



## Basics of Health Promotion from the Perspective of the Holy Qur'an and Traditions

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction** Islam has considered "Health" of human beings from different angles such as physical and spiritual as well as individual and social aspects. We referred to the Qur'an, its interpretations, and hadith books to consider the Islamic issues related to the different aspects of health. In this regard, the examples were presented in the form of verses and traditions. The Holy Qur'an has reminded us to endeavor in improving our physical health. Many of the verses in the Holy Qur'an such as Ala'raf/31 and 157, Al Maedah/1 and 96, Al-Nahl/14, 68, and 69, Al-Abas/24, and Al-kahf/19 have manifested the "physical health" as the key word in this field. Also, Holy prophet has endorsed the importance of keeping in progress the health of every individual in the society. The aim of this review was to express the importance of physical health and its promotion from the point of view of Islamic teachings, Qur'an, and tradition (Hadith).

**Conclusion** When there was no new science and people were in a dreadful darkness of knowledge, Islam established health foundations. Allah has bestowed health to His servants, who should keep it through their life. There are many principles for humans to keep their health such as decline in eating too much food, providing food through law-abiding channels of Islam, taking advantage of fruits, taking bath per day, brushing the teeth, etc. If we follow the recommendations of Islam, we will not get sick and there will be no need to tolerate painful treatment.

**Keywords** Islam; Physical Health; Health Promotion

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## Introduction

Based on the Islamic pedagogical foundations, human being is a combination of material (body) and soul. However, material is not complete in itself; it needs a spiritual part, which cannot be seen physically.

Many verses of the Holy Qur'an have dealt with this feature of human creation [Al-Zumar/42; Al-Sajdah/9; Al-Momenoon/14]. Meanwhile, Islam deserves material aspect of human beings as well. Matter and soul make a whole. They have reciprocal influence. The soul has an effect on body and it influences the soul. This interconnection has been discussed among philosophers to make clear that the relation between soul and body is absolute. Avicenna, the prominent philosopher, has argued this issue in his seminal book titled *Shafa* (Ketabo Al-nnafs) [1]. Mulla Sadra is another famous philosopher, who has put his views on the relation between soul and body in his book titled *Asfar* [2].

In divine and religious thinking, it is believed that matter embeds the soul in itself; this is the soul, which needs a body to manifest its actions. Moreover, the soul of human attain its perfection or its decline as the result of the deeds of the body. The soul will become perfect if the body acts good deeds. Islam also recognizes the interplay between body and soul; today, new empirical sciences such as medicine and empirical psychology have confirmed the idea that a calm soul without a healthy body is not possible and a healthy body will not be possible without good thinking and good morals and they are interrelated [3]. Therefore, human body is also very important. Consequently, whenever the body is unhealthy, hardly the soul will evolve as well. As Aristotle and other philosophers believed, if a person does not have a sense, the sciences inspired from that kind of sense will not be the same [4].

A detailed account on the viewpoints of philosophers on this very subject is not the main purpose of the present research, but the main point is that in Islam, thought, the material aspect of human, is not forgotten. Therefore, keeping the body healthy is one of the cornerstones in the principles of Islam.

**Islam and the Significance of Health:** Due to the key role of the body, Islam as a divine religion put an emphasis on keeping the body healthy in various ways. Imam Ali (PBUH) has said: "Two blessings are unknown: health and security [5]. As the creator of human beings, God has given importance to human health. Many verses in Holy Qur'an deal with the health of body. "Eat and drink, but not lavish" [Al-A'raf/31]. The words of Allah advise man to consider his appetite. Today, many studies have argued that the origin of many illnesses is the unabsorbed of additional foods that are extra to the needs of the body and remain in it uselessly. Our Holy Prophet also has called his followers to be clean if they want

to be healthy. He has said: "The best drug is to eat less than what you desire [6].

