

ISLAMIC HEALTH RIGHTS

By: Dr. Amber Khan

Citations:

Stacey, Aisha. Islam is a way of life that takes a holistic approach to health.
<https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1878/viewall/health-in-islam/>

1. Mind-Physical-Spirit

It is a very well-known verse from the Quran that our body parts will speak either for or against us on the Day of Judgment.

They should not forget the Day when their own tongues and their own hands and their legs (or feet) will bear testimony in regard to their deeds. On that Day Allah will give them the full recompense they deserve, and they will realize that Allah is the very Truth, Who makes the Truth manifest.
Nur: 24 (24:24)

When we hear this verse, what do we immediately think? The spiritual acts of our body parts.

What our eyes saw.

What our ears heard.

What our tongues said or didn't say.

Where our feet walked; what our hands touched.

These acts of our body parts are what make up our **spiritual embodiment**.

But our body parts carry out much more than just the spiritual acts.

What are the other acts? What other role do our body parts play:

1. Spiritual role
2. Mental role
3. Physical role

What exactly is involved in the mental and physical role of our bodies?

Mental: comprises of desires, nafs, intention (thought process before you action)

- we are not held accountable for bad thoughts: but our thoughts have the potential, i.e. the starting ground, for evil acts.
- What is it that affects one's thoughts?
- psychological and emotional well-being
- level of patience
- controlling anger
- selflessness and empathy
- humility
- confidence and conviction in the deen
- qadr; will of Allah – bad things happen to good people. This life is a test. – how you overcome hardship.
- IN OTHER WORDS – MENTAL HEALTH
- Strong mental health leads to strong spiritual and physical health. Mental leads the other two.
- And one needs to be aware of signs of poor mental health.
- Warning signs of poor mental health or even a mental disorder that may require professional help – we do not have control of this (medical disorder); stigmas in this can prevent treatment which lead to poor spiritual and physical and mental health

Physical: encasement, your outer being

- This is tied with mental role: Do you value your body? Do you take care of it? Sleep, scent, dress, what you put inside your body.
- Nutrition
- Exercise.
- Personal Hygiene
- Avoidance of agents (drugs, alcohol, food and chemical products)
- Knowledge and awareness sexual and reproductive health
- Due to genetics and unforeseen circumstances - Chronic Disease (heart disease, diabetes) - Maintaining the best lifestyle to improve their current state and avoid further complications
- IN OTHER WORDS – PHYSICAL HEALTH

These are the 3 roles are to the body – spiritual, mental, and the physical require 3 types of health

- spiritual health
- mental health
- physical health

It is an Islamic right and an Islamic responsibility to know and nurture all 3 in accordance with the Quran and sunnah.

We know this for spiritual; no one doubts this.

However, the other two roles are downplayed or even discussed in an Islamic atmosphere. They are mainly learned in a secular environment. This may be sufficient, however, many Islamic

legal rulings that apply to one's mental and physical health. Therefore it becomes a right on us to learn.

So we will give them the limelight -

1. **What are the Islamic Rights to Mental and Physical Health Education?**
2. **What are the risks if one does not fulfill this right?**
3. **How can we abide by these rights with secular medicine?**

2. Mental & Physical Health Education is a Right and Responsibility

Importance of Education:

Education, in general (Islamic and secular) is right for all.

Right and Responsibility:

The pursuit of knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim.”[Narrated by Ibn Mâjah (authenticity is questioned).]

Benefits of knowledge:

- Brings you closer to success.
- “...and he who treads a path in search of knowledge, Allah makes that (path) easy for him, leading to Paradise...” [Narrated by Muslim (4867) on the authority of Abû Hurayrah]
- Avoid transgression.
- “... It is only those who have knowledge among His slaves that fear Allah...”[Fâtir: 28]

Provide for Others:

“There is no envy except in two (cases): a person whom Allah has given wealth and he spends it in the right way, and a person whom Allah has given wisdom and he gives his decisions accordingly and teaches it to others.”[Narrated by Al-Bukhârî and Muslim]

So what are the specific rights?

