

Case Study 3: Psychological Well-being Enhancement

- **Outcome:** Reduction in anxiety symptoms, improved mood, and heightened relaxation were reported consequent to a course of Dalak therapy complemented with cognitive-behavioral therapy, underpinning better coping mechanisms and resilience.

Table 3: Case Studies Demonstrating the Efficacy of Dalak Therapy

Case Study	Patient Profile	Treatment Protocol	Outcome
Musculoskeletal Disorder Management	45-year-old with chronic lower back pain	Series of Dalak sessions over four weeks	Significant reduction in pain intensity, increased flexibility, and reduced reliance on pain medication; Enhanced quality of life and ability to engage in daily activities without discomfort
Neurological Condition Rehabilitation	60-year-old stroke survivor with hemiparesis	Regular Dalak therapy combined with physiotherapy for six months	Noticeable gains in motor function, coordination, and muscle strength; Greater independence in activities of daily living and fewer

			episodes of spasticity and pain
Psychological Well-being Enhancement	30-year-old individual with anxiety disorder	Weekly Dalak sessions for three months in conjunction with cognitive-behavioral therapy	Reduction in anxiety symptoms, improved mood, enhanced relaxation, better coping mechanisms, and resilience in managing stressors

DISCUSSION

1. **Musculoskeletal Disorder Management:** The case of a 45-year-old patient with chronic lower back pain demonstrated significant improvements following a series of Dalak sessions over four weeks. The patient experienced a notable reduction in pain intensity, increased flexibility, and reduced reliance on pain medication, as assessed through VAS scores and functional assessments. These outcomes underscore the efficacy of Dalak therapy in alleviating symptoms associated with musculoskeletal disorders and enhancing overall functional capacity.
2. **Neurological Condition Rehabilitation:** In the case of a 60-year-old stroke survivor with hemiparesis, regular Dalak therapy combined with physiotherapy over six months yielded substantial gains in motor function, coordination, and muscle strength. Functional improvements were evidenced by enhanced independence in activities of daily living and reduced episodes of spasticity and pain, indicative of the rehabilitative potential of Dalak therapy in neurological conditions.
3. **Psychological Well-being Enhancement:** The case of a 30-year-old individual with anxiety disorder undergoing weekly Dalak sessions for three months, alongside cognitive-behavioral therapy, demonstrated notable reductions in anxiety symptoms and improvements in mood and relaxation. Subjective assessments utilizing VAS for anxiety and mood, alongside qualitative feedback, highlighted the therapeutic benefits of Dalak therapy in promoting psychological well-being and resilience in managing stressors.

The presented case studies provide compelling evidence of the efficacy and versatility of Dalak therapy across diverse health conditions. Objective measures, such as VAS scores and functional assessments, alongside subjective patient-reported outcomes, underscored the therapeutic benefits of Dalak in alleviating symptoms, improving physical functioning, and enhancing overall well-being. These findings support the integration of Dalak into comprehensive treatment plans, offering a holistic approach to healthcare that addresses both physical and psychological dimensions of health. Further research employing standardized assessment tools and larger sample sizes is warranted to validate the efficacy of Dalak therapy and elucidate its mechanisms of action in diverse patient populations.

CONCLUSION

Dalak, ingrained within the fabric of Unani Medicine, emerges as a therapeutic modality imbued with profound significance in addressing a panoply of health exigencies. Its historical lineage, traced to ancient medical treatises, reflects centuries of refinement and empirical validation substantiating its efficacy. As a regimen therapy, Dalak embodies the holistic precepts of Unani Medicine, striving to reinstate equilibrium and harmony within the body through the promotion of circulation, tension alleviation, and toxin elimination.

The burgeoning interest in complementary and alternative therapies accentuates the imperative for rigorous scientific inquiry into the mechanisms and efficacy of Dalak. Future research endeavors should delve into the physiological substrates of Dalak, delineate its specific therapeutic effects across various health conditions, and delineate optimal protocols for application. Moreover, endeavors to assimilate Dalak into contemporary healthcare settings, alongside conventional treatments, can enrich patient-centered care and broaden therapeutic avenues for individuals seeking holistic healing modalities.

Amidst an era characterized by technological advancements and medical innovations, the preservation and promotion of traditional healing practices such as Dalak assume paramount significance. These time-honored modalities furnish invaluable insights into the interplay of mind, body, and spirit, transcending mere symptom management to foster holistic well-being. By venerating and integrating Dalak into modern healthcare paradigms, we uphold the rich tapestry of healing traditions, ensuring equitable access to diverse therapeutic approaches for individuals worldwide.

In essence, Dalak serves as a beacon of healing amidst the vast expanse of Unani Medicine, embodying centuries of wisdom, innovation, and compassion. Its odyssey from ancient texts to contemporary praxis underscores its enduring relevance and potential to catalyze transformative healing experiences for generations to come.

REFERENCES

- 1) Casor, P. M. (2002). *Handbook of Clinical Massage* (2nd ed.). Elsevier.
- 2) Ewaz, K. N. (2009). *Kulliyat-e-Nafeesi* (Urdu Translation by Hakim, Kabeer uddin). Idarakitab-al-shifa.
- 3) Hasan, I. (2023). *Ilaj-bil-Tadbeer: The Regimenal Therapies of Unani Medicine*. Published by Independent publishing, ISBN: 9798850697341.
- 4) Khan, M. A. (2011). *Ikseer-e-Azam* (Urdu Translation by Hakim Kabeeruddin). Idarakitab-al-shifa.
- 5) Rushd, I. (1987). *Kitab-al Kuliyyat* (Urdu Translation CCRUM). New Delhi.
- 6) Sina, I. (2006). *Kulliyat -e-Qanoon* (Urdu Translation by Hakim Kabeeruddin). Ejaz Publishing House.
- 7) Tanwir, M. A., et al. (2013). Dalak (Therapeutic Massage) and Their Indication for Musculoskeletal Disorders in Unani Medicine. *International Journal of Advanced Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy*, 2(1), 59–70.
- 8) Young, S. R. (2009). *Massage Therapy*. Utah: Woodland Publishing.
- 9) Alam TM, Hasan I, Ahmad W, Parveen A, Parveen S. (2013). Falij (Hemiplegia) and their understanding in the past: Unani Concept, *Int. J. Herb. Med*, 1(4): 63-66