Islam asks for its followers to be clean and hygienic. Our Holy Prophet (PBUH) has said: "Cleanliness is a part of faith [7]. He has considered cleanliness as a pious character of human and as a universal duty. Holy Qur'an says piety is the highest position, where human beings can achieve [Al-Tagabun/16]. Our Holy Prophet also has beautiful words on being hygienic: "Protect your cleanliness with any tool, because the foundation of Islam is on cleanliness, Sa'dat (prosperity), and Paradise and they are for those who are tidy" [8].

**Importance of the body's health in Islam:** There is a slogan in our literature saying that "Whenever the body is ill and incapable of doing its routine activities, it will affect the soul, mind, and the way of man thinking". Man is created to promote his/her inner capabilities such as reasoning, thinking, and his most significant role that is attaining the position that is desired by Allah. All these will be achieved if the body works well.

True believers need healthy bodies and minds in order to worship God in the correct way. If one desires to have a sound mind, he must pay special attention to his body. Admittedly, the heart and the mind are nourished by worshiping and calling God all the time and performing related activities in a lawful way. The body is nourished by partaking of good and lawful food that God has provided; attention to diet and nutrition is a definite principle in Islamic health system.

From the viewpoint of Imam Ali, the roots of human calamity are 3 issues: A) Poverty; B) Disability of the body, and C) Psychological and mental illness. Our knowledgeable Imam proposes 3 treatments for that disaster: having communication with other people, and keeping the health of the body and soul. Here, being sick is considered worse than poverty [9]. The Prophet has also stated: "Blessed be to one who has accepted Islam and keeps his body healthy and strong [10]. Islam has planned educational programs for people to promote the health of their body. In Islam, fathers are called to teach their kids how to swim and practice archery [11].

In the present review, the researcher has extracted verses and traditions (Hadiths) on "Health" from Qur'an and Hadith books. Hadiths were not translated and only their message were expressed. The writers' approach was to express the recommendations and points made in the Qur'an and the Hadiths on body health. The Hadiths and other data are compacted in some files. The number of hadiths is numerous and there are lots of books written in this regard. We have referred to them briefly.

This review was conducted with the aim of evaluating the basic arguments in the field of health from the perspective of the Holy Qur'an and traditions.

The following parts of the article outline some guidelines of Islam for keeping our bodies healthy:

**Islamic Laws (practical):** Today, disease prevention and care managements are enacted in medical universities, where the students are taught ways of disease identification and prevention. Islam has provided useful hygiene instructions for the prevention of diseases since 1400 years ago. Islamic rules on this regard have been always considered by people. We are obliged to follow some religious rules such as obligatory, inappropriate, and Mustahab. These pros and cons are confirmed by the new medical sciences.

**Forbidden foods:** Whatever we should eat is made clear in Islam, some victuals are forbidden for us. Interestingly, the new science has discovered that what Islam has forbidden will have a bad effect on our body.

**Wine is forbidden:** [Ma'edah/90 and 91]. Drinking wine not only affects our thinking, but also brings with it physical disorders such as tremor .Other health problems include gastroenterology, respiratory diseases, and circulation, heart disease, asbestos, and liver and kidney disorders. For this reason, Prophet of Islam has attributed drinking wine as the root (mother) of all crimes and diseases [12]. A scientist and researcher states: "It is a virtue of Muhammad's religion that all wines have been forbidden" [13].

**Eating blood and carrion is forbidden** [Al-Baqarah/172 and 173]: Some victuals are forbidden in Islam. Allah has spoken to His servant (Muhammad) through the Holy Qur'an that Muslims are warned not to eat some forbidden food.

"Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead animals-cattle-beast not slaughtered, blood, the flesh of swine, and the meat of that, which has been slaughtered as a sacrifice for other than God..."; "...and intoxicants" [Al-Maedah/91 and 92].

While sweets and junk food are not forbidden, it would be better to eat them less than other victuals for the purpose of balancing our diet and improving the health of the body. Today, it has been discovered that many of chronic diseases are the result of unhealthy eating habits. Coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, and depression have all been the result of inadequate diets. The traditions of our Holy Prophet Muhammad show following moderate ways of maintaining the body in good health. Holy Qur'an advises man to keep in balance all his deeds between any two extremes.

