
UNIT 2 ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE AND THERAPIES

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Concept of Alternative System of Medicine
- 2.3 Ayurvedic System of Medicine
 - 2.3.1 Definitions
 - 2.3.2 Concept of Health and Disease
 - 2.3.3 Diagnosis of Disease
 - 2.3.4 Treatment in Ayurveda
- 2.4 Unani System of Medicine
- 2.5 Siddha System of Medicine
- 2.6 Homeopathy
- 2.7 Naturopathy and Yoga
- 2.8 Amchi or Tibetan System of Medicine
- 2.9 Advantages and Disadvantages of Alternative System of Medicine
- 2.10 Alternative System of Medicine in Care of the Elderly
- 2.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.12 Key Words
- 2.13 Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJETIVES

After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- define the concept of alternative system of medicine;
- describe the definition and principles of different disciplines in the alternative system;
- discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the alternative system; and
- discuss the relevance of the alternative system of medicine in health care of the elderly.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Survival is one of the primary motives of life. Preserving life against the over-powering force of physical environment and predating biological environment has always been a struggle since the dawn of civilization. The continuity of human race and survival of its several highly developed cultures and civilizations is a proof of the victory of the mankind over these forces. Maintaining health, curing disease and preventing premature death has always been a human endeavour. Since the dawn of the civilization man has always tried to find relief from pain, discover cure for disease and live long and healthy. All known cultures of the past had their own systems of medicine and health care, from which modern systems of medicine have originated.

In this unit you will learn about different systems of medicine that are practiced in our country. You will also learn their principles of practice, advantages and disadvantages as well as their application in the health care of the elderly.

2.2 CONCEPT OF ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

The system of medicine, which has evolved in last five hundred years and is being practiced all over the world, is termed as the allopathic system of medicine. This system originated in Europe from traditional systems of medicine during the industrial revolution and renaissance and spread to all other continents along with colonialism. Allopathic system or modern medicine has been associated with scientific understanding of health and disease, public health and high degree of instrumentation and technicality. Curative medicine and preventive medicine are the two major arms of this system. However after controlling the infective and communicable diseases, the human race now faces the challenges of degenerative non-communicable diseases for which the modern system of medicine has fewer answers.

During these golden years of modern medicine, the traditional systems of medicine in many societies did not see any progress and several of them disappeared. However in many other societies such as India, most traditional systems of medicine survived the centuries of neglect. It has now become clear that these traditional systems of medicine can provide alternatives, where the modern system of medicine is not very successful namely, the degenerative and non-communicable diseases. These traditional systems of medicine have their principles of understanding and rational basis for practice.

Combination of modern system of medicine and alternative system of medicine as a comprehensive system of medicine is one of the priorities of the Government of India. Thus it would be important to have an overview of the alternative system of medicine in care of the older patient where most diseases are degenerative in nature with no cure in sight.

2.3 AYURVEDIC SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

Ayurveda or science of life, is one of the most ancient systems of medicine. It has grown as a body of knowledge along with the Indian civilization and is about 3500 years old. Let us learn more about this system in the following sub-sections.

2.3.1 Definitions

The fundamental and applied principles of Ayurveda have been organized in Atharvaveda (one of the four most ancient books of Indian knowledge, wisdom and culture) in the form of 114 hymns or formulations for the treatment and prevention of diseases.

Making use of systematic observations and documented experiences of the past, it has grown into a very comprehensive health care system in two major schools. The school of physicians is known as '*Atreya Sampradaya*' and the school of surgeons is referred to as '*Dhanvantri Sampradaya*'.

There are two major compilations in Ayurveda—*Charka Samhita* and *Sushruta Samita*. "*Charka Samhita*" contains chapters on therapeutics, internal medicine, 600 drugs of plant, animal and mineral origin and discourses on anatomy, physiology, etiology, prognosis, pathology of disease.

"*Sushruta Samhita*" relates to the school of surgery and contains principles of surgery, description on more than 100 surgical instruments, description of operative procedures, 650 drugs and descriptions on anatomy, embryology, toxicology and therapeutics.



