



# Eating Etiquettes in Islam

Eating etiquette is one of the issues that Islam gives importance to and there are many narrations about it. Among the issues that have been discussed in these narrations are what effect food has on the human psyche and behavior, how food should be eaten, what foods are suitable and what foods are not suitable, and what is the appropriate time to eat. There are also several dos and don'ts about food in the Holy Qur'an.

### The Importance of Food

Food is the most important and critical daily need of human beings, from birth to death, and even the divine prophets and imams <sup>(PBUH)</sup> have not been of exception in this regard.

Growth, longevity, well-being, peace of mind, mood and behavior, ability and strength, and reproduction, etc., are all somehow indebted to healthy nutrition. Therefore, nearly two hundred and fifty Qur'anic verses and dozens of narrations from the Infallible personalities of Islam have made some points about this issue. Also, the naming of the fifth Surah of the Qur'an as Al-Ma'idah (food table) God's oath to some food items like fig and olive, the request for heavenly food by Jesus (AS), and the request for food by Moses (AS) each prove the importance of food and nutrition.

Also, God obliged the people of Mecca with two things, i.e., 'food' and 'security' in the Qur'anic verse "الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ" (who has fed them and saved them from hunger and secured them from fear).

Imam Reza (AS) is quoted as saying: "The health and stability of the body, as well as its illness, depend on the food and drink one consumes."

### The Effect of Food and Nutrition on Ethics and Behavior

God has made a difference between what the unbelievers and believers eat. About the unbelievers, He says: "As for the faithless, they enjoy and eat like the cattle do" (Surah Muhammad, Verse 12)

It means, just like animals that eat without knowing where it comes from, whether it is halal or haram or whether it has been usurped or not, unbelievers also eat food without paying attention to such issues.

It has been narrated that a man went to the Prophet (PBUH) and said that he wished for his prayers to be answered in response to which the Prophet said: "Purify your food and avoid any kind of haram food."

Therefore, believers are ordered to use only clean and halal foods. In the words of the Holy Qur'an: "O you who have faith! Eat of the good things We have provided you, and thank Allah, if it is Him that you worship." (Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 172)

In some verses, a close connection between clean food and righteous deeds can be observed. For instance, "O apostles! Eat of the good things and act righteously." (Surah Al-Mu'minin, Verse 51)

### The Impact of Food on the Human Soul and Heart

Imam Ali (AS) has said: "The thoughts of he who eats little will be purified." This beautiful narration reminds us that human emotions are more diluted and his intelligence and senses are more awake in the state of hunger. In fact, one of the factors that stop intellectual growth is overeating.

Luqman has been quoted telling his son: "Overeating makes the mind fall asleep, one's wisdom becomes dumb, and the body feels lethargic to perform one's worship duties."

### Starting and Ending One's Meal by Praying

It has been highly recommended to start one's meal by saying 'In the Name of God' and saying 'Praise be to God' after finishing one's meal

### What Are the Best Times for Taking Food

There are some narrations that recommend eating food twice a day. Imam Sadiq (AS) said: "Eat breakfast and dinner and do not eat anything in between, because it causes the body to deteriorate. Have you not heard that God says: "And they (the people of Paradise) have their own special sustenance in the morning and in the evening?"

There are also other narrations that recommend eating dinner, especially for the elderly. The Messenger of God (PBUH) said: "Do not leave the eating of the evening meal... I fear that my nation will get old soon by leaving the evening meal because the evening meal gives strength to both old and the young." And some hadiths refer to the Prophets having dinner.

It can be deduced from these narrations that two meals, i.e. breakfast and dinner, are enough to suffice one's bodily requirements, and if one is hungry in the middle of the day, he/she should only take snacks or fruits. As regards food there are also some narrations that consider the issue of hunger and appetite as criteria and highly recommend that one should avoid eating if he/she is not actually hungry. Imam Ali (AS) is quoted telling his son Imam Hasan (AS): "Do not sit at the table (to eat), except when you are hungry... If you do this, you will never need a doctor."

### The Amount of Food to Take

Going to extremes with regard to eating food is harmful to one's health. By likening the human body

to an agricultural land Imam Reza (AS) said: "The human body is like a piece of pure land ready for cultivation. If it is taken care of in such a way that the water does not reach it more than it needs so that it becomes swampy or gets less than enough to cause it to suffer from thirst, its prosperity will continue. However, if it is neglected, it will be bound to get ruined. The same (rule) applies to the human body. Overeating deteriorates the body and results in hardheartedness and dumbness."

Imam Ali (AS) said: "The habit of overeating results in all kinds of diseases". He also said: "Avoid overeating, because it is a cause of destruction of the body."

Another point with regard to food is to stop eating when one is not totally full.

Imam Ali (AS) has said: "If you want to stay healthy and not need a doctor, observe four things:

1. Do not eat when you are not hungry.
2. Stop eating before you are completely full.
3. Chewing the food in the mouth properly before swallowing it.
4. Do a bowel movement before going to bed.

These same recommendations have also been narrated from the Noble Prophet of Islam (PBUH).

The concept of the Qur'anic verse "eat and drink and be not extravagant..." which seems very simple at first glance, is today ranked among the most important health instructions because according to research conducted, the source of many diseases is excess food (inside the stomach), which remains unabsorbed in the body.

The late Tabarsi has quoted an interesting point in his book *Majma' Al Bayan*, which is an exegesis of the Holy Qur'an:

Harun al-Rashid had a Christian physician whose skill in medicine was famous. One day, this physician told an Islamic scholar: "I do not find anything about medicine in your book (the Qur'an), while useful knowledge is of two types: the science of religions and the science of bodies.

The Islamic scholar responded by saying: "God Almighty has given all the medical instructions in half a verse of his book. "eat and drink and be not extravagant" and our Prophet has also summarized the science of medicine in this instruction: "The stomach is the home of diseases and fasting is the best of all medicines, and do not deprive your body of the right habits. When the Christian physician heard this, he said: Your Qur'an

and your Prophet have not left any medical words for Galen (a famous physician).

## Things to Be Observed with Regard to Eating

Certain things have been recommended by the Holy Prophet of Islam and his infallible progeny with regard to eating and drinking habits, which are summarized hereunder:

1. Washing hands before eating and not drying them with a towel; The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Washing hands before eating heals the body."
2. Starting by taking the name of God. Imam Ali (AS) said: "For the one who takes the name of God for eating his food, I guarantee that he will not suffer from any pain from that food."
3. Not waiting for anything else after bread has been put on the table.
4. Start the meal with prayer and thanking God.
5. Start the meal with salt.
6. Taking a long time to eat one's meal.
7. Avoid blowing on hot foods and drinks.
8. Taking small bites and chewing them completely
9. Giving up food before being full.
10. Praying after meal.
11. Lying on one's back after eating and placing the right foot on the left foot.
12. Not sleeping immediately after eating
13. Toothpicking or brushing after meals.
14. Eating fruits in their seasons.

## Things to Be Observed with Regard to Eating and Drinking

1. Saying Bismillah before drinking and Alhamdulillah after it.
2. Drinking water in three sips and not gulping it at once.
3. Standing to drink water during the day and drinking while sitting at night.
4. Not drinking cold water.
2. Not drinking water in between meal.
3. Not drinking water after fat and fatty food.
4. Remembering Imam Husain (AS) and his family and cursing his killers.
5. Not drinking cold water after eating something hot or sweet
6. Not drinking a lot of water.

(Source: *Encyclopaedia Islamica*)