Proof for Physical and Mental Health Education as a RIGHT:

Let's first look at the rights mentioned in the Quran on physical and mental health.

1. Quran:

The Quran contains many verses of advice about healthy eating that relate to the interconnectedness of physical and spiritual health.

Citation: Basil H. Aboul-Enein. *Health-Promoting Verses as mentioned in the Holy Quran*. *Journal of Religion and Health*. June 2016, Volume 55, Issue 3, pp 821–829.
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10943-014-9857-8>

28 explicit verses on one's physical and mental health:

- with a focus on diet and nutrition,
- personal hygiene,
- abstention from harmful agents,
- and the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

Here is a brief highlight on their themes:

- Two verses connected the importance of a healthy lifestyle and behavior choices,
- three on personal hygiene,
- eighteen on diet and nutrition,
- one on physical activity,
- three on alcohol use, and
- one on breastfeeding promotion.

These results suggest that the Quran shows:

- A clear connection to the importance that physical and mental health plays in our lives on spiritual level.
- When one upholds to legal rulings in regards to health that this is worship and therefore accountability.

Below are the 28 verses:

Table 1

Topic	Quranic citation	Verse
Healthy lifestyle/behavior choices	Surat Al-Baqara (<i>The Cow</i>) 2:195	“And make not your own hands contribute to your own demise, for the Lord loves the actions of good.”
	Surat An-Nisa (<i>The Women</i>) 4:79	“What good comes to you (O Man) is divine, but whatever evil be falls upon you, is from your own actions (doing).”
Personal hygiene	Surat Al-Baqara (<i>The Cow</i>) 2:222	“Truly, God loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and loves those who purify themselves (through bathing, cleaning, and washing).”
	Surat Al-Maidah (<i>The Table</i>) 5:6	“O Believers! When you intend to offer the prayer, wash your faces and your hands (and forearms) up to the elbows, wipe your heads, and wash your feet up to the ankles. If you are in an unclean state, fully bathe.”
	Surat Al-Muddathir (<i>The Cloaked One</i>) 74:4–5	“Magnify your Lord! And purify your garments and shun all filth.”
Diet/nutrition	Surat Al-Baqara (<i>The Cow</i>) 2:61	“And when you said, O Moses! We cannot endure one kind of food. Therefore, pray to your Lord to produce for us what the earth grows, its herbs, its cucumbers, its garlic, lentils, and onions.”
	Surat Al-Baqara (<i>The Cow</i>) 2:168	“Eat of what is lawful and wholesome that exists on earth.”
	Surat Al-Baqara (<i>The Cow</i>) 2:172	“O Believers! Eat of the wholesome things which we have provided you with gratitude to the Lord.”
	Surat Al-Baqara (<i>The Cow</i>) 2:266	“Would any of you wish to have a garden full of date palms and grapes through which rivers flow underneath? He would have all sorts of fruits in it.”
Topic	Quranic Citation	Passage
Diet/Nutrition	Surat Al-An’am (<i>The Livestock</i>) 6:141	“And it is He Who produced gardens, both trellised and untrellised, and date palms, and crops of different shape and taste (their fruits and their seeds) and olives, and pomegranates, similar (in kind) and different (in taste). Eat of the fruits when they ripen.”
	Surat Al-A’raf (<i>The Heights</i>) 7:31	“Eat and drink, yet not in excess, for the Lord loves not those who commit excess.”
	Surat Ar-Ra’d (<i>The Thunder</i>) 13:3	“And it is He who spread out the earth and placed therein firm mountains and rivers and has placed two pairs (diverse) fruits on it.”
	Surat Ar-Ra’d (<i>The Thunder</i>) 13:4	“On the earth are neighboring tracts, and vineyards, and cultivated green fields, and date palms growing diversely, watered from a single source, yet we make some of them (fruits) exceed (quality of) in food value to eat. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who use their reason.”
	Surat An-Nahl (<i>The Honey Bees</i>) 16:11	“With it (the rain) He brings up for you the crops, olives, dates, the grapes and every kind of fruit.”
	Surat An-Nahl (<i>The Honey Bees</i>) 16:14	And He it is Who has subjected the sea (to you), that you eat thereof fresh fish.”
	Surat An-Nahl (<i>The Honey Bees</i>) 16:66	“And Verily! In the cattle, you have a worthy lesson. We give you to drink of that which is in their bellies, between the cud and blood: pure refreshing milk for those who drink it.”
	Surat An-Nahl (<i>The Honey Bees</i>) 16:67	“And from the fruits of date palms and grapes you derive intoxication and wholesome nourishment. Verily, therein is indeed a sign for people who have wisdom.”
	Surat An-Nahl (<i>The Honey Bees</i>) 16:69	“Then, eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord made easy for you.”
	Surat Maryam (<i>Mary</i>) 19:25–6	“And shake the trunk of date-palm towards you, it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon you. So eat, drink and be content.”
	Surat Ta-Ha (<i>T.H.</i>) 20:81	“Eat of the wholesome things we have provided for your nourishment.”
	Surat Ya-Sin (<i>Y.S.</i>) 36:33	“And from it (the earth) we produced whole grains, so that they eat thereof.”
Surat Muhammed or Surat Al-Qital	“(Here is) a Parable of the Garden which the pious are promised, in it are rivers of water the taste and smell of which are not changed; rivers	

