

# Islamic Diet & Manners

Muslims are a part of so many cultures and have contributed much to the nutritional practices of the world. However, the Islamic nutritional practices (including every other action) are expected to be predominantly determined by the injunctions and regulations of Islam as outlined by the Holy Qur'an and explained by Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). More than 900 million Muslims of different nationalities, societies, and geographical backgrounds of this world make this nutritional practice unique.

## Cleanliness and Hygiene

Cleanliness and hygiene in Islam are emphasized to the extent Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported by Ibn Hayyan to have said: "Cleanse yourself, for Islam is cleanliness." In another Hadith the Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have said, "Cleanliness invites towards faith, and faith leads its possessor to the Garden."

Cleanliness in food handling, cooking, preserving, processing, etc. is highly recommended and emphasized besides an overall cleanliness of body, clothing, home, and surroundings.

## Miswak

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) laid special emphasis on cleaning the teeth, hands, and hair. He (PBUH) was particularly careful in the observance of Miswak (brushing teeth). Miswak is an Arabic word meaning tooth cleaner. It is made of wood and the Prophet (PBUH) recommended its use with every ablution (washing for prayer) five times a day and before and after every meal. How our modern day dentists would applaud that advanced view.

## Eating Habits

Eating like all other acts of a Muslim is a matter of worship and begins in the name of Allah. Bismillah. Islam reminds Muslims that food and drink are the provision of Allah for survival and for maintaining good health. The following seven habits were recommended by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and are practiced by Muslims all over the world:

1) Du'a' (Supplication) before each meal:

"Bismillah wa ala barkatillah."

"In the name of Allah and with the blessings of Allah."

2) Du'a' (Supplication) after each meal:

"Al hamdu lil lazi at ta mana wa saqana waja-alana minal muslemeen."

"Praise be to Allah the One Who gave us the food and the drinks. Praise be to Him Who made us Muslim."

3) Eating less:

Overeating is discouraged and wasting of food is condemned.

"O children of Adam! Look to your adornment at every place of worship, and eat and drink, but be not prodigals. Lo! He loveth not the prodigals." (Quran 7:31)

Prodigal means wasteful or unnecessarily extravagant.)

#### 4) Dieting:

One of the main principals of good health is a balanced diet. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) emphasized the behavior of eating less as a method of preventing sickness and diseases. Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) is reported to have said:

"Eat less you will be healthier." (Hadith)

"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." (Tarmazi, ibn Majah and Hakim)

#### 5) Eating slowly:

Eating slowly is recommended for good health as it facilitates the food being thoroughly chewed and hence easier to digest.

#### 6) Moderation and sharing:

Fourteen centuries ago, Islam laid down the basis of dietary regulations as well as the limits within which man can satisfy his physical needs and desires without endangering his life and mental health. Islam motivated people to seek the good of the Hereafter as well as of this world in a balanced way. It taught us to enjoy the pleasures of life, including food, in a moderate way, not becoming a slave to his desires or losing sight of the ultimate spiritual goal. Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) did not permit Muslims to undertake fast which might be harmful and lead to weakness or illness, even though fasting is considered an act of worship.

'Abdullah ibn 'Amr ibn al-'As told of God's messenger, "Have you not been informed, 'Abdullah, that you fast during the day and get up at night for prayer?" When he replied that this was so, he said to him, "Do not do it. Fast and break your fast, get up for prayer and sleep, for you have a duty to your body, your eye, your wife, and your visitors. May he who observes a perpetual fast never fast! Fasting three days a month is equivalent to a perpetual fast. Fast three days every month and recite Qur'an every month."

A Muslim is advised to avoid extremes and to choose a moderate course in all his affairs, including his eating habits. "Eat of the good things we have provided for your sustenance, but commit not excess therein." (Qur'an 20:81)

We are also encouraged to enjoy life within certain limits which are drawn from the Shari'ah which was built on the Islamic 'Golden Rule', "Do not harm or be a cause of harm", whether for oneself or others. We are cautioned to avoid greed and to enjoy the pleasures of sharing, especially in regard to eating.

#### 7) Eating together:

The benefits of enjoying meals together applies whether it's a family sitting down together, a husband and wife dining out, or a young couple getting to know one another. The Prophet (pbuh) emphasized the importance of this when he said, "Eat together and not separately, for the blessing is associated with the company." (Ibn Majah)

## Drinking Habits

It is recommended not to drain a glass of liquid in one continuous draught. The pharynx serves as a common passageway for both food and air, and the pathways for these cross. Intervals while drinking are also recommended to avoid choking. Sitting down while drinking is also recommended.

The Holy Prophet said, "Do not drink water in one gulp (or one breath) like a camel, but take it in two or three installments (with breaks for breath). Take the name of Allah (recite "Bismallah") when you start drinking and praise Him (say "Alhamdulillah") when you finish. (Tirmizi)

## Table Manners

As Muslims we are required to show compassion, grace, gentleness, and consideration for others. This also extends to the table and how we conduct ourselves with others:

- 1) Sitting down while eating.
- 2) Eating together and sharing of food.
- 3) Serving others first, especially guests.
- 4) Host is the first to start eating and the last to finish. (This is the opposite of Western table manners.)
- 5) Taking food in smaller portions than needed.
- 6) Finishing (cleaning) the plate without leftovers (this too is different from Western tradition where we are taught to always leave a small bit on the plate.)
- 7) Eating with the right hand.
- 8) Waiting for everyone to finish before finally leaving the table or floor cloth.
- 9) Washing hands and mouth before and after eating.
- 10) Brushing teeth before and after eating (Miswak).
- 11) Sharing food with relatives, friends, neighbors, the needy and destitute.
- 12) Eat from the corner of the plate from your side (for one dish communal eating), don't eat from the middle or the other side of the dish.
- 13) As an invited guest it is permissible to ask your host for water or salt. Accept what is offered and don't request additional items your host may not have available.
- 14) When eating in a group, if quantities are limited, share from your plate with the others.

The Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) is reported to have said, "A plate for one is enough for two, and a plate for two is enough for four.

It is reported that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) has said that one who serves drinks should himself be the last person to drink. (Tirmizi)

It is also said that the Holy Prophet (pbuh) never found fault with any food; if he had the inclination, he would eat it, and if he disliked it, he would leave it.

"If a person takes the name of Allah (i.e., recites Bismillah or Assalamu Alaikum) when he enters his home and when he eats, Satan tells his companions, "Let us go. There is no room for you to pass the night in this house nor food." If he enters his house without calling to Allah, Satan says to his companions: "You have at least secured lodging." Then if he does not remember Allah at the time of eating also, Satan says, "You have secured both lodging and food." (Muslim)

Editors Note: Recently scientists in France discovered that eating with ones hands is beneficial as certain enzymes present on our fingertips act as an aid in digestion. Those elements are not present when using cutlery which is why it's called "finger lickin good"!