

ALI 267: ISLAMIC NUTRITIONAL WISDOM

Nutritional logic behind the Islamic ahadith on
nutrition and eating habits

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Why this topic?

- Islam is a complete system of guidance:
 - Several traditions from our Aimmah (as) on eating guidelines
 - Imams of ahlul bayt were just as concerned with treating the body as they were with treating the soul
- Problem: we don't quite understand the nutritional logic behind the ahadith
- Wisdom in those ahadith----our job to find that wisdom

Islam – a holistic system

- Islamic view----Mind-body-soul---all interconnected and affecting each other---scientific world now beginning to find evidence
- Islamic nutrition=holistic nutrition
 - More than just what you eat:
 - how you eat, how you think while you eat all has an effect on your digestive system
 - Includes proper diet + strong digestion+ proper absorption
 - connection between diseases and health of the digestive system now becoming more evident: yet imam Ali had said that the “abdomen is the house of illness”
 - More scientific literature available now
 - Ex: celiac, anemia, depression, ADHD, allergies, colon cancer, inflammatory bowel disease all linked to abnormal gut health

Ahadith covered last session

1. Eat slowly and chew properly
 1. Prophet (s): From among the etiquette of eating is to take small morsels and chew them completely (biharul anwar, vol 66: pg415)
2. Start with the name of Allah (swt)
 1. Prophet (s): Any food that is eaten without the name of God being taken on it, is a pain and has no barakah (blessing) in it. (Kanzul A'mal, vol 15, pg 238)
3. Start and end with salt
 1. Prophet(s): Whoever begins his food with salt and ends it with salt, is saved from 72 illnesses, from which is leprosy (biharul anwar, vol 66, pg397)

Mindful eating

Remember Allah when eating and refrain from useless talking, as food is a blessing and sustenance from God and you should remember Him and be thankful as you eat.

Imam Ali (a), Furu' Kafi, Vol. 7, pg 296

What is the hadith asking us to do?

- Refrain from useless taking—ie: eat quietly
- Remember Allah (swt) when eating
- Thank Him for the food –it's a sustenance

MINDFUL EATING!!!

Focus on the food, be aware of where the food is coming from and what it is going to do for your body. Be aware of how it feels, tastes and be in a state of gratitude for this blessing

MIND ON FOOD AND IT'S CREATOR!!!

Look familiar??



Distracted eating: why we do it?

- Too many distractions in our lives
- we are busy BUT WE HAVE TO EAT!! (or we can't function)
 - Eating suffers: no time but we need to eat so we multitask and eat on the go because eating so automatic...we don't really have to think
 - Swallow, digestion and elimination will happen regardless
 - Kids fussy eaters –eat better (or more) if distracted by TV
 - Relationship between hunger and food not clear cut anymore....tangled with emotions, stress, socialization etc