	<i>(The Fighting)</i> 47:15	of milk of which the taste never changes; rivers of wine delicious to those who drink, and rivers of clarified honey. They will have, in it, all sorts of fruits; and Grace from their Lord.”
	Surat Abasa (<i>He Frowned</i>) 80:24	“So let man reflect upon the food he eats.”
Physical Activity	Surat Sad (<i>The letterS.</i>) 38:41–42	“Remember Our servant, Job, when he called on his Lord: Satan has afflicted me with exhaustion (by ruining my health) and suffering. For the Lord replied: Strike the ground with your feet! And this is a cool spring of water to wash in and for drinking too.”
Alcohol use	Surat Al-Baqara (<i>The Cow</i>) 2:219	“They ask you about wine and gambling. Say: In them are great sin, and also some benefits for mankind. But its sin outweighs the benefits.”
	Surat An-Nisa (<i>The Women</i>) 4:43	“O Believers! Do not approach your prayers when you are drunk until you are aware of what you are saying (sober).”
	Surat Al-Maidah (<i>The Table</i>) 5:90	“O Believers! Liquor and gambling, practices of idolatry (through animal sacrifice) and arrows for seeking luck are only the filthy work of Satan. Turn aside from it so that you may prosper.”
Breastfeeding promotion	Surat Al-Baqara (<i>The Cow</i>) 2:233	“Mothers should breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing period.”

Quranic Verses with Corresponding Citation

Connection Between Health and Worship:

- **“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)**
- In Islam, health is treating our bodies with respect and nourishing them in such a way to prevent transgression.
- EX: imams not overeating to protect their taraweeh.
- Healthy eating not only satisfies hunger but also has an effect on how well we worship.

Personal Responsibility Highlights:

- **“And make not your own hands contribute to your own demise, for the Lord loves the actions of good.” (2:195)**
- the role of personal responsibility for our health – spiritual, mental, and physical.
- your individual lifestyle choices for health will either help or hurt you.

