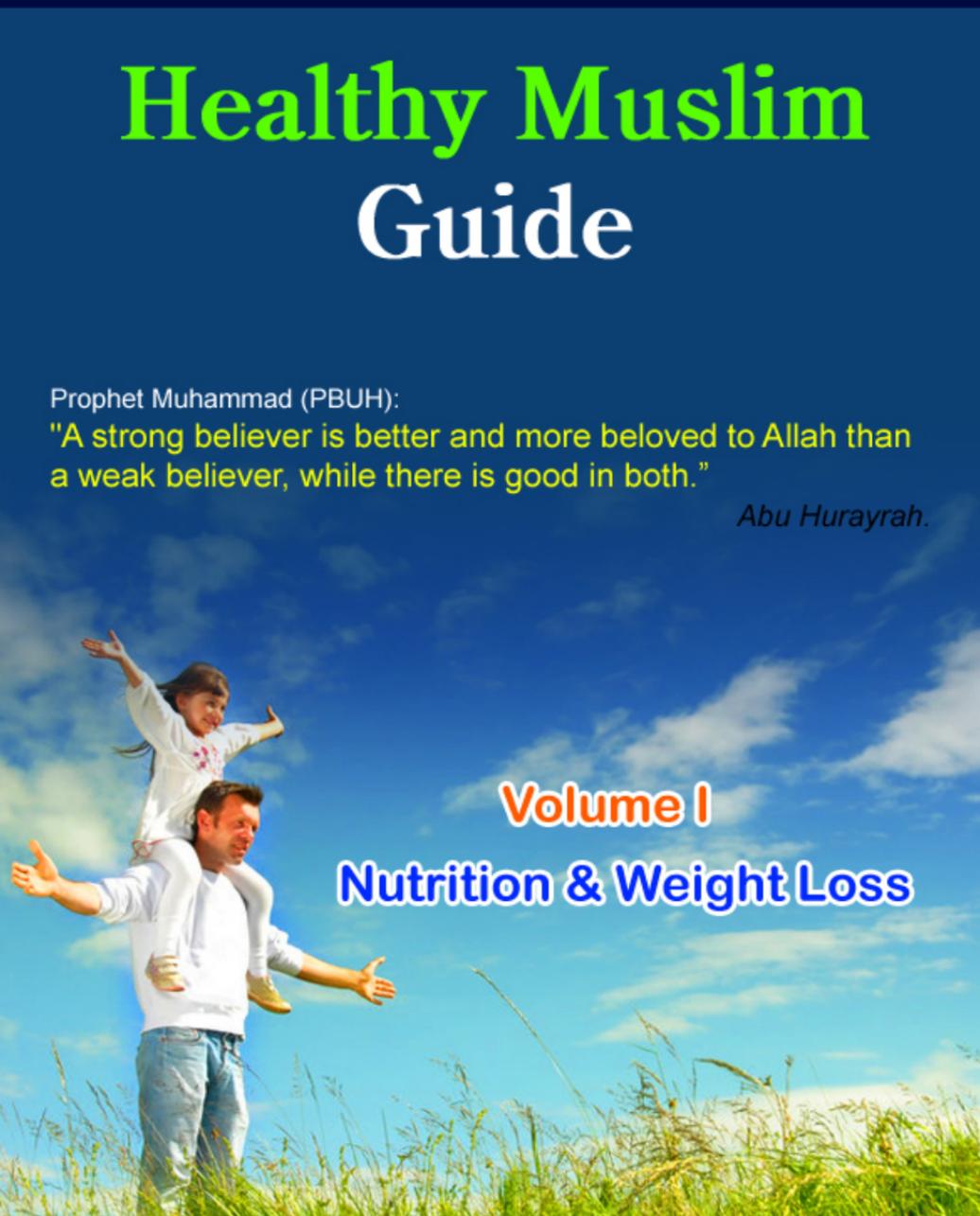


Healthy Muslim Guide

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH):

"A strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than a weak believer, while there is good in both."

Abu Hurayrah.

A photograph of a man in a white long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans carrying a young girl on his shoulders. The girl is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and has her arms outstretched. They are standing in a field of tall grass under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The man is also looking forward with his arms slightly out.

Volume I

Nutrition & Weight Loss

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Introduction

Praise be to Allah. We thank Him, the Most High, and seek His Help and Forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allah from the evils within ourselves and that of bad deeds. He whom Allah guides, is truly guided, and whom Allah leaves to stray, none can guide him. We bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His final Prophet (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him). We ask Allah to bless our Prophet Muhammad, his family, his Companions, and all his followers, from the beginning of his call to the Day of Judgment.



Indeed, as narrated in the following Hadith, the greatest blessing after belief is health. The final messenger of God, Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him) mounted the pulpit, then wept and



said, “Ask Allah (SWT) for forgiveness and health, for after being granted certainty, one is given nothing better than health.” (At-Tirmidhi).

From an Islamic perspective, health is viewed as one of the greatest blessings that Allah has bestowed on living organisms. Health is undoubtedly a favor that we take for granted. We should express gratitude to Allah for blessing us with health, and we are highly ordered to look after it. God has entrusted us with our bodies for a predestined period of time. He will hold us to account on how we looked after and utilised our bodies and good health.

Ibn Abbas has also narrated that Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) said: “There are two blessings which many people lose: (They are) health and free time for doing good.” (Al-Bukhari)

Furthermore, the importance of good health for a Muslim doesn't only stop at the stage of life we're currently living in *Dunya*, but we know that God will question us about that on the Day of Judgment. Narrated Abdullah ibn Mas`ud, Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: “A man shall be asked concerning five things on the day of resurrection: concerning his life, how he spent it; concerning his youth, how he grew old; concerning his wealth, whence he acquired it, and in what way he spent it; and what was it that he did with the knowledge that he had.”

Healthy living is part and parcel of Islam, introduced with the inception of Islam more than 14 centuries ago. Moreover, the Qur'an and the Sunnah outline the teachings that show every Muslim how to protect their health and live life in a state of purity.

In order for us to achieve this valuable goal, OnIslam.net produced this book, whose contents are based mainly on articles and features provided by reputed doctors and health specialists, to help both Muslims and non-Muslims, understand the basics, rulings and guidance for healthy lives, God Willing.

We ask Allah Almighty to guide us all to what is best in this world and in the Hereafter, Ameen.



Chapter I: Weight Loss & Exercising

- Lose it the Right Way.

- Correct Your Common Mistakes.



Lose It the Right Way

■ Muslims and Weight Loss*

An English proverb points out, "Some men walk through the forest yet see no firewood."

As Muslims, we should be careful of falling into this proverbial truth.

Muslims often seek outside help to lose weight, although the Qur'an and Hadith provide guidance on many ways through which we can combat being overweight. They include periodic cleansings, eating simple and whole foods and herbs, avoiding excess, drinking plenty of water, praying and seeking guidance from Allah, seeking the help of others, and being persistent and patient.



* By Karima Burns.



Ramadan is a time for physical cleansing as well as spiritual cleansing. A prophetic tradition (Hadith) states, "Fast the month of Ramadan so to heal your bodies from disease." If we strive to eat only pure, simple and light foods during Ramadan, we can undergo a physical as well as a spiritual cleansing. Since there is such a strong scientifically proven correlation between our spiritual, mental and physical health, to purify all systems at the same time provides the ultimate and most powerful detoxification fast that we have available today.

To eat purely means to eat the whole, unprocessed and pure foods that Allah has provided us such as whole wheat breads, grains, beans, vegetables and fresh fruits. These are perfect foods and we do not need to improve them with colors, chemicals and preservatives. The Qur'an (5:4) says, "They ask thee what is lawful to them as food. Say, 'Lawful unto you are all things good and pure.'" And (50:7), "And the earth we have spread out, and we have set firm mountains on it, and have made every kind of beautiful growth to grow on it."

The Qur'an also says (7:31), "Eat and drink, but waste not by excess for God loves not the prodigals." Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) emphasized this in Hadith when he mentioned that, "The stomach is the home of disease, and abstinence the head of every remedy. So make this your custom." It is easy to eat in excess since foods once reserved for royalty are now readily available in every

supermarket. However, there is a hidden cost to excess consumption that keeps them expensive. Livestock pay this hidden cost by being injected with hormones and chemicals to increase the production of meat, cheese, milk and cream. The earth pays an even higher price when we consider the amount of grain and water used to raise the excess number of cattle for meat consumption.