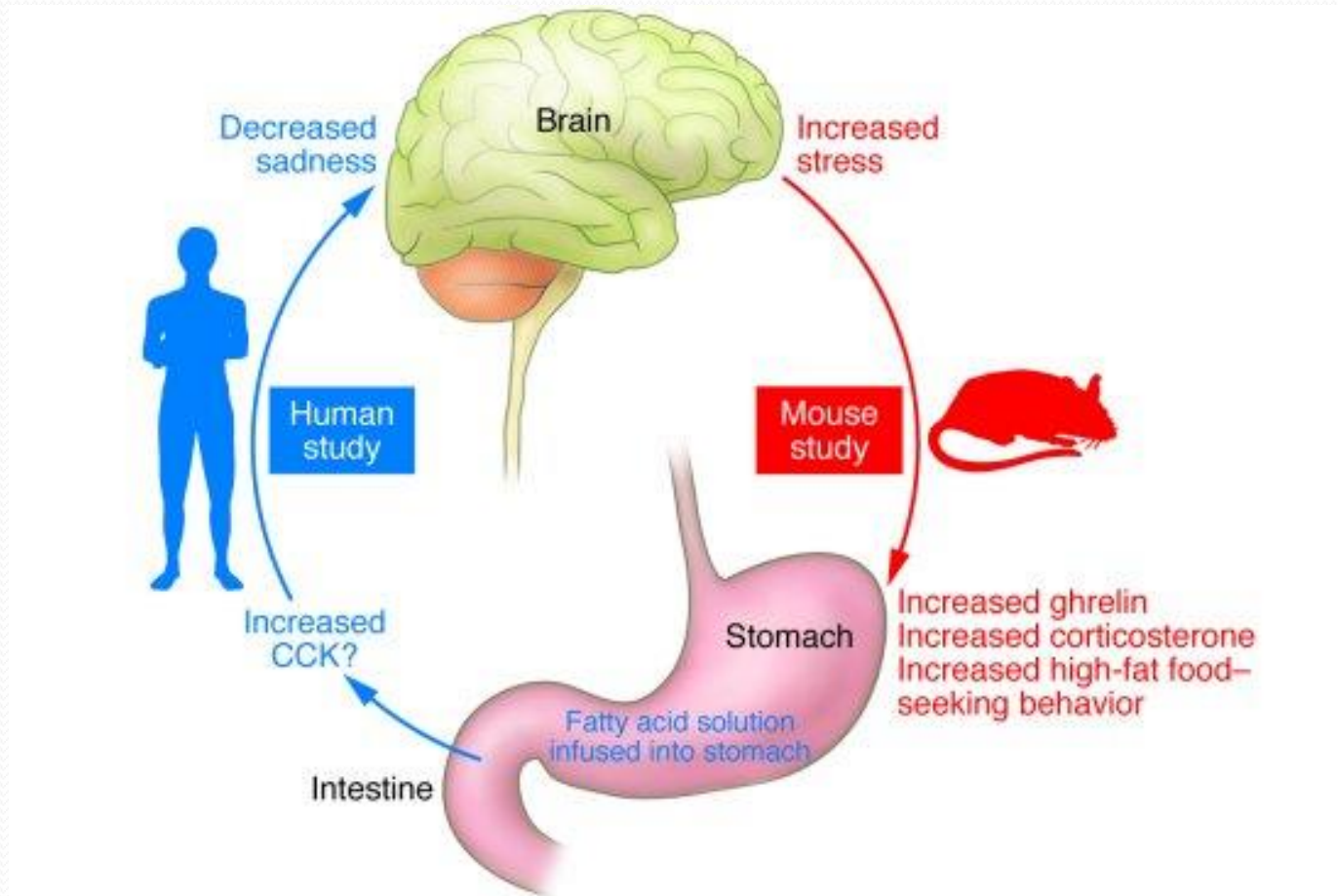
What is mindfulness?

- Mindfulness is deliberately paying attention (an active act). Being fully aware of what is happening inside yourself –in your body, heart and mind and outside yourself in the environment
- Mindfulness is awareness without judgement or criticism
- Being mindful, when we eat allows us to witness how the food tastes, how we feel when we eat and makes our thoughts positive as we ingest foods

What's the logic?

- GUT-BRAIN connection:
- Our state of mind (emotions) affect how well our digestive system works and what we eat affects how we think
- Lots of research in this area: the “gut” also known as the second brain. 95% of serotonin (a brain chemical) is made in the gut!!
 - Signals from brain to gut and gut to brain
 - A bidirectional signalling system
 - Digestive consequences of emotional state
 - Butterflies in the stomach
 - No appetite when stressed
 - Digestive malfunction when stressed
 - Many digestive disorders like irritable bowel syndrome linked to stress

Mental state: effects satiety and types of food desired



What can mindfulness during eating do for us

mindfulness works by affecting the autonomic (involuntary) nervous system. This system regulates many organs including digestion. It has two major parts:

- The **sympathetic nervous system** helps mobilize the body for action. When a person is under stress, it produces the "fight-or-flight response": the heart rate and breathing rate go up and blood vessels narrow (restricting the flow of blood and digestion slow down).
- The **parasympathetic nervous system** causes the heart rate and breathing rate to slow down, the blood vessels to dilate (improving blood flow), and the flow of digestive juices increases.

