

Healthy Living and Lifestyle with Prophet Teaching

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Abstract

Objectives: The aim of this review is to highlight the Islamic teachings that go beyond the spiritual and religious life of the Muslim, as it provides a healthy outline for daily life. Prophetic Medicine refers to the traditions and actions of the Messenger of Allah Muhammad (PBUH) in relation to health, illness, lifestyle, and all aspects of wellbeing. Prophet's teachings dealt with several sections of preventive medicine including environmental health, prevention of infectious diseases, lifestyle behavior, and mental health.

Study Design and Methods: Searching data based such as PubMed, Web of Science and Islamic sources of authentic Literatures using various key words that impact healthy living.

Results: Historically, the Prophet dealt with epidemics during his time. He advised washing hands frequently, not to leave the infected area, and not to visit the infected area; all are set by WHO as current recommendations to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Oral hygiene is essential for the protection from infection, and the Prophet recommended using Miswak, which is a toothbrush from Arak tree, at least 5 times a day. Prayers in Islam are performed 5 times daily, and several studies demonstrated the positive effects of salat on health status. Intermittent fasting has recently gained momentum for improving metabolic health and the Prophet advocated fasting two days per week 14 centuries ago. Islam encouraged midday nap which is shown to enhance memory and alertness. The Messenger of Allah strongly advise avoiding micturition or defecation in water, under the trees, and in public areas, to protect environmental pollution and human health.

Conclusions: Prophet teachings emphasize the value of healthy lifestyle and advocate all kinds of activities that enhance the human health. Awareness of these teachings among doctors and patients is likely to have a significant impact on their healthy life.

Keywords: Healthy Living; Prophet Medicine; Islam; Fasting; Miswak; Preventive Medicine; Life-Style

Introduction

Prophetic medicine is a collection of the acts and thoughts by the Messenger of Allah related to illness, remedies, nutrition, and hygiene. It should be distinguished from “Islamic medicine” which is a wider entity comprising the medical practices rooted in the ancient Muslim nation’s civilization. Prophet medicine laid the foundation for many aspects of preventive medicine, ideas of diet, and environmental health; matters that are pertinent in the current era [1].

As part of compiling the traditions attributed to the Prophet (hadith), which intersected with almost every aspect of life, Muslim scholars dedicated distinct chapters of their compilations to traditions with medical content. Medical traditions came to be the basis for a particular literary genre recognized as “Prophetic medicine”. The first known work on this genre was written in the western side of the Islamic world by the Andalusian philologist, poet, historian, and jurist Abd al-Malik b. Habib (d. 853) [2].

The Prophet reflected upon the fact that every disease has a cause and a way to cure, and that was narrated in many hadiths such as: “Make use of medical treatment, for Allah has not made a disease without appointing a remedy for it, except one disease, namely old age” [3]. He also said: “Ask God for forgiveness and health, for after being granted certainty, one is given nothing better than health” [4]. The Prophet also said: “There are two blessings in which many people incur loss. (They are) health and free time (for doing good)” [5].

The prophet stressed the value of maintaining health, supporting the foundation of preventive medicine, and promoting all practices that will lead to a healthy living [6]. Prophet teachings dealt with several sections of preventive medicine including personal hygiene (cleanliness of body, teeth, and food), prevention of infectious diseases (quarantine, isolation), lifestyle behavior (nutrition, physical exercise, and avoiding obesity), and mental health (stress and anger).

In this review, we discuss the guidelines and teachings narrated in the Qur’an verses and prophetic tradition and provide evidence-based medicine beyond these teachings.

Methodology

Searching data based such as PubMed, Web of Science and Islamic sources of authentic Literatures (Quran and Sunnah) using various key words such as Fasting, Prayers, Diet and Eating, Oral Hygiene, Miswak, Preventive Medicine, Infection Prevention, life-style in relation to healthy living.

Results

Prevention of spread of communicable disease

Decades before discovering microorganism’s theory behind disease, the foundation of controlling the expansion of infectious diseases was laid down by the Prophet Muhammad in his sayings, both at an individual level and the society at large. He strongly advocated quarantine in the era of plague and this is practiced by his companions [7]. Nowadays, we have observed similar practices of isolation in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This concept of home quarantine was introduced by the Prophet when little was known about the way of controlling the spread of communicable disease. Patients were ordered to quarantine themselves so that the disease may not spread to other healthy individuals. The Prophet, realizing the consequences of infectious epidemics, advised his companions that “If you become aware of a plague in a land, do not enter that land; and if you were therein, stay there and do not get out (and thus spread it elsewhere)” [8]. Based on this hadith, Muslims considered adherence to precautions and vigilance against epidemics as the command of God [9].

Personal hygiene

In Islam, body hygiene and washing are a mandate for the performance of worship. In his teachings, the Prophet set out a comprehensive rule for personal hygiene and cleanliness. He said, "Certainly, Allah likes cleanness and purity" [10].

