

Optimal Aging by Adopting Healthy Lifestyle: Focusing on the Islamic Lifestyle

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Abstract

Advancement of human researches and public health activities resulted in infectious diseases control and relative increase in human lifespan. Moreover, human industrialized life and life style changes have resulted in new challenges for human health specially in the field of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) especially in adolescence and old age. With the relative increase in life expectancy, one of the main concerns is healthy aging. Many factors influence healthy aging, some of these, such as healthy diet, physical activities and taking care of mental are related to lifestyle. In this article, lifestyle effects on healthy aging with focus on Islamic lifestyle would be presented under the following headings:

- A. Diet and Nutrition Style: Food poverty, overeating and obesity, specific nutritional needs and eating habits, traditional foods and cultural and religious rules for nutrition including eating "Halal" or permissible foods such as vegetables, fruits, meat of lamb, goat, beef, chicken and fish and also, not using "Haram" or forbidden foods such as alcoholic drinks, pork, carcasses meat, blood and filthy materials
- B. The religious beliefs and practices such as: praying, Salat, voluntariness to help others, experiencing compassion and empathy for others
- C. Islamic sexual lifestyle with safe and lovely marital status and proper family development
- D. Sleep and awakening pattern
- E. Social lifestyle, physical activities and recreation activities including: the type of leisure spending and high-risk behaviors: alcohol consumption, smoking, drug abuse & addiction etc.

Pay attention to essential role of lifestyle on development of healthy or non-healthy aging would be helpful to take proper decisions for effective modifications in lifestyle, in the process of acquiring healthy aging.

Keywords: Lifestyle; Health; Aging; Islam

Introduction

Although death is inevitable, long life has always been a concern for humans. Advancement of human researches and public health activities resulted to infectious diseases control, therefore, the morbidity and mortality rates of many important infectious diseases in the world declined and human lifespan relatively increased. Extending human lifespan, industrialized life and life style changes have resulted in new challenges for human health specially in the field of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs): cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), cancers, obesity and etc. especially in the old age. With the relative increase in life expectancy, one of the main concerns is healthy aging. Therefore, not only longevity, is important, but also quality of life and health in various dimensions, especially in old age, are important. Many factors influence healthy ageing, some of these, such as genetics, are not effectively in human control, but some others like healthy diet, physical activities, and taking care of mental health are within human reach. Many of important factors affecting healthy aging are related to lifestyle. Lifestyle of different parts of human living affects healthy ageing, directly or non-directly. In this article,

lifestyle effects on healthy aging with focus on Islamic lifestyle would be presented as the following:

The Influence of Lifestyle on Different Aspects of Human Life and Diseases Development

If human regarded as whole, the thoughts, perspectives and practices affect his body and soul directly or non-directly. Therefore, human health is influenced by lifestyle, also. WHO, has estimated that 60% of related factors to individual health and quality of life are correlated to lifestyle [1].

Various Aspects of Lifestyle with Known Effects on the Quantity and Quality of Human Lifespan

Diet and nutrition style

Nutritional style is one of the main factors affecting lifespan. Poor, imbalanced diet and its consequences like obesity, is the common healthy problem in societies. Unhealthy lifestyle can be measured by some indexes such as Body Mass Index (BMI) that could be related to nutrition and metabolism of human body. Some important nutritional situations with potential effect on healthy/nonhealthy aging would be discussed as the followings:

Food poverty: In general, the more malnourished the host, its susceptibility to the infection development and the severity of infectious disease will be greater.

Overeating and obesity: A U-shaped increased infection rate in both underweight and obese adults suggested by some researchers. In obese adults, the skin, respiratory tract and surgical-site infections have been more common than in normal-weight participants.

Specific nutritional needs: Malnutrition and nutritional deficiency diseases can affect host defense responses. In vitamin deficiencies and Protein-Energy Malnutrition (PEM), skin and mucous membranes are affected and also complement synthesis, neutrophil chemotaxis, antibody development and function and T cells decreased.

Eating habits: Dietary "pattern" and eating habits is an approach to examining the relationship between diet and the risk of developing diseases.

Some examples of eating habits with potentially effect on ageing would be regarded as the followings:

a) The Mediterranean Diet (MD) or Mediterranean Diet Pattern (MDP), as one of the healthiest dietary models with reduction of the incidence of major diseases especially: cancers, metabolic and cardiovascular syndromes and neurodegenerative diseases [1] slowing down the aging process and increasing longevity has been recognized [2]. This diet is rich in fiber, antioxidants and unsaturated fats. The prominent use of olive oil as the principal source of dietary lipids and restriction of alcohol consumption, adequate daily intake of water and physical activity are the characteristics

of Mediterranean Dietary Patterns (MDPs) [1,3]. The phytochemical compounds within the Mediterranean diet, such as kaempferol, quercetin, capsaicin, resveratrol, curcumin, luteolin, fisetin, sesamin and resveratrol, have been recognized as beneficial effector factors in the aging processes [3].

b) The "Western" diet (Western pattern diet or standard American diet) in industrialized countries, with higher intake of animal-derived foods (saturated fats), sweets, desserts and a lower uptake of fibers and micronutrients (found in fruits, vegetables and whole cereals) may underlies many so-called diseases of civilization, including coronary heart disease, obesity, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, some cancers, autoimmune disease, and osteoporosis [1].

c) Alcohol drinking habits: Alcohol misuse exacerbates and accelerates the age-related changes including: systemic inflammation, sleep disturbances, cancers, cognitive decline, and increased risk of injury and death from falls and other accidents [4].