Lawful Dietary Highlights:

- **“O Believers! Eat of the wholesome things which we have provided you with gratitude to the Lord.” (2:172)**
- Many of these verses contained a focus on fruit consumption
- a progressive focus on plant-based dietary patterns and
- *The current body of evidence **supports** diet rich in plant-based foods and their strong association with reduced risks of major chronic diseases
- Religion that encourages meat:
 - “He created cattle that give you warmth, benefits and food to eat.” (Quran 16:5)
 - “It is He who subdued the seas, from which you eat fresh fish.” (Quran 16:14)

Unlawful Dietary Highlights:

- **They ask you about wine and gambling. Say, “In them is a great sin and yet some benefit for mankind. But their sin is greater than their benefit.” (2:219)**
- verse 2:219 in Surat Al-Baqara identifies some potential benefits “for mankind” of consuming alcohol, particularly RED WINE due to its polyphenolic content (antioxidants – lower cholesterol, lower BP, lower blood sugar, lower inflammation, promote bone health, etc.)
- while the verse simultaneously recognizes the risk of alcoholism.
- The underlying health message in this verse, supported by other verses, upholds an overall abstention from consuming alcoholic beverages primarily as a preventive measure.
- **“Prevention is better than cure”** became the widely accepted maxim.
- Thus, the risk of alcohol-related diseases such as liver cirrhosis, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases is significantly decreased through the lifestyle promoted by the Quran.
- Polyphenol in foods: cloves, dark chocolate, berries, black beans, nuts, artichoke, spinach, soy, green tea

We also see a connection between mental health and physical health:

Avoid Excess:

- A Muslim is advised to avoid extremes and to choose a moderate course in all his affairs, including his eating habits.
- **“O children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer; eat and drink, but waste not by excess. For Allah loves not the wasters.” – Al-Qur’an, 7:31**
- mental health: empathy and care for others
- to think of others and not overindulging in your desires/nafs.
- This is especially true in today’s time.
- We eat purely for pleasure, for boredom, for social.
- We rarely eat for sustenance i.e. fulfill basic need (except suhur and iftar but those have become party events where we put a big burden on the hosts)
- Lead to obesity, disease, psychological disorder with unhealthy relationship with food: binge, anorexia, bulimia, depression, etc.
- Share: *“He is not a believer who eats to his fill but his neighbor goes without food.”* (Sahih Bukhari)
- *Eat together: “Eat together and not separately, for the blessing is associated with the company.”*– Ibn Majah
- *“Nothing is worse than a person who fills his stomach. It should be enough for the son of Adam to have a few bites to satisfy his hunger. If he wishes more, it should be: One-third for his food, one-third for his liquids, and one-third for his breath.”* Tirmidhi & Ibn Majah

The Quran also discusses prioritizing the health of those we are responsible for:

Breastfeeding Highlights:

- **“Mothers should breastfeed their children two complete years for whoever wishes to complete the nursing period.” (2:233) *right of the child**
- Benefits for baby: antibiotics lower risk of ear infections, respiratory illness, chronic infections (DM1), lower SIDS
- Benefits for mother: (postnatal body) – shrink uterus after birth, decrease uterine bleeding, lower risk of breast and ovarian CA, lower risk of osteoporosis
- Both: bond, clear vision is 8-12 inches, recognize scent of mother’s breastmilk from another mother’s
- Based on verse from the Quran, mothers are encouraged to breastfeed their children for the first 2 years of age.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) supports exclusive breastfeeding for the first 6 month as a global public health recommendation with continued breastfeeding for up to 2 years or beyond (WHO 2014)

Health Outside of Nutrition:

Hygiene Highlights:

- **“O Believers! When you intend to offer the prayer, wash your faces and your hands (and forearms) up to the elbows, wipe your heads, and wash your feet up to the ankles. If you are in an unclean state, fully bathe.” (5:6)**
- Quranic verses indicate an extension to both the physical and spiritual aspects of Islamic life, for cleanliness is indeed next to Godliness.
- Hand washing and the use of alcohol-based hand sanitizers continue to be key components in significantly reducing the transmission of infectious diseases

Other physical health topics given importance from the sunnah:

Physically Fit:

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) and his Companions were naturally physically fit.