Fig. 2.1

Like all systems of medicine, Ayurveda started as a magico-religious practice. However over the centuries matured into a fully developed medical science with eight branches which have parallels in the modern western system of medicine. In the last 50 years of development in the teaching and training, it has developed into following sixteen specialities:

- 1) Ayurveda Siddhanta (Fundamental Principals of Ayurveda)
- 2) Ayurveda Samhita
- 3) Sharira Rachana (Anatomy)
- 4) Sharira Kriya (Physiology)
- 5) Dravya Guna Vigyan (Materia, Medica and Pharmacology)
- 6) Ras-shastra
- 7) Bhaishaja Kalpana (Pharmaceuticals)
- 8) Kaumar Bharitya (Paediatrics)
- 9) Prasuti Tantra (Obstetrics and Gynaecology)
- 10) Swasth-Vritla (Social and Preventive Medicine)
- 11) Kayachikitsa (Internal Medicine)
- 12) Rog Nidan (Pathology)
- 13) Shalya Tantra (Surgery)
- 14) Shalkya Tantra (Eye and ENT)
- 15) Mano-Roga (Psychiatry)
- 16) Panchkarma

2.3.2 Concept of Health and Disease

Ayurveda is the earliest medical science having a positive concept of health to be achieved through a blending of physical, mental, social, moral and spiritual welfare.

- The philosophy of Ayurveda is based on “*panch-mahabhutas*” or five great elements (fire, water, air, soil and sky), of which the body is composed.
- Healthy person is one in whom there is equilibrium of the humors (“*vata*”, “*pitta*” and “*kapha*”) and body tissues, with normal digestive as well as excretory functions which are responsible for gratification of physical senses and mental as well as spiritual forces.
- The mental-spiritual forces are described as “*Sattva*”, “*Rajas*” and “*Tamas*”. Predominance of *Sattva* characterizes a man of pure and clear thoughts and ideas. Dominance of *Rajas* imply that the person is full of activity and energy. *Tamas* is the quality indicating that the man is passive and ignorant.
- Absence of this equilibrium between the “*pancha-mahabhutas*”, humors (“*vata*”, “*pitta*” and “*kapha*”) and the mental-spiritual forces is the cause of disease in human beings.

2.3.3 Diagnosis of Disease

Ayurveda postulates that the human organism exists in a balance of elements, imbalance causing disease. Poor nutrition, excess of body wastes, or disturbance of the circulating fluid and vital organs are the primary causes to which therapy must be applied, both in preventive and curative form.

The diagnosis involves consideration of the whole man. The diagnostic process largely involves two types of examination—examination of the patient and examination of the disease. For this, a comprehensive knowledge about the physical, physiological and mental state of the patient is gathered and systematically recorded, which includes details about the person’s temperament, habits, diet and external living conditions. In addition details about the disease itself is also gathered.

Examination of the patient generally involves one or more of the following:

Pulse examination to find out which of the three ‘*dosha* or *doshas*’ (humors) have lost equilibrium or balance causing the person to become sick

- Examination of the tongue
- Examination of the eye
- Examination through auscultation
- Examination of tactile stimulation
- Examination of part(s) of the body
- Examination of urine
- Examination of the stool

The second examination relating to disease concerns with determination of the causative factors, and details of the pathological as well as clinical conditions for determining treatment.

2.3.4 Treatment in Ayurveda

Treatment of the disease generally consists in avoiding factors responsible for causing the disequilibrium of the body matrix or of any of its constituent parts, through use of drugs, suitable diet, activity and regimen for restoring the balance. Stress is also given to strengthening of the body mechanism to prevent or minimize future occurrence of the disease.

Treatment in Ayurveda is always individualized. In addition to drugs it also considers other

factors such as diet, sleep, work and rest pattern environment, age, sex, appetite, strength and vitality.

There are two approaches to treatment. In the first approach the recommended therapeutic measures antagonize the disease, while in the second approach, the prescribed measures create effects similar to the aetiological factors of the disease process.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Enumerate the three "doshas" in Ayurveda.
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- 2) Describe the three mental-spiritual forces that determine the nature of the person.
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- 3) What are the Ayurvedic equivalent of internal medicine, ophthalmology, surgery and psychiatry?
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2.4 UNANI SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

Unani system of medicine originated in Greece and was enriched by inputs from Arabs and Persians. In this system the disease is considered as a normal body process and the symptoms are adjudged as the reaction of the body to the disease. The chief function of the physician is to aid the natural forces of the body by using drugs of plant, mineral and animal origin along with diet.

