

# Health and Fitness (part 1 of 2)

**Description:** Brief guidelines about diet and nutrition in Islam.

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## Objectives

- To understand that Islam is a way of life and that all spiritual, emotional, and physical health are connected.

## Arabic Terms

- *Halal* "permissible.
- *Haram* " forbidden or prohibited.
- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Ibadah* " worship.
- *Deen* - the way of life based on Islamic revelation; the sum total of a Muslim's faith and practice. *Deen* is often used to mean faith, or the religion of Islam.

## Introduction

When God made human beings He did so with a purpose. We were created to worship our Creator and because of this God sent us prophets, messengers and revelations to guide us along the journey. Islam is the religion for all of humankind and its guidance is applicable for all places in all times and circumstances. Unlike many other religions, Islam is a complete way of life; it is not possible to practice Islam on one day a week or when one has the time or inclination. Islam is a holistic way of life that stresses the importance of maintaining good health and offers the ways and means to cope with ill health. Islam teaches us to be concerned about the whole person, thus health is made up of three parts, spiritual, emotional and physical health and all of them are interconnected.



# Nutrition

The *deen* of Islam offers a holistic approach to health and fitness that includes treating our bodies with respect and nourishing them with *halal* nutritious foods. Allah expects us to choose wholesome food and to avoid food that has little or no nutritional value. He says, "Eat of what is lawful and wholesome on the earth..." (Quran 2:168) and "Eat of the good things which We have provided for you." (Quran 2:172).

Allah encourages us to eat wholesome food and couples it with warnings to remember Him and avoid Satan's tricks. "O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth that is lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy." (Quran 2:168)

Healthy eating and paying attention to the nutritional values of food satisfies our hunger and has an effect on the quality of our *ibadah*. Feeling bloated or suffering from indigestion can severely impede our worship. Likewise feeling energized can make our worship a joyful experience. Quran does not give us a list as such, but it does tell us what *halal* foods Allah has provided.

1. Meat. "He created cattle that give you warmth, benefits and food to eat." (Quran 16:5)
2. Fish and seafood. "It is He who subdued the seas, from which you eat fresh fish." (Quran 16: 14) "Lawful to you is game from the sea and its food as provision for you..." (Quran 5:96)
3. Fruits and vegetables. "It is He who sends down water from the sky with which He brings up corn, olives, dates and grapes and other fruit." (Quran 16:11) "And it is He Who produces gardens trellised and untrellised, and date palms, and crops of different shape and taste (its fruits and its seeds) and olives, and pomegranates, similar (in kind) and different (in taste). Eat of their fruit when they ripen..." (Quran 6:141)
4. Milk. "In cattle too you have a worthy lesson. We give you to drink of that which is in their bellies, between the undigested food and blood: pure milk, a pleasant beverage for those who drink it." (Quran 16:66)
5. Honey. "There emerges from their bellies a drink, varying in colors, in which there is healing for people..." (Quran 16:69)
6. Grains. "...and from it (the earth) we produced grain for their sustenance." (Quran 36:33)

Throughout the Quran and the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, we find numerous occasions where nutritious food and good health are linked. *Halal* food is able to nourish our bodies and aid in curing illnesses and injuries. The following are just three superfoods from the Quran and *Sunnah* that attest to the benefits of nourishing our bodies in a *halal* way.

1. Honey. "Honey is a remedy for every illness and the Quran is a remedy for all illness

of the mind, therefore I recommend to you two remedies, the Quran and honey.” Honey contains anti-viral, anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties. The WHO (World Health Organization) regards honey as a potentially valuable medicinal substance to soothe inflamed mucus membranes and thus a treatment for coughs. “All honey is antibacterial because the bees add an enzyme that makes hydrogen peroxide,” said Peter Molan, director of the Honey Research Unit at the University of Waikato in New Zealand.

2. Dates. Dates are good for digestive health; they aid in treating constipation, upset stomach or diarrhoea. They are an excellent source of iron, thus an excellent way to treat and prevent anaemia, and they help keep our bones, blood and immune systems healthy. There are at least 15 minerals in dates, including selenium, an element that is believed to help prevent cancer and is important in immune function.[\[1\]](#) Prophet Muhammad advised us to break our fasts by eating dates because they were purifying.[\[2\]](#)
3. Olives. Olives are very high in vitamin E and other powerful antioxidants. Studies show that they are good for the heart, and may protect against osteoporosis and cancer. In addition to this, many of the phytonutrients found in olives have well-documented anti-inflammatory properties. Extracts from whole olives have been shown to function as anti-histamines at a cellular level.[\[3\]](#) Prophet Muhammad advised us to “Eat the oil and use it on your hair and skin, for it comes from a blessed tree.”[\[4\]](#)

There are in fact very few foods that are *haram*. “Forbidden to you (for food) are: dead animals, blood, the flesh of swine, and the meat of that which has been slaughtered as a sacrifice for other than God...” (Quran 5:3) “...and intoxicants.” (Quran 5:91-92) Apart from a few things mentioned in the Quran and the *Sunnah*, everything else is considered lawful. However, this does not mean we can eat anything and forget about treating our bodies that are a trust from Allah, with respect.

## Diet

While processed foods, sugar, and junk food are not forbidden, they must be eaten sparingly as part of a balanced diet. Many of the most common illnesses today derive from unhealthy eating habits. Coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, obesity and depression, and the plagues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, have all been linked to inadequate diets. A healthy diet contains a mixture of all the good foods Allah has provided for us. We are however encouraged not to take things to extremes. A person who indulges in too much food may become unhealthy, thereby unable to fulfil their obligations. Likewise, someone who eats too little or not enough wholesome food will also become unhealthy causing their *ibadah* to suffer.

Prophet Muhammad advised humankind to maintain a balance between two extremes and not place too much emphasis on filling our stomachs. He said, “No man fills a vessel worse than his stomach. A few mouthfuls are enough. However if a person must eat more than that, they should fill one third (of the stomach) with food, one third with liquid and leave one third for easy breathing”[\[5\]](#)

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Endnotes:

[1] <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed?term=Phoenix%20dactylifera%20cancer> The fruit of the date palm: its possible use as the best food for the future? Nov. 2012

[2] Imam Ahmad

[3] Chandak R, Devdhe S and Changediya V. Evaluation of anti-histaminic activity of aqueous extract of ripe olives of olea-europea. Journal: Journal of Pharmacy Research Year: 2009 Vol: 2 Issue: 3 Pages/record No.: 416-420. 2009.

[4] At-Tirmidhi

[5] Imam Ahmad.

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