parasympathetic system is stimulated when we are mindful

Affects enzyme secretion, acid secretion, gut motility and ultimately absorption of nutrients: IMPROVED DIGESTION

What can mindfulness do for us

- This is what the National Institute of Health (a renowned US health agency) says in its review of research on mindfulness
 - cultivating a more mindful way of being is associated with less emotional distress, more positive states of mind, and better quality of life. In addition, mindfulness practice can influence the brain, the autonomic nervous system, stress hormones, the immune system, and health behaviors, including eating, sleeping
 - Practice of mindfulness even intermittantly can lead to Increased sense of wellbeing and decreased risk of disease

Practical suggestions

- Consider eating as an important, focussed activity—after all it's the only way your body will receive the right nutrients and absorb them correctly.
- Don't multitask : assign yourself 5-10 minutes to eat even while at work: if you get interrupted bring yourself back
- Do not eat in front of tv, computer, phone, ipad etc
- Start with just 1-2 mindful bites even if you can't eat the whole meal mindfully and slowly build up
- Start with the meal or snack that you will have the most time to eat (for ex. Don't start with lunch especially if you have to eat with people or eat at your desk working)

Hadith #2: Overeating

- Imam Sadiq (a): When eating, allocate up to a third of stomach for food, up to a third for water and leave 1/3 empty (hadith unwan al-basri)
- Imam Ali (a) said: “Over indulgence of food causes various kinds of diseases” (Qurar-ul-Hikam, p 359)

Overeating:

- 2nd hardest hadith to put into practice (after mindfulness) why?
because both require a paradigm shift in our thinking
- Many cultures recommend this
 - Chinese-70% full
 - Japanese – 80% full
 - India – 75% full
 - France – I have no more hunger (not I am full)

What's the logic

- Less food ->less calories->wt. Management
 - Wt management important for chronic disease prevention such as diabetes, heart attack and cancer
 - Biggest challenge in wt management: portion size
- Many spiritual benefits of hunger listed in traditions of our Aimmah (as)
- Physical Benefits for digestive system:
 - More food->needs more enzymes->overworked pancreas
 - More food->digestion slow->stomach overloaded with food->system slows down->toxin buildup happens->illnesses
 - More food->energy goes into digestion->not available for other functions->tired, mental sluggishness, lethargy

What's the logic

longevity and good health

- Animal studies
 - Caloric restriction (CR) markedly extends life span and improves the health of a broad number of species.
- Human population studies
 - The Okinawans -- a Japanese tribe known for the most healthy centenarians and they eat till they are 80% full

Practical Tip

- Satisfied Vs Full
 - All animals inherently programmed to eat when hungry and stop when satisfied
 - ex: babies
 - Tap into that wisdom that has been forgotten over time: Why?
 - Eat for many social and psychological reasons
 - We stop when we are full—cultural

Practical Tip

- Mindfulness—if you are aware when you eat then you know what it feels like to be hungry, satisfied and full (stuffed)
 - Learn body signals
 - Different for everyone
 - Different at different times

Practical Tip

- Tune in to how you feel before you eat, after you eat and every hour after you have eaten
 - Immediately-slight level of hunger
 - *imam ali: get up while there is still appetite
 - 20 minutes for satiety signal to reach brain
 - The way you can tell if you're 80% full is feeling whether there's pressure in your stomach. If you feel satisfied, but you can still eat more, then you're most likely to be 80% full...
 - Satiety: depends on what you eat
 - Whole fiber rich foods > refined foods

Practical Tip

- 60 minutes after
 - Satisfied and no desire to eat
- 2 hour
 - Maybe starting to feel a little hungry.
 - If too hungry—didn't have enough at last meal
- 3-4 hours
 - Feel like time to eat
 - Stomach growling
 - If no hunger at this time then ate too much at last meal
- After 4 hours
 - Starving
 - Never wait this long. why? In extreme hunger, difficult to make right choices in quantity or quality of food