Hadiths have also evidenced that eating blood and carrion is very harmful for the body. In 'Bihar al-Anwar', eating blood and carrion is regarded as a cause of smelling; it is discovered that some kinds of skin disorders, especially leprosy, are the clinical effect of eating blood [14].

**Eating pork is forbidden:** Eating pork in Islam is forbidden. There are several verses in the Qur'an about it [Al-Baghra/173; Al-Madah/ 3; Al-

Anaam/145; Al-Nahul/115]. Nowadays, new science has discovered many diseases such as Trichin Cream and Taenia solium that are transmitted to humans through eating pork [15].

**Practical Islamic Commandments:** Islam has obliged people to follow some practical guidelines to improve the health of its followers.

**Wudu (Ablution):** To wash the hands and face in a special way to prepare the person for saying his/her prayers. The procedure of ablution is given in the Holy Qur'an [Al-Maeda/6]. Although there is a difference in following the steps of ablution among Muslims, the main purpose of which is to present the individual before his Allah in a pure manner. Washing all the exposed areas of the body, hand, feet, face, mouth, nostrils, etc. 5 times a day is a healthy preventive procedure.

Nowadays, washing hands is being emphasized more and more in hospitals and clinical centers in order to prevent the spread of microbes. However, many non-Muslims did not know that hand washing was so important to the extent that it has been ordered in Qur'an 1400 years ago. To benefit a happy and pure life, it would be better to bathe every other day. [Al- Nesa/ 43]. Washing the body and its parts, ablution and bathing, and purging the urine and anus all bring with them a healthy body.

**Ruzah (Fasting):** Nowadays, science has discovered that fasting for a definite period of time will have a great benefit for our bodies. Surprisingly, we follow a routine program in eating food during eleven months, our stomach needs some rest to work efficiently all our life. Fasting for one month will refresh our body parts, especially our stomach and kidney. Bile consumption by our body for 30 days will be useful for our health. Bile secretions will be spent during solving the residual food collected. In old and new medicine, fasting has been the best treatment to maintain the health, especially those who are apt to diseases of digestive system, the kidneys and the liver, and there is not any other medical treatment for them.

Fasting helps dry out high humidity of the body, eliminates any block in digestive tract and blood vessels to help purify the blood, and helps the stomach and digestive system, the result of which will be the health of people. It also helps remove the bouts, decreases the fat deposits in the veins, prevents atherosclerosis, and repel toxins and dumps. So, the Prophet of Islam has said, "Fast to be healthy"[16].

**Health Recommendations in Islam:** Islam has recommended people to follow healthy ways for their life. Thus, it depends on you to keep healthy your body. The following activities should be practiced:

**Keep clean your mouth and teeth:** Brushing the teeth is an important step in keeping clean our mouth.

Miswak (brushing teeth) has not been a new

invention; it has a long history and dates back to at least 2000 years ago. This was stressed as a part of daily routine by our Prophet Mohammed. He has also advised us on using tooth-pick (Khilal) as is now being advised by all the dentists. Interestingly, our Prophet has advised using tooth-pick conservatively. Indeed, our Prophet used to brush His teeth 5 times a day. The Prophet (s) recommended brushing in interval times in during a day [16]. Even providing brushing for the guest is supposed for the host [17]. There are many traditions regarding keeping healthy the mouth in Islam. Consult the Encyclopedia of Medical Hadiths [15].

**Eating Habits:** Every individual has his/her own appetite, which makes his/her eating habits. Islam, as a complete religion which considers all human needs, has also useful guidelines in this regard. Our religious leaders have proposed good recommendations towards the habits of eating food. They advised people to eat calmly with no haste. Furthermore, they called for us not to eat until we go hungry [18].

Replying to the question of why our Holy Qur'an has considered all subjects except medicine, Imam Ali has mentioned that there is a verse in the Qur'an, which encompasses all the science of medicine, where it says: Eat and drink, but do not lavish [19].