Eating breakfast is also an important part of weight loss as it speeds metabolism of the body. The Hadith say, "Eat your meal at dawn, for there is blessing in the meal at dawn," and, "There is blessing in three things: the early morning meal, bread and soup."

Also, we must not ignore the benefits of the many herbs that Allah has provided us. Sahih Al-Bukhari relates that, "For every malady Allah created, He also created its cure. Whoever acquires such knowledge shall benefit from it, and one who ignores it will forgo such benefit."

Another gift that Allah has given us in the battle against excess weight is water. The Qur'an says (15:45), "The righteous will be amid gardens and fountains of clear-flowing water," and (21:30), "We made water essential for all life." Muslims wanting to lose weight would benefit by drinking ten glasses of water a day, at least one half hour before and after meals.

As well as their spiritual benefits, the five prescribed daily prayers also provide physical toning benefits to the body. And patience is



often the greatest test we face when we decide to lose weight. However, the Qur'an says (2:155), "Give glad tidings to those who exercise patience when struck with adversity and say, 'Indeed, we belong to God, and to Him is our return.' Such ones receive blessings and mercy from their Lord, and such are the guided ones."

Lastly, we cannot forget the power of prayer and support from others. The Qur'an says (26:80), "... And when I sicken, then He (Allah) heals me." Abu Hurairah relates, "Allah never inflicts a disease unless he makes a cure for it." Weight gain is often caused by excess, and the weakness of one or more organs of the body. A Hadith even says, "The origin of every disease is cold. So eat when you desire and refrain when you desire." Many people have lost weight simply by warming up their bodies with herbs and warm foods, and reducing heavier, colder foods and those that clog and chill the system.

"Oh, Lord! Advance me in knowledge..." The Qur'an says, and the Prophet has stated, that we should, "Seek knowledge, even in China." Along these lines, we can also obtain wisdom from people all around the world in the subject of weight loss. Utilizing the support of programs such as Weight Watchers or information provided in magazines can be beneficial - as long as we turn to the Qur'an as our ultimate inspiration.

■ Best Weight Loss Plan for You*

Today it seems that a female rite of passage is dieting. So much of a female's worth, right or wrong, is tied to how others perceive her and her own idea of body image.



Let's face it; we all want to look and feel good about ourselves. Yet, many fad diets and diet drugs are life threatening. Not too long ago, doctors would hand out Fen-phen (fenfluramine and phentermine) like candy to overweight patients, but it turned out that the deadly combination of pharmaceuticals had a high mortality attached to it. Also, caffeine containing diet pills can cause heart damage or failure.

As a species we never had such an obsession with diets as we do now and our ballooning waist lines in the West and amongst the affluent in the developing world, has made weight loss schemes a real money maker. In my private practice, I avoid the word diet. I refer to

* By Anisa Abeytia.



my approach on this topic as weight balance, because the word diet has become such a loaded word.

In an effort to unpack this word and to leave no room for ambiguity, I am going to define a diet as a whole system or way of eating. A diet can mean a Mediterranean diet, an Indian diet, or the Atkins diet. A diet is a whole approach to eating. A "diet" that consists of eating only grapefruits does not qualify as a diet, nor does a diet that causes disease like the Standard American Diet (SAD).

The guidelines of *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (impermissible) make for the most complete diet because it includes the clause "if it is harmful, it is not permissible." Now that we are clear on what I mean by diet, it eliminates many outlandish diets like the grapefruit diet.

But which is the best diet to follow for those who wish to lose weight?

Vegetarian diets have become a popular choice. The Atkins diet, the low fat-low cholesterol diet, as well as Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers are also very popular.

Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism was started by Hindus as a religious practice. This is not to say that all Hindus are vegetarians. Today, it is mostly viewed as a political statement against the mistreatment of animals. As a diet, it does not sustain robust health. According to research published in the Journal of Applied Nutrition, the vegetarians of Southern India have the shortest life spans on earth (Abrams). This is also not to say that vegetarianism is an unwise diet choice.

When someone comes to me and tells me they are a vegetarian, I really have to see what they are eating. Most of the time, they live mainly on pasta, bread, rice, and baked goods. They rarely eat vegetables.

Humans are by design omnivores (both meat and plant eaters). We have teeth that imply both tearing (canines) and grinding (molars). Our one chambered stomachs are also designed for an omnivore's diet. Animals that chew the cud exclusively like cows, sheep and goats have two chambered stomachs.

Historically, humans have been primarily herbivores (plant eaters). There are instances of cultures living primarily on meat, milk and blood, such as Bedouins, the Massai of Africa and the Inuit tribes of the Arctic. There has been no instance of a primarily vegetarian civilization, which was healthy.



However, modern man consumes excessive amounts of animal flesh and that too is unhealthy. A balance and not extremes is what promotes health. If one wants to promote animal rights, eat less meat, buy it organic and hand slaughtered.

It must be said that a vegetarian diet is very effective in curing cancer. One of the side effects of over consumption of meat is that it creates an overly acidic environment in the body which cancer cells thrive in.

A vegetarian diet helps alkalize the body, making it less hospitable for cancer. One must be careful to not be too alkaline because you run the risk of being a Petri dish for Candida, bacteria, viruses and other funguses.

Atkin's Diet (Paleolithic Diet)

Dr. Atkin's first proposed this diet in 1972. In the last two decades, it has increased in popularity and popularized the "carb sensitive" craze.

The diet emphasizes the consumption of proteins and vegetables and limits the amounts of grains and simple carbohydrates. This diet is also referred to as a Paleolithic diet because it closely mimics the way humans historically ate.

Consuming a diet that is rich in protein and fats does not mean the consumption of animal products. Beans, cheeses and milks are also good sources of protein. If you are concerned about your cholesterol, avoid animal products. Yet, just like the vegetarian diet, the Paleolithic diet has its place as well.

The Atkin's Diet is a building or anabolic diet, where vegetarianism is a cleansing or catabolic diet. This diet is useful for people recovering from an illness, children, post partum and during pregnancy. Also for people who are engaged in strenuous physical or mental activities (believe it or not, thinking requires a lot of food).

The Low Fat/Cholesterol Free Diets

When it comes to diets the low fat diet is a novelty to human history. There are various examples around the world of societies who consumed large portions of animal fat without inducing coronary infarctions (heart attacks). The study of centenarians (people who live to 100 years or beyond) discovered that not only did fat comprise a large part of their diet, but so did cholesterol.

Historically, there are no examples of fat or cholesterol free societies. It is only modern man that has attempted such an experiment. There are various reasons for this. One of the very essential functions of cholesterol in the body is to produce sex hormones like estrogen and testosterone. When sex hormones are not



produced in the correct amounts, sterility can be a result. Today in Western and Westernized societies we are witnessing a rise in infertility. A society that cannot procreate, does not survive.

Oddly enough, the body produces cholesterol; it is not solely obtained from food sources. Breast milk also contains large amounts of cholesterol. Cholesterol is essential to brain health and a lack of it can lead to depression and Alzheimer's. The use of cholesterol lowering statin drugs is marred by an excessively high incidence of Alzheimer's disease and cognitive dysfunction.

Not all fats are created equal. Some are harmful to us like canola oil (it is unstable and becomes rancid quickly) and hydrogenated oils (man-made oils that alter cell membrane structure). Others are healthful like olive oil, palm oil, ghee and coconut oil. Fats allow our bodies to absorb fat soluble vitamins like vitamins A, D and E.

Weight Watchers/Jenny Craig

I do not want to go in-depth with these two popular diets because I believe they are of little value and can pose a health threat. But I do want to mention them because of their popularity.

When you are looking to lose weight, avoid the quick fix. I understand that there are events in our life for which we want to look

our most radiant. However, this rapid approach to weight loss will only cause us to gain it all back again and we may even gain more weight than we lost. This approach is called yo-yo dieting. Another serious side effect of a sudden decrease in caloric intake can be depression and cognitive problems.

These weight loss schemes may provide results in some instances, but it is seldom a long lasting reduction in weight. These programs induce weight loss by calorie reduction. Hence, if you eat less, you will lose weight. As long as someone can continue to keep their caloric intake lower than the amount of energy they are using, they will lose weight. This does not mean that calorie counting does not have a place in weight loss.

