



# Seven Types of Foods Recommended by Iranian Traditional Medicine and Their Role in Health and Well-being

## Introduction

Given the increasing trend of different diseases throughout the world and the insufficiency of health-related resources, particularly among underdeveloped countries, traditional medicines have been recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO) as complementary or alternative to current classic medicine. Inefficiencies of most therapeutic methods in the current medicine, particularly for some chronic refractory disorders, such as cancer, have been a main impellent for this advice.



Iranian traditional medicine (ITM) is an ancient, comprehensive school of medicine with several 1000 years of history that has its roots in the boundless land of knowledge and experiences of many great scientists over the centuries. Every one of these scientists has had a significant role in promoting human knowledge.

Islamic medicine was inspired by the Holy Qur'an and Ahl al-Bayt doctrine. It was integrated with ITM after the rise of Islam among Iranians. One of the most significant aspects of ITM school compared to other medical schools - as described by Avicenna, a great ancient Iranian scientist - is its essential role in preventing diseases.

ITM scholars believe that human health would be fulfilled when all four natural body fluids: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile are in a balanced state. This balance is prepared through three to four digestive organs of gastrointestinal tract, liver, blood,

and cells. Chronic mal-temperament (Soo-e-mizaj) could disrupt the natural physiological processes in the human body, leading to different physical and mental disorders. These are preventable by observing health-related rules in ITM, particularly eight essential foods, which are described in this article and in accordance with the ancient medical resources within ITM.

According to ITM, the most essential preventive elements include air, body movement and repose, sleep and wakefulness, food and drink, evacuation and retention, and mental movement and repose. These essential elements are comprehensive in covering all sides of human health. According to ITM, these essential foods are as follows.

#### Normal food

Oral food includes all edibles and drinks that are usually consumed. According to ITM, oral food must have some properties to ensure fitness. First, it should be Halal, i.e., it should be obtained through a lawful way and in accordance with the laws of religion. ITM scholars believe that the Lord has not put human health in unlawful and ill-gotten food. Second, oral food should be compatible with one's temper, otherwise, it can lead to mal-temperament, a condition that makes people susceptible to illness. According to ITM, every edible has a specific temper, and it is better to consume with its corrector. For example, fish and yogurt are of cold temper and should be used with hot spices

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such as pepper, cinnamon, ginger, and mint. Meanwhile, simultaneous consumption of two or more foods with a similar temper is discouraged in ITM, thus, for example, fish and yogurt should not be eaten with each other. The food's temper should be also compatible with the season. Because, according to ITM, every season has a specific temper. For example, winter has a cold-wet temper, so consumption of hot-dry foods in this season is more compatible with fitness. It should be noted that different geographic conditions of the habitat influence the human temper. For example, if cold-dry foods are consumed in regions with hot and wet weather, human health would be more secure. Third, the food should be gentle, lawful, balanced, and nutritious. This means that it is easy to digest and absorb, its digestion creates normal blood and it has sufficient nutrients to meet what the body needs.

Fourth, ITM scholars emphasize that the best program for the daily meals is twice a day; a full meal in the morning, and the second one in the evening. Fruits and other proper edibles can be eaten for lunch and other snack times. The general principle is this gold sentence by Imam Ali: "Never eat anything unless you feel absolutely hungry, and stop eating before you get absolutely full." Fifth, some healthy habits have also been recommended by ITM scholars to keep one healthy, which include well chewing and mastication, washing hands before and after the meal, starting one's in the name of God Al-

mighty, beginning the meal with a bit of salt, and finishing it with a little of sweets.

#### Imaginary food

According to ITM, positive and negative thoughts are considered imaginary food and can directly influences one's mental and physical fitness. Positive thoughts and feelings like self-confidence, reliance on God, trust in others, kindness and love, etc., all have a positive effect on human health and well-being. Reversely, negative thoughts and feelings such as frustration and disappointment, pessimism and distrusting others, diffidence, etc., are considered as a pest against health and reasons for mal-temperament. Today, many studies have proved the significant role of meditation in healing chronic diseases, either physical or psychological. Meditation is a practice to train the mind or to induce a consciousness state. It refers to a wide range of drills including techniques planned to promote relaxation, make internal energy or life force, etc. and develop compassion, love, patience, generosity, and forgiveness.

#### Auditory food

According to ITM, all sounds surrounding us are considered auditory food. Some of these sounds are sedative and lead to a balanced temperament, for example, natural sounds such as sounds of waterfalls, rain, and birds; spiritual and beautiful words such as recitation of the Holy Qur'an, names of God, and eastern music played by reed.