Principles of Unani Medicine

The Unani system of medicine is based on the humoral theory which presupposes that there are four humors namely—blood (*dam*), phlegm (*balgham*), yellow bile (*saфра*) and black bile (*sauda*) in the body. The temperament of persons is expressed as sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric and melancholic according to the preponderance of the humors in the body. Every human being has got a unique humoral constitution which determines the state of the health.

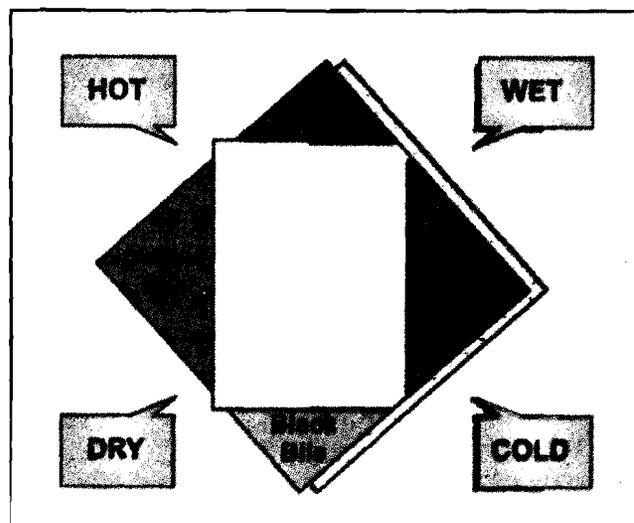


Fig. 2.2 : Four humors

Diagnosis and Treatment

The Unani system of diagnosis of disease and treatment revolves around the concept of temperament or "mizaz". Changes in the temperament along with failure of one or more parts of the body to eliminate pathogenic waste causes disease.

The diagnostic process involves:

- examination of pulse and use of thermometer
- examination of urine
- examination of stool
- observation of the condition of tongue, eyes, lips, teeth and throat
- examination of emotional and mental status

The drugs in the Unani system are also assigned a specific temperament i.e. hot, cold, moist and dry, etc. in different degrees. Drugs restore balance of humors by activating self-preservation mechanism of the body. The drugs are supposed to stimulate and strengthen the action of the body defense mechanism. Thus the treatment generally is both curative and preventive in nature and effective. The modes of treatment employed are: regimental therapy, diet therapy, pharmacotherapy and surgery.

Prevention of Disease

In Unani system of medicine there are six essential pre-requisites for prevention of disease. These include air, drinks, food, bodily movement and repose; psychic movement and repose; sleep and wakefulness; excretion and retention. This system recognizes inoculation and immunization as preventive measures against disease.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Enumerate the four cardinal humors of human body as envisaged in the Unani system of medicine.

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- 2) Enumerate the principles of prevention of disease in Unani system.

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2.5 SIDDHA SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

Siddha system of medicine is one of the most ancient systems of the world dating back to early Dravidan civilization. It was founded by saints (*siddhars*) who were highly talented scientists to understand the human mind and body during health and illness. Siddha system is usually practiced around Tamil Nadu and is largely therapeutic in nature.

The medical literature of Siddha, written in Tamil language, is highly scientific and is maintained systematically in various subjects starting from embryology to geriatrics. This system also deals with the concept of salvation in life. The exponents of this system consider achievement of this state is possible by medicines and meditation.

2.6 HOMEOPATHY

Homeopathy is a system, where diseases are treated by minute doses of drugs that in a healthy person would produce symptoms like those of the disease.

Strictly speaking homeopathy is not a traditional Indian system of medicine. It evolved in

late 18th century following the work of great German physician Dr. Samuel Hahnemann. Being completely different from the allopathic system of medicine it is included in the alternative system of health care.

It is a low cost system using only non-toxic drugs. It has a reputation for successful treatment of chronic illness and in certain disease for which there is no treatment or ineffective treatment in other systems.