Nature finds balance, our modern diets have disturbed this balance and now we are suffering from infertility, depression and lifestyle diseases. May Allah bless you and your family with health, wealth and success in this life and in the next.



■ Lose Weight, the Natural Way*

These days losing weight seems to be on everyone's mind, whether you want to lose a few pounds or are clinically obese.



Ads promoting fad diets or magic weight loss pills are everywhere. We are bombarded everyday

with these ads on television, the internet and in our e-mail. But the real secret to weight loss is that the best weight loss program doesn't cost a thing and you do not need to starve yourself or even feel hungry. Natural weight loss is the best, healthiest and longest lasting weight loss method around.

OnIslam.net (OI) conducted this interview with Anisa Abeytia, an integrative health specialist and Clinical Nutritionist, to discuss the best way to lose weight and how to make a few small changes to your lifestyle that will help you shed the pounds and keep them off for good.

* By Aisha El-Awady.

OI: If you were to suggest one food/drink to cut out of our diets in order to lose weight, what would it be?

Abeytia: Soda. One can of soda contains an average of 5 tablespoons of sugar and a host of artificial additives that can stress the liver and adrenal glands. Sugar promotes weight gain because it sets up a situation where blood sugar fluctuates all day. We can see this in the extreme with diabetic people who can gain excessive amounts of weight. When blood sugar spikes and falls several times a day, the body will hold onto fat because it thinks the body is starving.

OI: Are there any foods that can actually help weight loss?

Abeytia: I love coconut oil. It may seem like a strange thing to recommend, but I find that in my private practice that many people do not consume enough healthy lipids (fats). Currently consumption of corn and canola oil is excessive. It causes inflammation and is rancid (rotten). Hydrogenated oils are another health hazard and are really what gave saturated fats (solid at room temperature) a bad name. Hydrogenated oils do not occur in nature and there is some evidence that they alter the cell membrane by making it impermeable so waste cannot exit and nutrients cannot enter. This can lead to weight gain because it literally can get "stuck" in your body.

If you are interested in learning more about the role of fats in maintain weight balance, please visit the site for the Weston A Price



Foundation or read the excellent books by Sally Fallon "Nourishing Traditions, Eat Fat Lose Fat" or Mary G. Enig "Know Your Fats, Eat Fat Lose Fat." A great website that discusses and gives recipes for foods great for losing weight and just being healthy, go to The World's Healthiest Foods website. There is also a companion book.

OI: We hear that nuts are high in calories but also high in nutrients. If a person is trying to lose weight, would you recommend that they consume nuts or cut them out of their diet due to their high calorie content?

Abeytia: Nuts are a wonderful food because they are filling and they are easy to take with you. A small amount can keep you full, so they offer more bang for their size. The problem that arises is when we over consume nuts. This is an easy thing to do when we do not have to shell them ourselves. A serving of nuts is one handful (your hand).

OI: For weight loss plans, are there any fruits or vegetables that you would recommend one NOT to eat?

Abeytia: Most people do not eat enough fruits or vegetables, period. Some vegetables that can cause problems are potatoes, peas and carrots eaten in excess, but when they are part of a balanced and varied diet they are very nutritious. You want to purchase the most

nutrient-dense foods you can buy. Organic foods usually have many more nutrients because the way the soil is maintained, but if it is coming from far away, like from Brazil to California or Florida to New York, the distance is too great and the food loses its nutrients. In that case you want to go for local, but be sure to wash your fruits and vegetables well. Keep in mind though that some pesticides do not wash off. There is a list you can find online titled "The Dirty Dozen." You want to purchase the fruits and vegetables on this list organic whenever possible.

Eating nutrient-rich foods is also a key to maintain proper weight balance. When we eat nutrient-dead food our bodies can become malnourished, even if we look over nourished, because our bodies are not receiving what they need. As a result, our bodies think we are starving so they hold onto calories instead of burning them, then we become fat, even though we are malnourished.

OI: What is the ideal amount of weight an overweight person should lose during a month's period that would allow him/her to keep the weight off for an extended period of time?

Abeytia: I have worked with people who lost 25 lbs (11.3 kg) in one month and that was healthy for them because it was an issue of inflammation or food sensitivities. Also people who are involved with receiving different types of body work can also experience a large initial weigh loss in the first few months. I can recall one woman that I



worked with using a body work I developed called Noor-al-Tawheed, who lost 3 lbs (1.4 kg) after two sessions (1 lb/0.45 kg a day for three days).

It is not about the amount of weight, but about making the appropriate lifestyle adjustments to allow your body to find the appropriate weight. Weight loss can be a tricky thing because so many factors come into it that it is easier and, yes, cheaper to work with a health care practitioner. Weight balance is more of a result of good health than anything else.

Now on the other hand, if someone is starving themselves by only eating grapefruits or by taking diuretics for short term weight loss, then that is dangerous. Fad diets that promise an amount of weight loss by limiting a food group can also be dangerous and not long term and typically the person gains all the weight back and more. These yo-yo diets are unhealthy. They can boast that you can lose 25 lbs in one month, but it is usually water weight that will all come back. If a person loses that much that quickly, I would suspect food allergies.

With all that said, 5-10 lbs (2.3 - 4.5 kg) is a "healthy" goal to set. You can also look at it from a perspective of inches. You might measure yourself at the chest, waist, hip, upper thigh and see how many inches you lose as well. You may find that you lose inches before

pounds. I have also noticed that some women experience a shift in where their excess weight is before they see a loss of any kind.

OI: What is the best food to start the day with for people trying to lose weight?

Abeytia: There is a great book titled "The Metabolic Typing Diet" by William L. Wolcott and Trish Fahey. Not everyone does great on a high protein diet and some people do great as vegetarians and have you ever wondered why? This book discusses why different eating styles work for different people and it has a very useful questionnaire to help determine what type you are. This is important to weight loss because if you are forcing someone to eat a salad for breakfast and they are starving in a few hours, the dietary habit is not working for that person. And it is not going to promote health.

Weight loss is a "side-effect" of good health. When your body receives what it needs, it tends to drop the pounds, sometimes effortlessly. The "perfect" meal for someone will vary, but what you do not want to eat is something sweet. Doctors of Traditional Chinese Medicine feel very strongly about this and it may have to do with insulin and the metabolic drag it exhibits on the body first thing in the morning. Now, the prophet (peace be upon him) did eat dates in the morning, but he combined it with water or milk, which would help counter the sweetness. Also, dates are a whole food (they are not



processed or have something added or removed) and are not like doughnuts, breakfast bars or breakfast candy (most breakfast cereals).

Starting your day with a metabolically appropriate meal can be the best gift you give to you and your family. When I work with someone, I find it very useful to do a complete metabolic profile.

Correct Your Common Mistakes

■ Ten Myths About Exercise*

One of the longest and toughest battles in history was the Battle of the Bulge.

The daily battle against bulging body forms is not less hard, if not as bloody. Many people are getting increasingly obese, and obesity is stepping in early nowadays.



Before, women used to lose their figure after their first or second baby. Men used to develop beer bellies or become obese due to

* By Deepa Kandaswamy.



inactivity. Nowadays, however, obesity develops at a young age, as young as 10 sometimes.

Increasingly, kids are taking to junk food and television dinners, and they rarely play in the evenings, unless it is computer games. As for today's adults, both men and women lose their health and shape due to overwork. The worst jobs are desk jobs, such as working in administrative, IT, and customer service positions. This has become a form of occupational hazard.

Do you know people can gain weight if they continuously miss on sleep? According to a University of Chicago research study by Eva Van Cauter and her team, which appeared in the medical journal, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, sleep deficiency causes a fall in secretion of a hormone called leptin and an increase in another called ghrelin. Leptin is responsible for telling the brain that a person is full and does not need to eat. Ghrelin is the hormone responsible for triggering hunger. The decrease in leptin and increase in ghrelin together cause a person to crave food even when the body does not really need it. They also tell the body to store the extra calories eaten for later use. No wonder obesity starts early and is on the rise!

One of my cousins was stuck in an executive job that required her to be seated for over nine hours a day. She decided that the easiest way to lose weight was to skip breakfast and go jogging two

kilometers on the beach early in the morning every day. As a result, she would end up eating a bigger lunch than she used to eat before she started her "lose weight" program. After a month of this, she not only gained weight but also stopped jogging because she decided exercise was useless!

