

Family Diet in Islam: The Importance of Food and Correct Nutritional Habits

Food is an essential prerequisite for life and as such the primary goal of eating and drinking is to enable the body to function normally. With food, or the lack of it, the destinies of individuals are greatly influenced. We should "eat to live", and "not live to eat". The Holy Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.s.) recommended even for pious man the quantity of food "which is just sufficient to keep his back-bone erect".

Nutrition is a matter of life-long eating habits which become set with age. Dietary patterns also vary from one person to another according to the difference of cultural and geographic environment to another. To ensure a proper supply of the essential nutrients, we must combine food sources of these nutrients in the right amounts. This results in a healthy well-balanced diet.

A BALANCED DIET

A balanced diet consists of food from the five basic food groups in the correct proportions. That is:

- Bread and cereal group - (bread, breakfast cereals, pasta, rice - important nutrients CHO, vitamin B, dietary fiber)
- Fats and oils group - (margarine, oils, mayonnaise, salad dressing) - important nutrients - essential fatty acids, vitamin A.D.E.)
- Meat and meat alternatives - (meat, chicken, fish, eggs, legumes, including
- Soya - important nutrient -protein, iron, vitamin B)
- Milk and milk products - (milk, cheese, yoghurts - important nutrients -
- calcium, phosphorus, vitamins)
- Fruit and vegetables - (all types - important nutrients include vitamin &
- minerals especially vitamin A & C. and fiber)

Having food from the five basic food groups during the day ensures that the diet consists of varieties of nutrients.

Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. A great number of adults and children eat an inadequate breakfast or skip it altogether. A good breakfast should emphasize complex carbohydrate and should provide between 25-30 % of the energy requirements recommended daily, and vitamins, minerals and fiber. For example; whole-wheat bread, low-fat spread, cheese/tomato, yoghurt or milk with muesli, all-bran flakes, Weetabix or cooked oats and fruit. Here the emphasis is on dietary fiber.

The old view point was that food fiber is only necessary for regular movement of the bowels. Nowadays researchers are investigating the connection between food fiber and several typical

western diseases such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, cancer of the colon, overweight, hypertension, diverticulosis etc. Surveys show that these conditions are less common among groups of people following a high-fiber diet.

According to the following Hadith Sahl bin Sa`d (r.a.) said: "I did not see the Prophet (S.A.W.S.) take sifted flour ever since Allah sent him till Allah took his breath".

And then he went on to explain this: "We used to grind it and blow it off. So what was blown off, went away, and what was remained, we cooked and then we ate."

ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE DIET

Islam enjoins us to have a balance diet in order to have a variety of nutrients. When we look at verses from the Holy Qura'n, the recommended foods indicate nutrient density. It states:

"O you people! Eat of what is on earth lawful and good!" (2:168)

"So eat of (meats), on which Allah's name hath been pronounced if ye have faith in his signs." (6:118)

"The game of the sea and its food are permitted to you." (5:99)

"Pure milk, easy and agreeable to swallow for those who drink." (16:66)

"He it is who produced gardens with trellises and without, and dates, and tilth with produce of all kinds and olives and pomegranates, similar and different, eat of their fruit in season." (16:141)

These recommended foods mentioned in the Holy Qur'an, will certainly fulfill daily protein, carbohydrates, fat and vitamins requirements.

NUTRITION DURING THE LIFE CYCLE

The diet of a pregnant woman has an effect on the development of the fetus and the course of pregnancy and confinement.

Eating a sensible well-balanced diet of protein (meat, fish, cheese) milk, fresh fruits and vegetables, increased amounts of carbohydrates, especially fiber, reducing fat, will help to provide the pregnant woman with energy needs, over-come nausea, constipation, anemia, control weight gain, provide the necessary calcium intake for calcification of bones and teeth of baby and also provide additional protein and vitamin B complex.

The nutrition status of the pregnant woman will largely determine the nutritional requirements during lactation when her nutritional requirements are even higher especially the calcium intake which should be increased.

When we look at infant nutrition where breastfeeding is recommended at least for the first two years, we find reference made to this in the Holy Qur'an (31:14).

Human milk is the most balanced food for an infant. Human milk forms fine flocculent curds in the stomach of the infant, thus enhancing digestion and leading to more rapid emptying of the

stomach, reduces the likelihood of allergies and other illness. And of course from the psychological point, breast-feeding provides bonding between mother and child.

Food continues to be a major factor in the development of the whole person throughout the growing years. Pre-school children require the same basic nutrients as teenagers and adults, but in smaller quantities. A selection of a variety of foods from the milk and meat group, fruit and vegetables and bread and cereals groups provides a sound basis for the child's diet.

The teenage years involves social, physical and physio-logical development. All these facets of the adolescent influences his nutritional status and food habits, and stresses of various kinds during this period also have an effect on nutrition. Here again, milk, meat and its alternatives, wholegrains, cereals, breads, fruit and vegetables are recommended.