Principles of Homeopathy

In homeopathy the main emphasis is on the remedial agents in health and in illness. The system is governed by the law of 'Similia Similibus Curentus' that is 'let likes be treated by likes'. In other words the basis of treatment under the homeopathic method of drug therapy employed to cure the natural sufferings of person by the administration of drugs which have been experimentally proved to possess power of producing similar artificial suffering or symptoms of diseases in healthy human being.

There are four cardinal principles:

- The Law of Similar
- The Law of Direction of Cure
- The Law of Single Remedy
- The Law of Minimum Dose

The Law of Similar is the most important principle of homeopathy. It states that the symptoms experienced by the sick person are reactions of the defense mechanisms of the body which it mobilizes in order to counteract a specific (bacteria, virus) or a non-specific (environmental pollution, mental stress) pathogenic influence. Symptoms are the best possible reaction of the organism under stress and through them it tries to regain its lost balance. In order to help the organism to achieve this, homeopathic physician should assist and strengthen these reactions through his drugs rather than suppressing the symptoms.

Other three laws further define the above central concept. These include the different phases to be experienced in the process of treatment; selection of the single agent potent enough to create the response in healthy individuals similar to those in the patient and determining the minimum possible dose to be administered.

Diagnosis and Treatment of Disease in Homeopathy

The classical approach to the problem is to individualize each patient although they may be suffering from the same disease. The physician has to undertake detailed interview to find out specific characteristics of the defense mechanism of each patient including the patient's mental, physical and emotional conditions for a thorough understanding of the imbalance and associated symptoms complex.

In homeopathy the primary emphasis is on therapeutics. It takes a holistic approach towards the patient and treats the disturbances on the physical, emotional and mental levels at the same time. It aims at bringing back the lost equilibrium of the patient on all three levels by stimulating and strengthening his body's defense mechanism. The sick person after taking treatment not only gets cured of the disease, but simultaneously regains a perfect state of health.

Homeopathy has definite and effective treatment for diabetes, inflammatory arthritis, bronchial asthma, epilepsy, allergy and several mental disorders.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Enumerate the cardinal principles of homeopathy.

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2) Describe the Law of Similars.
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2.7 NATUROPATHY AND YOGA

After going through the role of Homeopathy in different systemic conditions, you will also be apprised of the value of naturopathy and yoga in curing certain chronic systemic conditions. Yoga is a bridge between yesterday and today, an ancient tradition, provide a sense of spiritual, mental and physical health.

Naturopathy

Naturopathy is a way of life and is often referred to as the drugless treatment of diseases. The system believes that with a properly organized way of life and by not retaliating (by drug treatment), one can get energy, health and happiness from the benevolent nature. The system is closely allied to Ayurveda so far as fundamental principles are concerned.

There are two schools of thoughts in this system. One group believes in the ancient Indian methods while the other group adopts western methods, which are more akin to modern physiotherapy.

The advocate of naturopathy pay special attention to fasting, eating and living habits, adoption of measures for purification; use of hydrotherapy, cold packs, mud packs, baths and massage; and a variety of other innovative methods.

Yoga

Yogic system of medicine is as old as the Ayurveda. About 2500 years ago Patanjali propounded it in a systematic form, which consists of eight components, namely, restraint, observance of austerity, physical postures, breathing exercise, restraining of sense organs, contemplation, meditation and samadhi.

These yogic practices have potential to improve circulation of oxygenated blood in body, restrain the sense organs and the mind and to induce tranquility and serenity in mind. Meditation if regularly practiced to a bare minimum, the mind can be directed to perform more fruitful functions.

A number of physical postures are described in yoga to improve health, to prevent disease and to cure illnesses. The physical postures are to be chosen judiciously and are to be practiced in a right way to derive the benefits of prevention of diseases, promotion of health and for therapeutic purposes.

The practice of integrated type of yoga prevents psychosomatic disorders and improves individual's resistance and ability to endure stressful situations.