Starving yourself or skipping a meal is neither practical nor sensible. Many people cringe at the thought of dieting and exercise. This is either because they don't understand what it means or because they take drastic measures when they decide to lose weight. Some fitness fiction like "no pain, no gain" still exist to this day.

In addition, there is a constant background of products that advertise losing weight on television, such as miraculous drinks for a slimmer body in 10 days and other similar outrageous product promises. People buy these due to a lot of popular misconceptions that are still widely prevalent. Here are 10 of the common myths about exercise as well as the not-so-commonly-known facts based on current exercise research.

Myth 1

Like all the different results which one can get from exercising, weight gain or weight loss is due to many factors. These can range from food intake and dietary programs to genetics. Not all individuals will lose the same amount of weight on the same exercise program. In



fact, it is possible to be active and overweight! So if you are active and still overweight, do not lose hope. Exercise being the only sure way to lose all the weight you want is a myth. While exercise alone cannot guarantee you ideal weight, regular physical activity is one of the most important factors in building up stamina and in the long term helps with reducing weight.

Myth 2: You Burn More Fat by Exercising Regularly at High Intensity

The most important aspect in exercise is not how fast or vigorous the workout is but rather how much calories are burned during an activity. While it is true that you burn more calories by running, walking, or stepping quickly, it is often not possible to sustain the pace of a high-intensity exercise routine. This is the reason why most people give up their fitness programs after eagerly joining the local gym. It is trying to do too much too fast. It is safer and more practical to exercise longer at a lower intensity, especially when you are starting out or returning to your exercise routine.

Myth 3: Exercise Is a Waste of Time If Not Done Regularly

This kind of thinking keeps people away from even starting an exercise routine or joining an exercise program. Research continues to show that a little exercise is better than no exercise at all. Therefore, if you missed some days of your exercise program, don't give up but

rather go back to it. So, exercise whenever you find the time, or try to do it by not using the usual gadgets. Go over to the television and try to manually change the channel each time instead of using the remote control. Walk over to the telephone instead of picking up the cordless phone. Don't get into your car to visit your neighbor who lives down the street, take a refreshing walk instead.

Myth 4: Overweight People Are Unlikely to Benefit Much From Exercise

This myth discourages many obese people from ever getting into an exercise routine because there is way too much fat to get rid of. The truth is both men and women of all different sizes and weights can improve their fitness levels with modest increases in activity or exercise. Studies have repeatedly showed that obese people who participate in regular exercise programs have a lower risk of mortality than lazy individuals, irrespective of weight. ([EuroAspire Study Group](#)).

Myth 5

Yoga is an ancient Indian discipline. It is an excellent exercise system and has huge benefits due to its holistic nature. However, some asanas, or poses, are quite rigorous and demanding, both physically and mentally. As with any form of exercise, a qualified instructor and close supervision are essential for a safe and effective



workout. It is true that yoga is a safe program but not without a yoga master. One cannot perform all the asanas just by watching the video instructions on the yoga DVD. Therefore, try not to undertake yoga on your own without supervision.

Myth 6: Only Gym Workouts Help Reduce Weight

Despite all the hype about the gadgets, trendy exercise facilities and routines, it is not true that you will lose weight only if you go to the gym. Research shows you lose weight if you perform an exercise routine consistently. For most people, home-based workouts are fine as they are easier to stick to, rather than a trip to the local gym. The keyword is "consistently." The location is irrelevant.

Myth 7: Benefits of Mind-Body Programs Are Questionable

A research study by Dr. Michael Irwin recently published at Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, University of California, Los Angeles, shows that the health benefits of mind-body programs Tai Chi and Yoga continues to grow. Tai Chi, for example, has been shown to treat lower back pain. Yoga has been shown to cure asthma and other diseases. Both these routines result in improved flexibility, balance, co-ordination, posture, and strength. They can also reduce stress and promote weight loss.

Myth 8: Water Fitness Programs Are Only for Older People or Those with Disabilities

A recent research published in American Fitness magazine shows that water fitness programs can be highly challenging and effective for both improving fitness and losing weight. Nowadays, even top athletes, such as Olympic gold medalist Carl Lewis, integrate water fitness programs in their training workouts.

Myth 9: Be Critical of Yourself

This is not just a myth but also a very bad idea. It is easy to get skeptical and critical if you don't see immediate results in your exercise program. Weight loss varies from one individual to the other. Fitness experts all over the world are now saying that weight loss largely depends on one's Resting Metabolic Rate (RMR) which is the rate at which the body burns calories while not exercising. RMR varies greatly from one person to another and depends on genetic factors. This is why some people lose the first few pounds quickly, then take a lot of time losing the rest while others take forever to lose the first pounds and then lose the rest quickly.

Some others experience weight loss at a steady rate. So when you are on an exercise routine, remember your goal is long term and the weight loss is mostly related to genetics. Do not be critical of yourself if you don't lose your weight immediately. Instead, be supportive of



yourself and reassure yourself each time you're doubtful. Hard work always pays the dividends in the long run and it is no different in exercise.

Myth 10

Most people treat themselves if they achieve a particular weight on the scales. According to IDEA Health and Fitness, this is the wrong way to go about rewarding yourself. Experts suggest instead of rewarding yourself for the pounds lost, it is important to reward yourself for the positive changes you make in your behavior. This reward system will not only make you feel good about losing weight but will also help you continue to regularly exercise, even after you have reached the desired number on the scale. Now that you have learnt the myths, what are you waiting for?

Stop counting the calories and weighing yourself every couple of hours. Stop following the latest fad diet. Do not buy one of those "lose weight without exercise" quick fix gadgets they advertise on television.

Watch what you eat, sleep eight hours a day, and exercise every day, at least a little each day.

Chapter II: Healthy Food vs. Junk

- Unhealthy
& You Know
It.

- Ask Your
Doctor.



Unhealthy & You Know It

■ It's Called Junk and You Still Eat It*

The profits of giant fast food chains hit billions of dollars every year as hungry consumers all around the world continue to line up to get hamburgers or pizzas with French fries and sodas.



Fast-paced citizens of the 21st century spend their money and risk their health to eat junk. Mainly composed of fat and salt, fast food is nothing but that.

Americans eat it to enjoy its delicious taste and to save their time and effort; non-Americans, especially Arabs, consume fast food to

* By Sara Khorshid.

imitate the American behavior and to be cool and trendy. Both groups of people are gravely harming their health.

Fast Food= Processed Food

Basically, fast food is processed food; but what is processed food to begin with?

Processed food is simply food that has been altered in a factory from the way in which nature presented it, as part of a bulk process where natural and chemical food additives are added. This leaves the final product without its naturally created nutrients like vitamins, minerals, and enzymes.

Besides giving the food its delectable taste, food additives keep it lasting unspoiled for a long time, which means that processed food is usually stored for a long time before it is purchased and eaten! The oldest natural food additives are salt, sugar, and vinegar; and although these are natural, an excess in their amounts seriously endangers the health.

Junk foods characteristically contain high amounts of salt (sodium chloride). Sodium is necessary for various metabolic functions; too much of it, however, is associated with an increased risk of hypertension (high blood pressure). Hypertension is a known risk factor for heart disease.



If this is the case with natural food additives, then how about artificial ones?

With the advent of processed foods in the past thirty years, there has been a massive explosion in the chemical adulteration of foods with additives.

In his best seller, *Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser reveals to the American public very interesting facts about what they eat. He talks about his experience in a factory in New Jersey where he discovered how the flavors of McDonald's food products are fabricated.

Current food processing methods gather many parts of many animals into one burger. The burger's beef has to be deep-fried in oil at high temperatures over 300° C, and this goes for almost all the popular fast foods that have to be deep-fried, consequently, they become denatured and possibly even carcinogenic.

Moreover, there is a very interesting story to tell about the popular McDonald's French fries exposing the way they are processed, and the flavors that distinguish them. For decades, McDonald's cooked its French fries in a mixture of 7% cottonseed oil and 93 % beef tallow. The mixture gave the fries their unique flavor and more saturated beef fat per ounce than a McDonald's hamburger.