Contrarily, inharmonic industrial sounds, such as traffic sounds, train horns, and factory sirens; ugly words, and nearly all Western music, such as jazz lead to an imbalanced temperament. Lord says in the Holy Qur'an: "Verily in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest!". Accordingly, every word, sentence, sound, etc., which make us remember the Lord and calm us down are examples of auditory food.

In recent decades, a Japanese scientist, Masaru Emoto, explored the significant effect of sounds and words. Moreover, according to many studies, today the role of music therapy has been proved to reduce pain and other physical and psychological problems.

## Visual food

According to ITM scholars, everything that is in the range of human vision can be considered as visual food. What a person sees affects his/her mind and thoughts. Natural beautiful scenes such as

mountain, forest, sea, river, etc., have almost a warm temper and help balance human temperament. Reversely, all ugly and nasty scenes such as the view of accumulated waste could disturb the human temperament and have negative effects on fitness.

One study on 72 undergraduate students showed that natural views improve attentiveness. Another study presented that a natural view through a window could accelerate recovery from surgery in patients. Natural view has also shown a positive effect on psychological well-being and reduction of stress in people. Seeing violent views, however, have negative effects on one's well-being.

Moreover, every color is actually a visible light, which affects the mind in different ways, so different persons show different reactions to each color. Color therapy or chromotherapy is an ancient branch of alternative medicine rooted in ancient Egyptian medi-

cine. Recent studies have proved that every color can affect human emotions to a different degree.

## Olfactory food

Olfactory food includes all scents and odors around us, which could stimulate one's sense of smell. Natural fragrances such as the scent of fresh flowers have often a warm temper and help improve the temperament. For example, breathing the gentle fragrance of flowers in cold seasons which have cold temper could moderate the temper and help reinforce of central nervous system. On the other hand, unnatural chemical odors like cologne have almost a cold temper leading to brain coldness and disorders such as depression and dementia.

Aromatherapy is one of the ancient medical sciences according to which many human diseases are treated through essential oils obtained from natural herbs. Today, these natural oils are widely used in developed countries. Moreover, the WHO approved aromatherapy as a complementary medicine technique in 1992, and a large body of literature is emerging within research studies about it. For example, many studies have taken place since the year 2000, which have proved the significant effectiveness of the aromatherapy in treatment of sleep disorders. In addition, the effectiveness of aromatherapy for stress management has been shown in several clinical trials. Aromatherapy has also presented a significant efficacy in treating hypertensive patients, according to some recent studies.

### Touch food

Touch food includes all objects and materials that are in direct contact with the body's skin, such as textiles and clothes. According to ITM sources, the material of clothes has a determinant role in human well-being. For example, wearing cotton or linen clothes has been recommended by ITM scholars, and conversely, it has been suggested to avoid wearing clothes made of hair and fabrics chemically obtained.

According to many studies, it has been proved that chemical textiles such as polyester have negative effects on human health. There are also some evidences of the negative effects of hairy clothes on human fitness.

### Familiarity food

Familiarity food can be provided by companions, friends, relatives, and family members; so according to Islamic resources and psychological studies, it has a significant role in preventing diseases and increasing human lifetime. Based on Islamic doctrine, the human is naturally social and the path of his/her evolution passes through community. Mental fitness, relaxation, and friendship have been mentioned as the main goals of marriage in the Holy Qur'an. A well-structured family has an important role in keeping and promoting personal and social human fitness. Divorce and other familial disrupting events have significant deleterious effects on human health, according to many recent studies. Social isolation and staying away from the community and family could



lead to harmful effects on human fitness, particularly within mental health; the fact that many studies have approved it. Today, the role of friendship and social advocacy in health, particularly in later life, has been determined; so, friendship is considered an important health factor in health-related studies.

### CONCLUSIONS

We are recommended by Iranian-Islamic traditional medicine to observe EEF for health promotion and well-being. These essentials are oral food, including all usual edibles and drinks; imaginary food, including individual thought content; auditory food, including all usual surrounding sounds; visual food, consisting of everything in the range of our vision; olfactory food, containing all odors which stimulate our smell; touch food, consisting of all materials with direct contact to our skin; sexual food to response our love needs; and familiarity food, friendship

relations with friends and family members. Our temperament would be balanced, ensuring our health and well-being, if we observe some considerations toward EEF. Our oral food must be Halal, nutritious, compatible with our temper, and proper to digest and absorb. Imaginary food must be free of any negative thoughts. Auditory food should include more natural sedative sounds and spiritual and beautiful words. Visual food should be full of more natural beautiful scenes. Olfactory food is better to be opulent of natural fragrant odors. Touch food should be natural such as cotton and linen to moderate our temper. Our sexual food should be fulfilled by proper lovely relations. Familiarity food must be prepared by companions, friends, and family members. Since these essential advices cover all health-related aspects of our lives, promoting them could lead to health promotion and well-being in our community.