Hand washing

Although the role of handwashing in the prevention of infectious diseases has been known for over a century in Europe, it was neglected as a public health measure, to be periodically re-discovered during pandemic-scale infections [11]. The Prophet sanctioned the habit of washing hands before and immediately after a meal. He said "The blessing of food is the washing of hands before it, and the washing of hands after it" [12]. The Prophet exhorts "When one of you wakes up from his sleep, he must not put his hand in a utensil till he washed it three times, for he does not know where his hand was (while he slept)" [13].

Washing after Toilet

Islam emphasizes keeping the hand clean and washing private parts and hands after going to the toilet. 'Aishah said: "I never saw the Messenger of Allah come out of the toilet without first (cleansing himself) with water" [14]. In another Hadith, "Clean yourself from urine, for the general punishment in the grave is from it" [15].

Prophet teachings require followers to maintain personal hygiene after urination and defecation. Self-hygiene in these areas protects the urinary system from infections.

Be away of three!

Pollution with sewage or direct defecation near water and under trees is a source of water pollution leading to parasitic and bacterial infection. The Prophet strongly advised against micturition or defecation in water, under the trees, or in public areas [7]. He said: "Be on your guard against three things which provoke cursing: easing in the watering places, in the road, and the shade (of tree)" [16].

This highlights a known risk of human waste products imposed to our health and environment [17]. This practice will be very valuable in combating the spread of several infectious diseases caused by fecal contamination [18].

Approximately 1.5 billion people are infected with soil-borne parasitic worms worldwide. Seventy-eight countries are affected with schistosomiasis, with almost 300 million people requiring treatment in one year [19]. According to the WHO, five hundred million people are infected with Entamoeba worldwide and amoebiasis leads to 40,000–100,000 deaths yearly [20]. Cholera and Hepatitis A are also other examples. If the Prophet's recommendations are followed, millions of people would have been saved from contracting these diseases.

Miswak (Siwak)

Maintaining oral hygiene by daily cleaning is an effective way of preventing oral and systemic diseases. The Prophet paid particular attention to oral health through a number of sayings and practices that promote the habit of cleaning the teeth with "Miswak" [21].

The Prophet recommended using Miswak several times throughout the day. He encouraged Muslims to use Miswak before each prayer [22]. The Prophet said: "Had I not thought it difficult for my Ummah, I would have commanded them to use the Miswak (tooth-stick) before every Salat" [23].

He also said: “The Miswak cleanses and purifies the mouth and pleases God” [24]. Aisha narrated: “Whenever Allah's Messenger entered his house, he used Miswak first of all” [25]. Hudhaifa narrated: “Whenever the Messenger of Allah got up (from sleep), he would rub his teeth with Miswak” [26].

Miswak is a chewing stick prepared usually from the roots or twigs of *Salvadora persica* and has been used for tooth cleaning for thousands of years in different parts of the world. Several studies reported the positive effects of miswak against plaque, caries and gingivitis in addition to its whitening properties. In its different forms, Miswak has been shown to be effective measure in oral hygiene and management [21,27].

Islamic prayer

Islamic prayer is the second pillar of Islam, performed 5 times daily and entails serial movements in addition to Quran recitation. Several studies demonstrated the positive effects of salat on health status. It has been shown to have a positive effect in individuals with anxiety, stress and depression [28]. The practice of salat leads to a reduction in sympathetic activity and an activation of the parasympathetic nervous system [29]. Salat is usually considered as a form of meditation since it promotes relaxation and reduces anxiety. In addition, the movements performed during salat are considered as a light form of daily exercise.

The Mind/body medicine provided during salat may alleviate symptoms of chronic illnesses and share in the prevention of these chronic diseases. The use of mind/body medicine may be incorporated in the holistic medicine, particularly when chronic stress-related disorders are increasingly encountered throughout the world [30]. A recent review discussed the positive effects of salat on health including cardiovascular, neurological, musculoskeletal and psychological effects, and concluded that Salat is a non-pharmacological type of intervention that may be encompassed in rehabilitation programs and holistic care [31]. Not surprisingly, the Prophet used to say: “but my comfort has been provided in prayer” [32]. In another Hadith he said: “O Bilal, call iqamah for prayer: give us comfort by it” [33].

Intermittent Fasting

Fasting twice a week is not only a tradition of the Prophet, but, is shown to be a healthy routine for the body. Emerging evidence recognizing the medical benefits of fasting have been published Intermittent fasting has recently become a topic -in- focus worldwide, since it has been shown to improve health, enhance metabolic process, and slows the progression of several illnesses [34].

Intermittent fasting may be considered as an adjunctive non-medicinal therapy for patients with type 2 diabetes [35]. Besides, the beneficial effects of intermittent fasting as a way of nutritional intervention in patients with anxiety-related disorders has been reported [36].