d) Traditional foods: Some traditional foods may affect human health situation in aging. Yogurt act as probiotic food with positively effects on infection prevention [1] and may reduce the risk of accelerated aging [5].

e) Cultural and religious factors: The cultural and religious factors affect different aspects of nutrition such as diet quantity and quality, food sources and etc. For example, following the guidelines of the Holy Quran about human nutrition such as: pay attention to the nutrition importance and its effect on human life, diversity of nutrients and their classification as: Materials with herbal origin (vegetables and etc.) and animal materials (meats, milk and etc.), "Halal" or permissible foods such as vegetables, fruits, meat of lamb, goat, beef, chicken and fish, "Haram" or forbidden foods such as alcoholic drinks, pork, carcasses meat, blood and filthy materials, necessity of fasting during Ramadan, necessity of carefulness about foodstuff usage and evaluation of the benefits and harms of potential foods, forbidden of overeating and food extravagance and finally, therapeutics effects of honey, would be express beneficial effects for normal nutrition and prevention of obesity and nutritional disorders and therefore may be influence human health at different stages of life [1]. Moreover, in some Islamic texts some foods have been recommended for long-lived life and/or quality management at the aging such as prevention of dementia.

It is believed that, the caloric-restriction diet group had persistent and significant reduction of all measured conventional cardiometabolic risk factors, including LDL-cholesterol, total cholesterol to HDL-cholesterol ratio, and systolic and diastolic blood pressure. Furthermore, no serious adverse events were reported, suggesting that moderate caloric restriction can be a safe and effective intervention to promote cardiometabolic health [6].

The religious beliefs and practices

The religious beliefs and practices (such as: praying, Salat, voluntariness to help others, experiencing compassion and empathy for others) would be effective in strengthen spiritual health and express beneficial preventive effect against dementia (via prevention and control of depression, as a risk factor of dementia). The results of some studies have indicated the effectiveness of Islamic spiritual programs on successful aging variables [7].

Islamic sexual lifestyle with safe and lovely marital status and proper family development

In Islamic lifestyle, sex regarded as an essential part of life and as one of the most pleasurable things. The Islamic guidelines for a healthy sex life for both men and women have explained in Islamic texts. There are some essential states in Islamic sexual lifestyle:

- A. Not unrestrained sexual activity, nor sexual asceticism but legal sexual activities that restricted to marriage.
- B. Prohibition of unlawful and illicit relationships (adultery, pederasty and same-sex relationships).
- C. Encouraging the chastity and forbidden of indecent behaviors such as: sex in public or in front of children.
- D. Forbidden sexual relationship during a woman's period and when fasting.
- E. Prohibition of alcoholic beverages and therefore prevention of uncontrolled behaviors.
- F. Punishment for overt unlawful sexual relations and sex crimes [8].

It is reasonable that sexual activity via endorphin and testosterone increasing, inflammation reduction, physical activity, enhancement enjoying of life, sleep quality improvement and depressive symptoms reduction decrease frailty and induce successful aging. A growing literature has documented that a higher frequency of sexual activity is associated with a reduction in cardiovascular events in later life, reduced risk of fatal coronary events, prostate and breast cancer, and better reported quality of life [9]. It seems that a sexual lifestyle according to Islamic teachings best satisfies sexual needs and establishes stable emotional and romantic relationships between couples, which are also effective in maintaining a lovely and pleasure life even in old age.

Sleep and awakening pattern

Sleep and awakening regular pattern as recommended in Islamic lifestyle could reduce the risk of dementia (Inadequate sleep-in midlife raises one's risk of dementia) [10].

Social lifestyle

Islamic social lifestyle (with interference against social isolation) and promotion of staying socially active may reduce the risks of unhealthy aging and its adverse sequences specially, dementia. Social interaction may help slow down the progression of

some disorders such as dementia. Islamic teachings regarding the role of the family in caring for the elderly, the duty of the community and government towards the elderly, education and empowerment of the elderly, and respect for the elderly and encouraging the communications between human beings are helpful for social health of people with different ages [11].

Physical activities

The value of work and effort, the condemnation of unemployment and laziness in the Islamic lifestyle and explicit recommendations for some sports such as swimming, horse riding, and archery could help healthy aging development and postpone dementia. Physical inactivity in later life (ages 65 and up) increases the risk of developing dementia [12].

Recreation activities

Recreation activities in Islamic lifestyle such as: spending time in the nature along with mindfulness, finding meaning and purpose of life, leisure spending (without high-risk behaviors: alcohol consumption, smoking, drug abuse & addiction and etc.) are valuable activities with positive effects on physical, mental, social and spiritual health for people.

Conclusion

Above mentioned factors indicate essential role of lifestyle on development of healthy or non-healthy aging. Although there is general evidence, especially in cases that are acceptable to Muslims based on religious texts, however, designing and implementing experimental or comparative studies will yield valuable findings about their possible mechanisms and practical applications. One published example is about evaluation the Ramadan Intermittent Fasting (RIF) effects on the expression of cellular metabolism (SIRT1 and SIRT3) and antioxidant genes (TFAM, SOD2, and Nrf2) [13]. Therefore, carrying out in-depth studies about lifestyle especially Islamic lifestyle will be helpful to take proper decisions for effective modifications in lifestyle, in the process of acquiring healthy aging and preventing or delaying unwanted sequences.

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