In 1990, amidst a barrage of criticism over the amount of cholesterol in its fries, McDonald's switched to pure vegetable oil. This presented the company with a challenge: how to make fries that subtly taste like beef without cooking them in beef tallow. A look at the ingredients in McDonald's French fries suggests how the problem was solved. Toward the end of the list is a seemingly innocuous yet oddly mysterious phrase: "natural flavor". That ingredient helps to explain why the fries taste so good.

Food additives interfere with what we drink as well as what we eat. Let alone the dangers posed by the chemical ingredients of soft drinks, additives put in the most popular beverages in the world are quite unsafe. Brominated vegetable oil (BVO) is used to keep flavor oils present in soft drinks in suspension thus giving the well-known cloudy appearance to these beverages.

Small residues of BVO are trapped in body fat, and it has not yet been scientifically proven that BVO is safe. Bromate, the main ingredient of BVO, is a poison. Just two to four ounces of a 2 percent solution of BVO can severely poison a child.

Another very ironic fact about soft drinks is that diet Coke and diet Pepsi are considered the way out for those who care to have a healthy diet. These people are unaware that instead of sugar, the artificial sweetener in the diet sodas is acesulfame K. This is linked to



depression, insomnia, neurological disease, and a plethora of other illnesses; doctors even warn that acesulfame K may be carcinogenic.

We thus see how the mouth-watering tastes of the much popular American fast food diet are all about chemicals, artificial flavors and food additives that are added to the food in the course of a hi-tech manufacturing process.

Fat and Sugar: Obesity Has Become a Phenomenon

Simply put, fast food is high in fat and sugar – that is to say high in calories – and low in its nutrient value. Fast food is particularly high in saturated fats, generally preferred by the food industry because it is cheap and can withstand high cooking temperatures.

It has been scientifically proven that saturated fats are correlated to cholesterol levels in the blood, and can therefore cause heart diseases.

While experts state that a healthy meal should have less than 30% of its calories from fat, with 9 grams of fat and 270 calories, a McDonald's hamburger just breaks the 30% ceiling. Burger King's hamburger has 15 grams of fat and 320 calories, i.e. 42% of its calories are from fat. Other famous restaurants' hamburgers have more calories and larger percentages of fats.

Thus, hamburgers give us much more calories than we need and their calories come mainly from fats.

When it comes to sugar, it is enough to say that the typical can of soda contains an equivalent of 10 teaspoons of sugar.

Fast food thus offers much more calories than our systems can digest; and these extra calories are stored in our bodies in the form of fats. Excessive storage of fats in the body leads to obesity, which does not merely prevent people from looking slim, but it furthermore predisposes them to many disorders, such as insulin-dependent diabetes, hypertension, stroke, and coronary artery disease. More fatally, obesity has been linked to an increased incidence of certain cancers, notably cancers of the colon, rectum, prostate, breast, uterus, and cervix.

If fast food and soft drinks mark the American way of life, then it is easy to understand why more than half of all adult Americans are overweight. Actually, both scientific studies and common sense indicate that fast food is the primary reason for obesity.

Consuming junk food does not only mean eating the chemical food additives that are added while the food is being processed, nor is it limited to looking fat and getting exposed to obesity-related illnesses. The problems of fast food are far more diversified.



"No two countries that both have a McDonald's have ever fought a war against each other," says Thomas Friedman, the well-known globalization theorist, and the Foreign Affairs columnist.

According to Friedman's McPeace theory, McDonald's might prevent wars; but can McDonald's prevent the diseases caused by the junk it serves, such as obesity, diabetes, heart diseases, and even cancer?

■ Will These Drinks Relax You? *

Would you like a drink to relax you?

This isn't a phrase that Muslims hear often. However, a new wave of specialty drinks is trying to change that. A new beverage is on the market which hopes to find a lucrative home between two financially successful categories – that of “vitamin waters” and “energy drinks.”



These new “relaxing drinks” promise to help you relax, sleep better and feel less stressed. Although this is a refreshing idea in the midst of our overly caffeinated societies, how these drinks are marketed and manufactured pose issues for debate. The main issue is the ingredients in the new “relaxing drinks”, their availability, how they are marketed and how they are labeled.

(Un)Relaxing Ingredient

* By Karima Burns.



All of the new drink lines feature melatonin as a key ingredient. However, the safety of melatonin is not discussed on their websites.

Melatonin is a hormone produced in the brain's pineal gland and is secreted at night (Ratzburg). Although it sounds deceptively "natural," one must remember that all human hormones when used in prescription drugs are regulated because they carry substantial risks that require careful medical supervision.

For example, Thomas Moore points out that, "Insulin – an essential and lifesaving drug for Type 1 diabetes – can [...] produce a loss of consciousness and coma. Estrogen, unopposed by progesterone, is a growth promoter and proven carcinogen. It causes endometrial cancer, and possibly other cancers. Thyroid hormone, important and safe replacement hormone for millions, caused heart attacks when used in a different form to lower cholesterol." (Moore)

Francis Mercuri, Licensed Acupuncturist and Doctor of Oriental Medicine, states that, "melatonin supplementation is really a type of self-administered hormone replacement therapy, whose effects and contraindications have not yet been noted extensively."

Melatonin should not be taken by people with certain medical conditions such as severe allergies, severe mental symptoms, autoimmune diseases or cancers such as leukemia. There may also be

negative effects on the reproductive system, so pregnant women or those who want to conceive should not take those drinks. (Ratzburg; Ebner)

Mercuri shares, “Melatonin, in the public mind, is being thought of as a ‘sleeping pill’ whereas, in reality, it is a hormone intimately connected with the day/night circadian cycles. This creates two problems: The first pertains to timing. Melatonin naturally peaks during periods of darkness; taking it at other times (such as in the daytime, following a ‘graveyard’ shift) is highly questionable from a circadian point of view.”

Melatonin is not the only ingredient in question. The beverage RelaxZen contains passionflower and GABA as well. Passionflower is a strong depressant that can significantly reduce blood pressure, and GABA “should not be combined with alcohol or other depressants.” (Drug Safety Site). DreamWater also contains GABA.

However, IChill has chosen Valerian as one of its key ingredients. The website does not mention that Valerian should not be taken by people who have liver problems or are pregnant or nursing and, according to drug safety sites, should also, “never be combined with melatonin.” (Altmed)

Surprisingly, although the safety of these drinks is questionable, they are allowed to be marketed without a prescription. And although



the UK, France and Canada have outlawed them, they are still being distributed in the United States. (Ebner)

Dreamwater's site states that "the information presented is for informational purposes only. Any consumer should consult their doctor, practitioner, and/or pharmacist for any health problems/questions and before using any supplements or before making any changes in prescribed medications." However, you are not required to have a prescription for ordering and no contraindications are listed, of which there are many. (DreamWater)

"Chemistry is Chemistry"

In fact, lack of information on the ingredients contained in the drinks is not the only thing missing from the websites and labels on the bottles.

A glance at all of the websites and labels reveals that these drinks advertise a "blend of stress reducing and mood enhancing herbs and vitamins is especially formulated to relax you throughout your day." (RelaxZen) However, little safety information is provided.

RelaxZen includes "commuters and travelers" on its list of who its drink can benefit. However, the only safety advice on any of the three websites (RelaxZen, IChill and Dream Water) clearly says, "This

product may cause drowsiness... do not take when operating machinery or driving a vehicle.” (IChill)

Other dangers are not even mentioned at all such as the combined use of “uppers and downers”, long term effects of melatonin, dangers of consuming hormones on a regular basis and dangers of combining these drinks with medications. Even worse, studies linking GABA to possible increased risk of suicide are not listed at all. (Korpi)

A possible risk associated with the drink is how people will use it. Seventy-five percent of Americans between the ages of 55 and 64 drink coffee and 47 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds drink coffee daily (Dowydizka). With caffeine drinkers being so prevalent, chances are high that people will mix caffeine (a stimulant) with a relaxing drink (a depressant.) Many studies have shown that mixing depressants with stimulants can cause symptoms such as severe dehydration, insomnia, vomiting, nose bleeds and even cardiac and respiratory conditions that might lead to death. (Ball State University)

So why are there so many dangers to drinking these relaxing waters when they are filled with such “natural” ingredients?

Biochemist Stephen Naylor says that the problem is that these “natural” drinks are not natural at all.