Different types of intermittent fasting have been recognized. The most common method practiced by people adopting intermittent fasting is 16–20 hours fast twice per week [37]. Fasting in Islam entails abstaining from any drink or food for the period between sunrise and sunset, whereas in intermittent fasting, calorie-free liquids such as water, coffee and tea are permitted. For centuries, many Muslims have been performing voluntary fasting similar to the intermittent fasting advocated nowadays. Aishah narrated: “The Messenger of Allah used to be keen to fast on Mondays and Thursday” [38]. The prophet said: “Fasting is a shield” [39]. which means it protects its owner from the desires, in broad terms, that harm him.

Lifestyle

The lifestyle that the Prophet adopted goes along with current heart-healthy best practices throughout the practice of spiritual activities, eating food in moderation, performing regular exercise, and avoiding forbidden drinks and foods [40]. The habit of overeating is strongly disliked in the Qur’an. “Eat and drink but be not excessive. Indeed, He does not like those who commit excess.”

(Quran 7:31). The prophet strongly advises his followers to fill one-third of the stomach with food, the second third for drink, and to leave the last third empty. "A human being fills no worse vessel than his stomach. It is sufficient for a human being to eat a few mouthfuls to keep his spine straight. But if he must (fill it), then one-third of food, one third for drink and one third for air" [41].

The Prophet emphasized moderation in every aspect of life. When the Prophet was told that one of his companions has been fasting all day and praying all night, he strongly disliked this behavior and said: "Fast and break your fast, pray during the night, and then sleep. Verify, your body has a right over you" [42].

Furthermore, the Prophet encouraged the use of healthy foods, such as bran, olive oil and dates. He stated: "Eat olive oil and anoint it upon your bodies since it is of the blessed tree" [43]. The Mediterranean diet is probably the only diet proven to be statistically decreased incidence of cardiovascular and all mortality [44]. The Prophet encouraged his followers to walk to the mosque rather than riding, and advised Muslims to teach their children horse riding, swimming, and archery [45].

Smoking Tobacco has taken away the life of eight million people yearly, of which seven million directly attributed to tobacco use, and just over a million due to passive smoking. Unfortunately, two hundred million of the world's one billion smokers are women [46]. The Qur'an warns against self-destruction: "And make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction" (The Qur'an 2:195). The prophet also said: "There should be neither harming nor reciprocating harm" [47]. The lifestyle advocated by the Prophet upholds enjoying a healthy life, assisting in the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, and the risk factors leading to this disease [45].

Midday Nap (Siesta)

Napping during the day is widely practiced in the world. Neuroscience reveals that it enhances memory, improves performance and alertness, and recovers some the lost night sleep [48,49].

The prophet advises midday napping and was practiced by him. The Prophet said: "Take the noon nap, for the Shaytan (Devil) does not nap" [50] Anas narrated: "We used to offer the Friday prayer early and then have the afternoon nap" [51].

Several studies revealed that midday napping has improved vigilance performance and alertness at work. The rise in hippocampal activation noted after the nap may imply restoration of hippocampal function and naptime spindles might contribute to the improvement in memory [52].

Midday nap in healthy individuals has been shown to be inversely related to coronary mortality, particularly in working men. In a study from Greece involving 23 681 individuals and followed up for 6 year, those who were regularly napping had a 37% lower cardiac mortality (HR, 0.63; 95% CI,0.42-0.93) [53]. In a recent study including 206 patients recruited in King Khalid university hospital in Riyadh, regular siesta was shown to lower the risk of ischemic stroke (HR 0.58, p = 0.031) [54].

Some researchers suggest that the midday napping may be for 10 to 20 minutes [55]. Islam encourages midday napping after "Zuhr" or "Jumaat" (Friday) prayer. This is consistent with neuroscience, which suggests early midday napping than late in the afternoon, to avoid disturbing the night sleep [49].

Turn off the lights at night

Scientific evidence suggests that sleeping with light can cause several disadvantages to health. Darkening lamps protect a person and his environment from light pollution arising from excessive exposure to light at night. The common use of electric lighting led to disturbance of human's circadian rhythm. Recent studies suggested that the exposure to artificial light at night (ALAN) was associated with an increase in the incidence of cancer [56,57], metabolic and mood disorders [58].

In adolescents, ALAN was shown to be associated with disturbed sleep patterns and anxiety disorders [59]. At the time of the Prophet, there were no electric lights and people were using the lamps. The scientific theory of not using light when sleeping is in concordance with the Prophet's teaching. In several Hadith, the Prophet ordered to turn off the lights at night. He said: "When you intend going to bed at night, put out the lights" [60].

Conclusion

Prophet teaching not only provided Muslims with spiritual life but also with a pathway for healthy life. These guidelines are consistent with much recent scientific evidence that pertains to public health. Prophet tradition is loaded with recommendations that promote practicing healthy activities. Spreading the awareness of these teachings among both doctors and patients is likely to carry a significant impact on their move toward a healthy life.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval

This is a review article that does not involve patients and hence ethical approval is not applicable.

Contribution to manuscript

HCP established the framework of the manuscript and drafted and corrected the final copy of the manuscript. SAM searched the literature, obtained material required, and reviewed it. All authors approved the final version of the review.

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