Overeating has also been blamed in Islamic teachings, because it causes many physical and mental illnesses. A Hadith is reported, in which our Holy Prophet has said people should wash their hands before and after eating if they seek a healthy life [20]. There are many other recommendations that should be consulted in the related books [21]. The Prophet has strongly advised that one should wash his/her hands before and after a meal. "It is a blessing to wash your hands before and after meal." Therefore, cleanliness of body and mind is stressed in Holy Qur'an [Al-Nesa/43].

**Recommendations on eating foods and fruits:** In Islamic teachings and the hadiths of our Holy Prophet and the Imams, there are useful guidelines on what people should eat or drink to keep their body more healthy. There are recommendations for eating vegetables, fruits, and other useful foods. All of them call the man to a healthy eating habit. It is recommended to eat some special foods, fruits, and vegetables at certain times. They also help those people, who suffer from many diseases.

Indeed, the suggestions of our Holy prophet on eating habits are collected in a book titled "Tib Al-Nabi, (Medicine of Prophet Mohammad), Tib Al-Reza, and Tib Al-Sadeq". These recommendations are also compiled by Ayatullah Mohammad Reyeshari in a book titled Mousoah al-Ahadith al-Tibyyah or Encyclopedia of medical hadiths [15]. It is a pity for the writer of this article, who cannot discuss all the book in this very compact written paper. However, many organs of body, their probable disease, as well as their treatments are also

concluded in these Hadiths. Useful fruits and vegetables of whatever kind have been studied centuries before empirical science deal with them. Treatment was mainly based on natural medicine, including eating useful fruits and vegetables.

### **Some useful victuals and their advantages based on the verses of Holy Qur'an**

**Honey:** Honey is described as a source of healing in the Qur'an: "There comes forth from their [bees'] bellies, a drink of varying color, wherein is healing for men. Verily, in this is indeed a sign for people who think" [Al-Nahl/69]. Honey is one of the delicious victuals of Jannah (Paradise): "The description of Paradise, which the pious have been promised is that in it are rivers of water, the taste and smell of which are not changed; rivers of milk, of which the taste never changes; rivers of delicious wine to those who drink; and rivers of clarified honey, clear and pure..." [Mohammad/15]. Our Holy Prophet has repeatedly spoken on the usefulness of honey as a "healing," a "blessing," and "the best medicine."

New findings of empirical sciences have shown that honey has antibacterial properties and many other health benefits. Honey is composed of water, simple and complex sugars, minerals, enzymes, amino acids, and several different vitamins.

**Olive:** The Qur'an says: "And a tree (olive) that springs forth from Mount Sinai, that grows oil, and it is a relish for the eaters" [Mohammad/15]. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also once told his followers: "Eat the olive and anoint (yourselves) with it, for indeed it is from a blessed tree." Olive oil contains monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids, as well as vitamin E. It is used in the treatment of coronary disease and spread on the skin to increase its softness and elasticity.

### **Conclusion**

Body health is a key factor in Islam to the extent that it calls for its followers to consider the health of their body. As far as the findings of the present study show, Islamic teachings on health promotion of individuals can be summarized as follow:

Islamic practical terms include haram (illegality), obligatory, rebellious, and detestable. As laws in Islam are founded on real facts, it has forbidden what should not be used and what should be done to improve health of the human soul and body such as fasting. Today, science has also confirmed the pros and cons of Islamic principles.

Many health recommendations proposed by our Holy Prophet and Imams indicate that their main duty is the promotion of the health of individual and society. There are many useful teachings in Islam, which are related to the body health, some of which are washing the body to prepare for saying prayers. (Wudu and Ghosl).

Therapeutic recommendations in eating useful food or forbidding others are proposed to nourish the

body or in treatment of some diseases. Some other recommendations deal with probable incompatibility of some food with other victuals.

Focus on doing exercise, which is good for the body health such as swimming.

And finally, the authors of the article believe that Islam is very sensitive for body health, and if we follow the recommendations of Islam, we will not get sick and there will be no need to tolerate painful treatment. All these findings are of great importance in the statements of our Holy Prophet and the Imams.

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