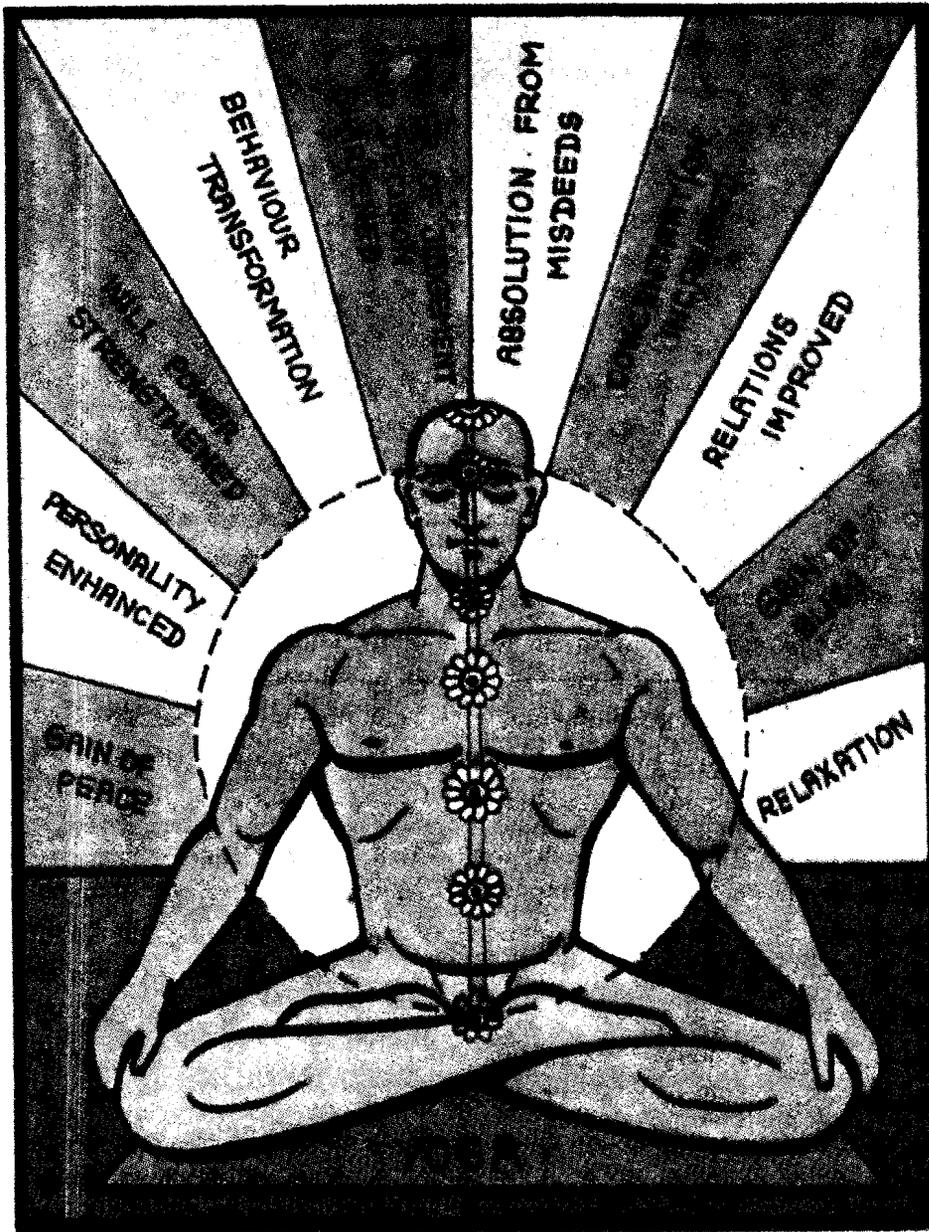


Fig. 2.3: Yoga

2.8 AMCHI OR TIBETAN SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

The Amchi System of Medicine also known as the Tibetan system of medicine is practiced in areas around the Himalayas, namely, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Tibet.

This system traces its origin to Ayurvedic system of medicine. Therapy under the system is divided into treatment by herbs, minerals, animal organs, spring and mineral water; and by mysticism and spiritual power.

2.9 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM OF MEDICINE

After going through the different alternate systems of medicine, you will know about certain advantages and disadvantages compared to modern allopathy system.