“Chemistry is chemistry,” he explains. “Whether you're extracting a hormone from a plant, or chemically synthesizing it, the moment you start to handle a chemical like melatonin, it is going to undergo other chemical reactions, and add whole new dimension to biological and toxicological activity. That is just reality.” (Moore)

■ Think Twice Before Drinking Diet*

Aspartame (As- par-teem) is an artificial sweetener, created by agriculture super giant Monsanto Inc.

To some it is an alternative to sugar. Those wishing to shed a few pounds often switch to Aspartame products hoping to see the difference around their waist.

Aspartame is closely associated with diet soft drinks, but has moved into an abundance of dry food products, vitamins and even chewing gum.

Studies support the fact that Aspartame is a harmful substance, and further evidence suggests those who use it are susceptible to an array of damaging symptoms and even weight gain.

What's Wrong with Aspartame?

According to Betty Martini of Mission Possible International, an organization geared to educating the public on the threats of



* By Barbara J. Hunter.



Aspartame, “When the temperature of Aspartame exceeds 86 degrees Fahrenheit, the wood alcohol converts to formaldehyde, and then to formic acid.” It is due to this process that the system becomes toxic. Daily and long-term consumption of Aspartame can mirror symptoms of muscular sclerosis and systemic lupus (1).

Further, the FDA presents a lengthy list of symptoms attributed to Aspartame use, including chronic fatigue, menstrual problems, heart palpitations, poor memory, vision loss, hair loss, seizures, and headaches or migraines (2).

Many researchers say it is hard for the consumer to link their symptoms to Aspartame. A person who may suffer from headaches and then begins to suffer from insomnia may simply believe their condition is getting worse, and is most likely related to a larger problem or disease. Upon going to the doctor, the patient will relay a batch of symptoms that the doctor will interpret and run appropriate testing for, but will most likely miss the underlying predator Aspartame as the true cause.

Lee Falk from Vital Nutrients, a leading vitamin manufacturer in the US, states, “I was suffering from lower back pain for over a year, and consulted many doctors who could not determine what was wrong with me. Finally, on the suggestion of a friend, I discontinued use of an ice tea that contained Aspartame. The pain went away

immediately.” Lee explains that although it was hard to give up her “favorite” drink, it was well worth it. She, like many others, are looking at labels before they purchase a product.

Weight Loss or Weight Gain?

Not only is Aspartame a threat to one's health, it also shows evidence of promoting weight gain, which is a direct contradiction to what the product boasts. According to Michael Murry, N.D. and Joseph Pizzorno, N.D., authors of the acclaimed Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine, “studies have shown Aspartame to increase the appetite.” They suggest a regular addition of fruit in one's diet, which can “control sugar cravings and promote weight loss in overweight individuals.”

Dr. Sandra Cabot, a specialist of the function of the liver for over 23 years, stands by the opinion that Aspartame causes weight gain. “After having been consulted by thousands of overweight people suffering with problems concerning the liver and/or metabolism, I can assure you that Aspartame will not help you in any way, indeed it will help you to gain unwanted weight.” Dr. Cabot concludes it is the liver that “breaks down Aspartame to its toxic components.” This process puts stress on the liver. “The liver cells will have less energy for fat burning and metabolism, which will result in fat storing.” She further explains that the fat “builds inside the liver,” and causes a “fatty liver.” It is at this point that it becomes “difficult to lose the weight.”



Among other things, the liver is responsible for the proper function of the gynecological system. John Lust, N.D. and Michael Tierra, C.A., N.D., write in their book “The Natural Remedy Bible, “any menstrual disorder almost invariably involves the liver malfunction.” Women who intake Aspartame regularly and suffer from menstrual disorders including endometreosis, may consider discontinuing products which contain Aspartame.

What do Supporters Say?

The Aspartame originator Monsanto Inc., who brought Nutrasweet (Aspartame) to the market in 1985 claims, “aspartame is safe” and “may cause allergic reactions in some individuals.” One opinion is that “Aspartame manufacture-sponsored studies are designed in a way as to avoid the possibilities of finding adverse effects.” (3) Monsanto is also known as the number one producer and supporter of Bio-Tech foods. Labeled “Frankenfoods,” Monsanto's bio-engineered seeds are ruining the very landscape of the world.

What Can You Do?

Most people notice immediate relief of their symptoms when they discontinue using Aspartame. “It often takes at least sixty days without Aspartame to see a significant improvement.” (4) The first line of defense is education. Read labels before you purchase products. Be

familiar with sister names of Aspartame, like Nutrasweet, Equal, Spoonful, Canderl, acesulfame-k, sunette, and L-Aspartyl-L-Phenylalanine Methyl Ester. Look for natural sugar substitutes like stevia, which derives from a wild plant.

“Aspartame destroys the nervous system, the brain and the optic nerve, and ravages every organ in the body,” says Bettie Martini. All one needs to do is stop using it to reap the benefits.

Always Look on the Bright Side of Things

For some, Aspartame is a highly addictive substance, which takes a huge effort to overcome. For others, the lack of Aspartame-free products may be hard to come by. When in doubt go natural. Revert to a higher consumption of water and natural products like fruit and vegetables. As Henry David Thoreau said, “Nature is doing her best each moment to make us well. She exists for no other end. Do not resist. With the least inclination to be well, we should not be sick.”

For those who are suffering from Aspartame-related illness, and would like more information on how to report them, or is in need of support see: [The Aspartame Victims Support Group](#).



■ **High-Fructose Corn Syrup: An Ingredient to Avoid?***

It can be hard to understand the ingredients on prepackaged foods these days, which makes it a challenge to decipher their effects on our bodies. One such ingredient is high-fructose corn syrup.



High-fructose corn syrup has been around since the 1970s, showing up in a variety of foods and beverages. In simple terms, it is derived from corn and is composed of between 42–55 percent fructose, with the rest being glucose or other higher sugars. Not only does it sweeten food at a level comparable with table sugar, but it also keeps products fresh as it maintains its moisture.

What Studies Say

Although it shows up in a vast amount of products on supermarket shelves, some food items are now boasting that they are free of high-

* By Suzanne Fouad.

fructose corn syrup. This seems to imply that it poses some harm to the body, but just what kind of harm?

Obesity: Studies show conflicting stances about the harms high-fructose corn syrup are said to bring about. For example, according to MayoClinic.com, early studies that showed that beverages such as sodas that are sweetened with high fructose corn syrup are linked to obesity are challenged by other studies showing that high fructose corn syrup isn't necessarily less healthy than other sweeteners and that other factors can be contributors to obesity.

Diabetes and metabolism issues: Recent studies are now pointing a finger at high-fructose corn syrup, indicating that large amounts of it can start to have an effect on metabolism, which puts people at the risk of diabetes. Basically, fructose uses up the body's adenosine-5-triphosphate (known as ATP). When ATP is used up, many body functions begin to lag. Small amounts of high-fructose corn syrup are not too harsh on the body, but too much of it can deplete the ATP and stress the body out. This stress causes the body to begin resisting insulin, which in turn can cause type 2 Diabetes (3).

One of the more common ways people come in contact with high-fructose corn syrup is via soft drinks. The Framingham Heart Study (a project of the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute and of Boston University) revealed that those who drank at least one soft drink a day were at a higher risk of developing metabolism issues when compared



with those who did not have a soft drink. The Nurses' Health Study (One of the largest and longest running investigations of factors that influence women's health) conducted a study, which also showed that women who had one or more sugary drinks daily were more likely to become diabetic than those who did not consume the drinks.

High blood pressure: Another concern surrounding high-fructose corn syrup is that it may raise blood pressure. Dr. Diana Jalal, an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Colorado, conducted a study that found that even when blood pressure is normally healthy, the sweetener can still drive it up. Jalal's study found that a daily intake of 74 gram or more was linked to a 36 percent risk increase of having a blood pressure of 140/90 or higher. The ideal blood pressure should be somewhere below 120/80.

The reason behind the increase in blood pressure was not definitive. However, Jalal speculates that fructose decreases the amount of the nitric oxide produced, which is responsible for relaxing vessels thereby lowering blood pressure. Fructose can also potentially send a signal to the kidneys to reserve more salt, which in turn can cause high blood pressure.