Snacking makes up about 25% of the energy requirement of most teenagers. But snacking is acceptable provided the snacks furnish an equivalent amount of the days allowance for protein, vitamin and minerals.

If good nutritional habits are not inculcated at the beginning of young adulthood as part of the lifestyle, poor eating habits become a risk factor for a number of diseases for the middle-aged and elderly.

Most modern affluent homemakers are forced to seek ways of acquiring time due to having jobs outside home and therefore regularly make use of convenience foods, processed foods, and fast foods. These foods are often high in kilojoules, high in fat content, especially high in saturated fats and cholesterol, high in sodium, low in nutritional value and contain liberal amounts of food additives.

The individual who has had poor food habits throughout life is not likely to be in as good health as the one who has enjoyed the benefits of a good diet.

SOME DIET-RELATED HEALTH PROBLEMS

Many diet-related health problems affect many individuals, like: high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes, and coronary heart disease.

Some of the risk factors of coronary heart disease are: High blood cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, stress, lack of exercise, overweight, and diabetes.

Diet plays a decisive role in the control of blood fats that is, cholesterol and triglycerides and other risk factors, like hypertension and diabetes, and hence in the development of coronary heart disease.

The prudent dietary guidelines for coronary heart disease, are:

- food low in fat, especially saturated fats
- to substitute saturated fat with polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats
- limit the intake of foods high in cholesterol

- eat more complex carbohydrates especially rich in fiber
- control your weight
- use less salt

High blood cholesterol is a risk factor which can easily be controlled by making changes to our eating habits. The body can manufacture all its cholesterol needs from fat in the foods we eat. The westernized diet is high in fat and cholesterol and our bodies are becoming overloaded. Therefore, cut out many risks as you can.

This can be achieved by improving our lifestyle, and eating habits.

- eat less fat (30% of total energy requirement should be fat)
- reduce saturated fat (animal fat, full-cream dairy products, brick margarine, coconut and palm kernel oils)
- reduce dietary cholesterol (egg yolk and organ meats -brains, liver, as well as prawns and shrimps)
- stop smoking
- control hypertension (High Blood Pressure)
- control diabetes
- exercise regularly
- reduce weight
- reduce stress and
- eat a wide variety of foods (refer to the 5 food groups)
- eat more carbohydrates especially rich in fiber (fruit, veg, legumes, oats)
- eat regular meals (don't skip meals)
- reduce salt intake (to control Hypertension)
- eat moderately (to avoid overweight)

Moderation is the keyword as far as eating habits are concerned. As with all our divine obligations moderation in terms of the quantity of the food we eat is essential. The Holy Qur'an mentions this: "Eat and drink and be not immoderate." (7:31)

Hypertension - the elevation of the blood pressure above normal is a major risk factor and a symptom that accompanies many cardiovascular and renal diseases.

Obesity is often associated with hypertension, so there seems to be a strong correlation between weight and blood pressure and between increases in weight and increases in blood pressure.

Sodium restriction is effective in lowering blood pressure in some persons. Many food contains salt, like convenience food, processed food and preserved food, examples are: Sodium benzoate, a

preservative used in relishes, sauces, margarine. Sodium propionate in cheese and breads to retard mould formation. Sodium alginate in ice cream to give the smooth texture. Monosodium Glutamate in processed foods. Natural sodium content of animal food is relatively high (meat, fish, eggs, cheese) although nutritionally essential must be used in moderate amounts.

Organ meats contain more sodium than muscle meats. Shellfish of all kinds are especially high in sodium than fresh water fish.

All in all we can put it as that:

- weight control - highest priority in dietary management of diabetes
- eat regular meals - a delay in eating may produce hypoglycemia
- eat moderately
- reduce simple sugars
- increase foods rich in carbohydrates
- eat more dietary fibre
- eat less fat or cut them from your diet

CONCLUSION

Good food must contain three essential components:

- Nutritional benefits and efficiently in producing the needed energy.
- lightness for the stomach
- ease of digestion

Allah (SWT) says in the Holy Qur'an:

"O you who believe, do not forbid the good things which Allah has made lawful for you and do not exceed limits. Surely Allah does not love those who exceeds the limits." (5:90)

And then defining moderation, the Prophetic guidance on the best of common diets is: "one third food, one third water and one third air." Because, when the stomach is saturated with food, it will not be able to take in water, and when food and water exceed their recommended level, one may suffer from pulmonary difficulties, resulting in stress and exhaustion from lungs being unable to easily deliver oxygenated blood to the left atrium of the heart.

One will also feel heaviness in his body, his heart and spirit will experience languor and drowsiness and his limbs will fail to obey him in performing his basic religious duties. Hence a filled stomach is damaging to one's body, heart and spirit. Moderation is the path of good health and the body benefits from moderate and nutritious meals.