- Life was tougher, long distances were covered on foot,
- men hunted and farmed their food to survive,
- and there were no useless recreations to produce laziness and waste many hours of otherwise constructive time.
- The 21st century contains many distractions and forms of entertainment that encourage laziness and induce ill health.
- It has been conclusively proven that obesity in children increases the more hours they watch television.[4] Other studies have indicated that this is equally true for adults.

Sexual and Reproductive Health:

Sexual health education is a lifelong journey of acquiring information that shapes our beliefs, attitudes, and values on sex. It encompasses:

- physical development,

- relationships,
- intimacy,
- body image,
- gender roles,
- and signs of abuse.

Ideally, it should begin at a young age and be taught by the primary caregivers on an ongoing basis.

The women of Madinah were considered quite bold in character; they were not shy to seek advice and inquire about women's health issues.

Aisha (r) said: "How good were the women of the Ansar that they did not shy away from learning and understanding religious matters." (Muslim, Kitab al-Hayd)

- not shy: shyness has its place. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "Faith (Belief) consists of more than sixty branches (i.e. parts). And Haya is a part of faith." (Bukhari).
- We should not feel shy when seeking knowledge.
- We should create an environment that is decent and sensitive to the nature of the content and safe for people to ask questions and learn.
- Good: praiseworthy quality. We should emulate as well. We should make a concerted effort to learn about women's health.

The sahabah recognized that learning about reproductive/sexual health had a strong influence on their relationship with Allah.

The books of Islamic jurisprudence include several topics promoting sexual awareness such as:

Menstruation
 Pregnancy
 Postpartum health
 Breastfeeding
 Intimacy
 Family planning
Ghusl (bath)
 Body Image
 Self-Esteem
 Abuse

These matters are essential to our faith and can be learned in a decent and respectable way whilst also upholding an appropriate element of shyness.

As can be seen, just like we must fulfill our spiritual selves, we too must fulfill the rights and responsibilities of our mental and physical selves as well.

Despite the strong evidence we have to support the importance of this right and responsibility, our community still struggles with fulfilling it.

3. Risks of Not Fulfilling this Islamic Right of Physical and Mental Health Education:

1. Risky Behaviors:

- At risk of preventable diseases and further medical complications:
 - Infectious diseases
 - Obesity, diabetes, heart disease
 - reproductive and sexual health – STDS, signs of sexual violence, pregnancy health
- Lower morbidity and mortality

2. Seek unreliable resources:

- Guidance on health from Allah is the best regardless of where science stands today.
 - Allah is the Creator of your health. He knows exactly what it needs for it function successfully.

3. Cultural myths:

- Culture strongly influence many of attitudes and behaviors towards health
 - how the family eats, attitudes towards mental illness, body image, and self-esteem

4. Developing unhealthy understanding towards mental health:

There are a lot of negative perceptions associated with mental illness within the public. These perceptions are more common in our community than in the general population.

A common belief among muslims is that mental illness should not happen to a true believer.

Some even say there are no such thing as mental illness when you are a true Muslim.

These viewpoints stem from two major misconceptions:

Misconception #1: It's not mental illness, it's YOU!

- low iman/faith
- Lack of tawakkul – lack of a trust in Alla h.

Misconception #2: It's not mental illness it's THEM! (someone out to get you!)

- someone is jealous of you, someone doesn't like you and wants evil on you, or it's jinn
- ***You are a victim of jinn possession, black magic, or evil eye!**

These perceptions have a big effect on muslims who suffer with mental illness. It prevents one from seeking professional help, getting the right treatment, or preferring alternative forms of treatment that do more harm on their mental state.

Now knowing the rights of health and the risks that come with ignoring those rights, how fulfill our health rights with secular/western medicine?

4. Islamic Health Rights and Secular Medicine

Rather than viewing disease as a punishment from God as the Christians thought, Islam looks at disease as just another problem for mankind to solve. The Prophet (pbuh) decreed that the sick and injured should be cared for, not shunned.

In Islam, we have to remember that everything has a purpose.