Hadith #3: Eating Greens

1. Prophet (s): Adorn your meals with greens, for they along with saying Bismillah, drive away Satan (Biharul Anwar, Vol 62, pg 300)
2. Imam Sadiq (a): Everything has an adornment, and the adornment of a tablemat is greens (Biharul Anwar, vol 66, pg 199)
3. One day Imam Musa Kadhim (a) invited me and had me sit with him for lunch. When the food was brought, there were no greens with it. Imam withdrew his hand and told the servant “do you not know that I don’t eat from a meal in which there are no greens? Bring some greens for me”. The servant went and brought some greens and placed them on the tablemat. Then the imam extended his hand for the tablemat and ate (Al-Kafi, vol 6, pg 362)

Why Greens? Nutritional logic

- Most nutrient dense
 - Most nutrients and least calories
- Full of Fiber
 - Makes you feel full – manages intake
 - Helps move the digestive system->efficient digestion->less toxins->better health
- When eaten raw
 - Full of enzymes that help with digestion ->less stress on our pancreas if we eat raw
- Full of vitamins and minerals
 - Need to replace these everyday
 - Supplements can't replace natural plant food

Why Greens?

- Phytonutrients (anti-oxidants)
 - Newly discovered
 - Give plants their disease fighting abilities
 - Linked with prevention of many diseases

Practical Tips:

- Make Salads fun
 - Use different greens – kale, spinach, sprouts, beet greens, swiss chard, micro greens
- Indian salads
 - Achars (or indian pickles) add chopped spinach or any other leafy green to it.
 - Raita (yogurt dip) mince spinach, kale, coriander, parsley and mix into the yogurt
 - Green pesto's (or chutneys) made with spinach /kale with added herbs and spices
- Green smoothies
 - Green vegetable with a fruit blended
 - Spinach & banana; beet greens & strawberry, pineapple and swiss chard, kale & avocado

Practical Tips

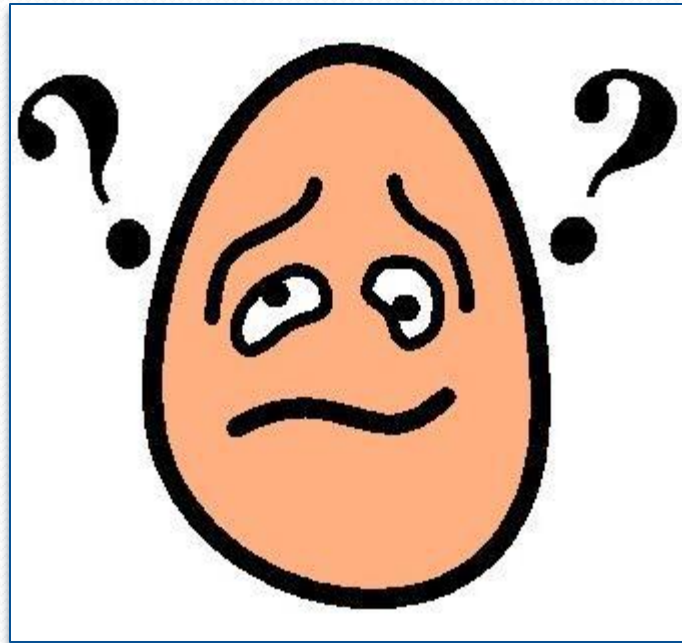
- Problems with incorporating greens
 - Too boring & labour intensive
 - Doesn't have to be – experiment with new greens
 - Check out the produce section for variety
 - Buy the baby leaves in a tub (washed and ready to use)—no need to chop just add to plate
 - Keep them always in your fridge. You will be forced to eat them if you buy them.
 - “I hate greens”:
 - Your body is not used to the nutrients found in greens- give it time: You will crave it once you have it regularly and you know how it makes you feel

Final Tip

It's a journey: difficult in the beginning but gets easier as you go further

Implement what you know with the intention that Allah (swt) through our Imams (as) has asked us to do it for our own good. Do your best and Allah (swt) will look after the rest!!

QUESTIONS?



Questions and Feedback

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