Fatty liver disease: Another study was conducted, this one by Saint Louis University, in order to be presented at the Digestive Diseases Week meeting. The study involved a group of mice that were gathered

and allowed to eat whenever they wanted. They were not forced to eat. The intention was to mimic the American lifestyle in terms of diet. The mice were fed a diet that was high in high-fructose corn syrup, roughly equivalent to eight cans of soda a day in a human diet.

The study showed that the diet, along with an inactive lifestyle led to fatty liver disease in the mice. There was also a reason to believe that the fructose caused the mice to have a decrease feeling in fullness. In adults this means eating more. The study was worrisome in that its results are already seen in American children. One out of every eight children in America suffers from fatty liver disease, according to Brent Tetri, MD, a professor at Saint Louis University. The promising factor is that the damage can be reversible with a switch to a healthier diet and lifestyle.

FDA's Stance

The Food and Drug Administration, also known as the FDA, is known as the regulating body in the United States that ensures that consumers are protected from harmful food and drugs. The FDA predicts that high-fructose corn syrup will increase in production and will continue to replace sucrose and invert sugar, which is a mixture of glucose and fructose. This is largely said to be due to its cost as it is found to be cheaper.



They also state that, "There is no evidence that such replacement, per se, would have an adverse effect on public health." They do go on to state, however, that "It is not possible to determine without additional data, whether an increase in consumption-that would result if there were a significant increase in the total of corn sugar, corn syrup, invert sugar and sucrose added to foods-would constitute a dietary hazard".

Ways to Avoid High-Fructose Corn Syrup

With the concerns surrounding high-fructose corn syrup, consumers may be led to limit their consumption of products containing the ingredient. Limiting foods that are processed as well as foods with added sugar can help.

Eating natural fresh fruits instead of fruit flavored drinks is another way to avoid high fructose corn syrup. When purchasing canned fruit, choosing a variety that is canned in its own juice can be a better alternative rather than those canned in heavy syrup. Most sodas use high fructose corn syrup so consumption of these beverages should be limited as well. It seems as though with the widespread use of high-fructose corn syrup, it can be a difficult ingredient to avoid. However, with its links to negative impact on health, moderation in the intake of this ingredient seems to be advisable.

■ **Supplements Are Not Necessarily the Answer***

Allah Almighty says in the Qur'an,

(O you people! Eat of what is on earth, Lawful and good; and do not follow the footsteps of the evil one, for he is to you an avowed enemy.) (Al-Baqarah 2:168)



As Muslims, we want to be healthy, so that our bodies could be in the best condition to perform our duties. Many people take up supplements out of belief that they will help maintain their health. But are nutritional supplements the kind of thing that the Qur'an is referring to as "lawful and good"?

The scientific community is divided on the impact of supplements on the body. However, the general consensus is that we need to learn more about them and that if you want to use them, you should consult a professional for advice.

Supplements vs. Drugs

* By Karima Burns.



The definition of nutritional supplements may help shed some light on why they have stirred such a controversy over the last few decades.

Nutritional supplement is defined by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) simply as "a product taken by mouth that contains a dietary ingredient intended to supplement the diet." The "dietary ingredients" in these products may include: vitamins, minerals, herbs, or other botanicals, amino acids, and substances, such as enzymes, organ tissues, glandulars, and metabolites." (Thurston)

However the FDA's definition of a drug is not very different. The FDA defines drugs as "articles intended for use in the diagnosis, cure, mitigation, treatment, or prevention of disease."

So, a nutritional supplement can be a drug, and a drug can be a nutritional supplement. The line between the two is often blurred, especially when one considers that many drugs come from natural sources, and many nutritional supplements have been extracted from plants in such a way that some do not differ from what are more commonly defined as drugs. Additionally, both can have powerful pharmacological effects and cause problems if taken incorrectly. (Consumer Reports)

So are nutritional supplements wholesome and safe?

Many people assume that because herbs and vitamins come from "natural" sources, they are safe. However, this is not necessarily true.

Many supplements can cause health problems, when taken in excess amounts, taken by the wrong person, combined with certain medicines, or taken while pregnant. Some supplements have been found to contain little of the named substance and may contain chemicals, pesticides, bacteria, heavy metals, and even pharmaceutical drugs. In April of 2008, one brand of vitamin C in Canada was recalled because it was found to contain large amounts of vitamin A. (Consumer Reports, Cohen)

Well-known nutritional supplement manufacturers have a higher quality of product, but they are still not regulated by any outside agency, so all claims of potency and safety are internally produced. Supplement manufacturers can launch products without any testing at all just by sending the FDA a copy of the language on the label. (FDA)

Beyond the Components

There is the further concern that some nutritional supplements are not even halal. Centrum multivitamins, according to the [FAQs](#) on their website, contain pork gelatin and many vitamin E capsules do as well.

However, beyond the quality and questions of integrity is a more important question: are nutritional supplements necessary? The Linus



Pauling Institute, one of the foremost research institutes on orthomolecular medicine, says, "Yes."

The Institute spends millions of dollars each year researching and tracking studies done on nutritional supplements and maintains a comprehensive website, as well as published many books that show the results of these studies. (Higdon)

According to their website, their major areas of research include "cardiovascular and metabolic diseases, cancer, aging, immune function, and neurodegenerative diseases." (Higdon)

However, although many doctors agree that proper nutrition is important for good health, not all believe that supplementation is the answer.

Many experts caution against using supplements to add vitamins and minerals to the diet as multivitamins may not contain the personal balance of nutrition a person needs. It may actually assist in depleting some nutrients from the body. Individual supplements and vitamin pills may not be as well absorbed by the body as nutrients in foods and some supplements also can have toxic effects in high quantities.

For example, studies at the University of North Carolina have shown that the same anti-inflammatory properties of fish oil, a

popular supplement, can also suppress the immune's system response to viral infections.

Additionally, some supplements in excess can even interfere with the body's ability to absorb other vitamins and minerals. An excess of zinc, for example, can interfere with absorption of iron and copper. (Landro)

In 2008, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) suspended a study on vitamin E because of the increased risk of diabetes in the study group subjects, which had been taking therapeutic doses of vitamin E. In April of 2009, an international research team sponsored by the Cochrane Collaborative, even found that consumption of the antioxidant supplements beta-carotene, Vitamin A, and Vitamin E actually correlated with shorter life spans! (ScoutNews; Armijo-Prewitt)

Another reason people can't substitute supplements for food is that there are more than 20,000 different antioxidants in food, but science has only figured out how to isolate a few of these. (Hellerman)

In addition to not being able to reproduce food nutrients, science cannot understand which of the known elements of food may be the most important ones. For example, science can extract sulforaphane, a compound found in broccoli, and put it into a pill. However, this is not the same as actually putting the entire broccoli in a pill.



Amy Stewart, author of *The Earth Moved: On the Remarkable Achievements of Earthworms*, puts it quite simply when she says, "The fiber and juice in an orange, the beneficial oils in a walnut, the micronutrients in a spinach leaf are simply not readily available in pill form." (Stewart)

As science moves forward to learn more about the nutrients in foods, it is ultimately Allah, the Creator of these foods, Who holds the secret to the healing elements present in their mix. Almighty Allah says,

(O you who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided for you, and be grateful to Allah, if it is Him ye worship.)
(Al-Baqarah2:172).

■ **Vital Vitamins: Don't Let the Label Fool You***

Nutritional supplements, known the world over as vitamins, are essential for maintaining proper health of the body. The lack of adequate vitamin intake will result in various deficiencies.

For example, Vitamin A deficiency can lead to night blindness, dry scaly itchy skin, susceptibility to infections and even loss of taste and smell. Vitamin B6 (Pyridoxine) deficiency can lead to anemia, kidney stones, and depression.(1)

The role of the vitamin has increased in importance over the years as the food we eat is decreasing in nutritional content. Studies show conventional produce is not making the mark in providing the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of vitamins. Organic foods still reign as number one for the highest nutrition content.



* By Barbara J. Hunter.



According to a report published in Organic Gardening Magazine, data from 41 studies taken between 1946 and 1997 stated, “Vegetables grown organically contained on an average 27 percent more vitamin C, 21 percent more magnesium, 14 percent more phosphorus, and 15 percent fewer nitrates than conventional produce.(2) Consumers also risk consuming bio-engineered foods that sneak their way into the food chain, and contain little, if any, nutritional value.”