There is a purpose to why someone's health may be afflicted.

“Whenever a Muslim is afflicted by harm from sickness or other matters, God will expiate his sins, like leaves drop from a tree.” (Bukhari and Muslim)

Purpose of Medicine:

It is this reason why Islam has taken a front seat to advancing medicine.

The Prophet said: “There is no disease that God Almighty has created, except that He also has created its treatment.” (Bukhari)

The growth of Islam in the seventh century sparked a golden age of scientific discovery -

medical science. This led to many discoveries and understandings in the field:

- Discoveries in anatomy and physiology,
 - Blood circulation, heart, lungs
- Understanding infectious diseases
 - (how contagious diseases spread and necessary methods of quarantine.),
 - leprosy, small pox, STDs
- Antiseptics:
 - Islamic hospitals pioneered the use of antiseptics such as alcohol, vinegar or rose-water in cleaning wounds. Everything was to be kept as clean as possible—in stark contrast to the near total lack of sanitation and cleanliness in Christian lands at that time.
- Surgery and Surgical Tools
 - Al Zahrawi invented over 200 surgical instruments, many of which are still used today, including forceps, scalpel, surgical needle and retractor, specula and catgut sutures.)
 - Muslim doctors were familiar with the use of opium as an anaesthetic during long surgeries and for extracting teeth.
- Hospitals:
 - The first medical center was established in Persia (Iran) in the 6th century;
 - in the 800s, the great Islamic doctor Al Razi oversaw Baghdad’s Audidi Hospital, with its two dozen doctors on staff.
 - By 1000, Baghdad had five public hospitals, and hospitals were founded in Cairo, Aleppo, Damascus and Al-Andalus.
 - These early Islamic medical centers would be recognizable as hospitals today: they had wards for different diseases, outpatient clinics, surgery recovery wards and pharmacies. They also functioned as medical education centers for doctor training.
- Pharmacies
 - (Muslim pharmacists focused on empiricism—they used substances that showed a positive effect on the patients. In other words, if an herb, spice or other ingredient worked by assisting a sick person to heal, it was used.
- Traditional natural remedies, such as the use of honey or olive oil, and the use of suction cups (*hijama*)

We see from this that Islam is a religion that views medicine as not only a benefit, but also an Islamic principle to wellness.

That being said, we know that medicine is not what cures. It is Allah.

Purpose of God:

The Quran, a book of guidance, is filled with mercy and healing.

• ***“O mankind! There has come to you a good advice from your Lord (i.e. the Quran), and a healing for that which is in your hearts.” (Quran 10:57)***

• ***“And We send down from the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe...” (Quran 17:82)***

- The words and recitation of Quran can cure hearts and minds, as well as overcome illness and injury,

The two together is what brings optimum health.

The Ultimate Cure – God and Medicine:

- In the past several decades, it has become widely accepted that religious belief and practices have a significant impact on both physical and emotional health.
- Medical and scientific research has demonstrated that religious commitment aids in the prevention and treatment of emotional disorders, disease and injury and enhances recovery.
- Belief in and submission to the will of God is the most essential part of good health care.

6. CONCLUSION:

Through His infinite mercy, God has provided us with a holistic approach to life, one that covers all aspects, spiritual, emotional and physical.

And that includes health.

Just as we have Islamic platforms to improve not only our spiritual health, we also need Islamic outlets to better our mental and physical health.

Alhamdulillah we are seeing more emphasis on this recently:

- khutbahs on the stigmas of mental disorders and sexual violence
- free health check ups at our masjids by volunteer health professionals

Our bodies are a trust from Allah. They are Allah’s and will return back to Him.

And when it does, it will speak for or against us on the Day of Judgment – how we fulfilled its spiritual, mental, and physical rights.

And in recognizing that, we must reflect on the wonder of the human body. With that comes gratitude to the Creator.

This gratitude is shown in the care and attention given to maintaining optimum health - mind, physical, and spiritual.