The advantages of the alternative system of medicine are:

- 1) Effective for non-communicable and degenerative diseases
- 2) Available in the local community and user friendly
- 3) Close to the culture and value system of the community
- 4) Low cost of treatment
- 5) Lower risk of adverse drug reaction
- 6) Less chances of interaction with drugs from allopathic system of medicine

The disadvantages of the alternative system of medicine are:

- 1) Not effective for communicable and infectious diseases
- 2) Unpredictable standard of practice and drugs
- 3) Poorly trained professionals and lack of regulatory authorities to prescribe and maintain standard of practice (as Medical Council of India for allopathic system)
- 4) Lack of evidence based practice (research in alternative medicine are very few as usual scientific standard)
- 5) Unpredictable nature of adverse drug reaction

2.10 ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM OF MEDICINE IN CARE OF THE ELDERLY

You will now be able to identify the substantial role for the alternative system of medicine in care of the elderly. As most diseases of old age being chronic, non-communicable and degenerative in nature, alternative system of medicine can provide care which would be:

- Community based
- Effective
- Low cost
- Lower risk of adverse drug reaction
- Lower risk of interaction with drugs from allopathic system of medicine.

In addition most alternative systems of medicine propagate health promotion through lifestyle changes and application of measures close to the nature. This aspect of care would be extremely appropriate for the older population.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Enumerate the interventions practiced in naturopathy.

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- 2) Enumerate the important components of yoga.

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- 3) Enumerate the advantages of alternative system of medicine.

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2.11 LET US SUM UP

Alternative and complementary system of medicine refers to the system of medicine other than the conventional system i.e. allopathic system of medicine. It incorporates many systems among which Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy, Naturopathy, Yoga and Amchi or Tibetan system of medicine are commonly practiced.

It is likely that substantial number of people in the community especially in rural areas depend on alternative systems of medicine. Low cost, safety and easy availability are unique features of alternative system of medicine. However poor training facilities, absence of regulatory authorities to maintain standard of practice and training and lack of evidence base in their support are important drawbacks for this system to gain more acceptability.

Alternative systems of medicine can be useful in older people in view of their advantages and you as the physician must be aware of the system.

2.12 KEY WORDS

Alternative medicine : Different to allopathy

Naturopathy : Treatment by natural way

Yoga : Treatment by number of physical postures to improve circulation and prevent diseases

2.13 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The three “*doshas*” of Ayurveda are: *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*
- 2) The three mental-spiritual forces that determine the nature of a person as described in Ayurveda are “*Sattva*”, “*Rajas*” and “*Tamas*”. *Sattva* is the characteristic of man of pure and clear thoughts and ideas. Predominance of *Rajas* implies that the person would be full of activity and energy. Dominance of *Tamas* indicates that the man is passive and ignorant.
- 3) The term used in Ayurveda for internal medicine is “*kayachikitsa*”. The other terms are *shalkya tantra* for ophthalmology, *shalya tantra* for surgery, and *mano-roga* for psychiatry.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The four cardinal humors of Unani system of medicine are: blood (*dam*), phlegm (*balgham*), yellow bile (*safra*) and black bile (*sauda*) in the body.
- 2) In Unani system of medicine, prevention of disease requires six interventions. These include air, drinks, food, bodily movement and repose; psychic movement and repose; sleep and wakefulness; excretion and retention.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) There are four cardinal principles of homeopathy. These are: the Law of Similars, the Law of Direction of Cure, the Law of Single Remedy and the Law of Minimum Dose.
- 2) The Law of Similars states that the symptoms experienced by the patient are reactions of the defense mechanisms of the body to counteract a specific (bacteria, virus) or a non-

specific (environmental pollution, mental stress) pathogenic influence. Symptoms are the best possible reaction of the organism under stress and through them it tries to regain its lost balance.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) The practice of naturopathy includes interventions like fasting, eating and living habits, adoption of measures for purification; use of hydrotherapy, cold packs, mud packs, baths and massage.
- 2) The eight important components of yoga are: restraint, observance of austerity, physical postures, breathing exercise, restraining of sense organs, contemplation, meditation and samadhi.
- 3) The advantages of alternative system of medicine are: effective remedy for non-communicable degenerative diseases, availability in the community, user friendly nature of intervention, familiar to the local culture, low cost and lesser chance of adverse drug reaction and drug interaction.