This is where the role of the nutritional supplement comes in. Nutritional supplements alleviate the shortfalls in food. Consumers are encouraged to take vitamins on a regular basis. The benefits include disease prevention, increase in energy and even longevity. Choosing a vitamin sounds easy, but not all vitamins on the market are what they claim to be.

Choosing a Vitamin

How often does someone look at the ingredient label on a bottle of vitamins?

Fact is, most believe that the label says it all. Vitamin C should be just that, Vitamin C, but depending on the manufacturer you could be consuming a pill that contains molds, yeast, dyes or wax.

Some ingredient labels even list hidden sugars under the names of glycerin and lecithin. (Please take a moment today to look at the labels on your vitamins. You will find this information under “inactive ingredients” or “other ingredients.”)

But, what about the ingredients you can't see and aren't labeled, nor are they required to be labeled on your vitamins? Vitamins can also contain more harmful contaminants, like salmonella, E. coli, Pseudomonas aeruginosa, or Staphylococcus aureus. Fish oil supplements may contain PCB's, (a known hazardous chemical), mercury, and dioxins. Herbal supplements may contain herbicide and pesticide residue. Chinese herbs may contain heavy metals. The same vitamin that is promoted to help you may be causing you further damage.

Vitamin Manufacturers

The way the process works is that a manufacturer will receive raw materials from a distributor that contain a certificate of authenticity. Manufacturers have the option of testing the validity of this certificate. By doing so they would also ensure that the material does not contain any of the harmful ingredients listed above. Unfortunately, most companies don't do any sort of testing at all and leave consumers to suffer the consequences.



“Current nutritional supplement manufacturing practices are inadequate to assure consistent quality products,” says Rick Liva, R. Ph., ND, and President of Vital Nutrients, a leading vitamin manufacturer in the United States, committed to promoting quality assured vitamins. “Many nutritional supplement companies ask you to trust in blind faith. They believe that raw materials purchased from their suppliers are authentic. However, most manufacturing companies do no testing whatsoever and rely solely on the certificate of analysis provided to them by their raw materials suppliers.”

Testing

There are also different types of testing that can be done. The first type of testing is performed on the premises of the manufacturer. This type of testing, although better than no testing, can be compromised for financial reasons, time constraints and numerous other factors. Independent testing, or testing that is conducted by a non-biased party, off the premises, is the most assured way to ensure the “identity, authenticity and potency” of the materials. Because of the high costs in doing so, independent testing companies shy away from it. Consumers are none the wiser and continue to be deceived.

It is also important to know whether the manufacturer you are purchasing from has products produced by an outside contractor. Furthermore, with regard to the potency of the vitamin, companies

should also be re-testing their finished products. “Our independent labs test our finished goods after manufacturing and then repeat the test on the same lot at twelve months and twenty-four months to verify purity, potency and label claim,” explains Dr. Liva.

Is There Any Hope?

Fortunately, there are a few conscientious vitamin companies that do independent testing.

Such companies manufacture their products through the United States Pharmacopoeia standards and proposed FDA Current Good Manufacturing Practice Guidelines (cGMP) for nutritional supplements.

Dr. Liva explains, “The cGMP’s cover employee training, cleanliness of the facility, documentation, quarantine and release procedures, identity and authenticity of raw materials and many other areas.” All of which ensures a quality product.

Vitamin manufacturers that promote quality standards are harder to find, but not impossible. One way to connect with a responsible vitamin manufacturer is through a naturopathic doctor or medical physician.

Cost



Many people may be wondering what the cost of a quality vitamin is. On the average, a good vitamin may cost 30-50 percent more than most generic brands, but the value is worth it. According to one consumer, Jane Snyder, “the more I read the ingredient labels on vitamins the more appalled I was to think of what I was really putting in my body! Now I pay a little more, but I can feel the difference.”

The best thing to do is to be informed. Look for hidden ingredients and fillers. Look for labels that say “manufactured for” or “distributed by.” Make phone calls and inquiries. Check expiration labels. Talk to doctors and health practitioners about where you can find vitamins without the fillers. In a world where nutrition in food is decreasing, taking the right vitamin is more important now more than ever.

Ask Your Doctor

Deadlines, meetings, emails, phone calls, important files to submit. All these are symptoms of daily business routines that have made workers subjected to the harmful act of having their lunch at their desks or being forced to eating in haste, without having a proper lunch break. Does this sound familiar to you? Do you sometimes eat your breakfast or lunch at your desk? It is clear that this is due to hyper-fast working environment which has left many employees with more work and less time.

Adding to this is the spread of fast-food concept that has also eradicated the previously famous midday lunch break at work. So we all get busy, but we also need to eat. This, thus make us combine working with eating at the same time. But do you know this could be really dangerous? And actually, this could pose a lot of hazards to your health. Our modern life has imposed on us a certain pace that is too hard to cope with and that gets its toll on our physical, mental and psychological health. To tackle this important topic, read below all the questions submitted by the website's users and the kind replies of OnIslam's guests and specialists:



■ Questions & Answers on Natural Health

Karima Burns, MH, ND has a Doctorate in Naturopathy and a Masters in Herbal Healing.

She has studied natural healing for 12 years, published a natural healing newsletter for 4 years, and writes extensively on natural healing and herbs.

Sister Karima became interested in natural healing after ending her personal lifelong struggle with asthma, allergies, chronic ear infections, depression, hypoglycemia, fatigue and panic attacks with herbs and natural therapies.

Karima offers natural healing consultations, aromatherapy and reflexology treatments, iridology readings, and nutritional and herbal programs from her home in Saudi Arabia. She believes that healing



occurs more rapidly when her clients can work on the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of their illnesses.

Q: Dear Editor,

**I was told I am at risk for osteoporosis, but I am allergic to milk and I really hate the idea of taking unnatural substances. Is there anything else I can do to get more Calcium into my bones?
N.J., Illinois**

Dear N.J.,

We have all been made aware lately of how important calcium is in developing our bones and preventing osteoporosis. However, although our awareness is recent, calcium has been performing this role for thousands of years in many different ways.

Not everyone has milk available to drink yet Allah, in His wisdom, has created many sources for all the vitamins and minerals we need. Those marketing dairy products would like us all to believe that unless we consume milk, cheese, etc., we will lack calcium in our bones, but this is simply not true.

What is true is that there are many things we are not told. Calcium can be found in many sources other than milk; however, it can also be



depleted by many things, and we need to consume a kind of calcium that our body can absorb.

As Muslims, we may think of milk first as a main source of calcium because it was so highly respected by the prophet. The Qur'an (16:66) says, "In cattle, there is a lesson for you: We give you the drink they carry in their glands that issues betwixt a secreting mucus and blood." In the Hadith Abu Daud, Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) supported this by adding, "I do not know anything that can rival milk or be a substitute, for it is simultaneously both food and drink."

However, it has long been realized by traditional Muslim healers that milk quickly loses its properties unless it is consumed fresh (Medicine of the Prophet, p. 292), and modern science has confirmed this as well as the fact that pasteurization alters the quality of calcium in the milk, oftentimes making it hard to absorb. Furthermore, cows that are fed hormones and proteins produce a different quality of milk than the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) used to consume.

One of our biggest problems concerning our calcium intake is not its quantity, but the canceling out of the calcium we do take in by eating devitalized foods and products. A recent study done on college students showed that the meals they ate contained well over the USRDA (U.S. Recommended Daily Allowance) of calcium, but the majority of the subjects showed a calcium deficiency in their bodies.

The study correlated this to the fact that the college students also consumed a large amount of phosphoric sodas, coffee, pizza, hamburger and French fries that was depleting them of the calcium they had consumed by either leeching it out of their system or by creating an imbalance in the alkaline environment of their bodies (thus forcing the body to release calcium to balance this).

In fact, there are many substances that leech calcium reserves from the body. Excess protein consumption is one way so when we eat cheeseburgers, the meat most likely cancels out the calcium in the cheese. The Jewish religion does not even allow the combination of milk and certain other foods.

The second problem we have is that we may not be absorbing the calcium we do consume. This is a big problem with milk since many people are allergic to it. When you are allergic to a food, your body does not assimilate it as well into the body; it rejects it instead. The body of a person who is allergic to milk sends out antibodies to attack it, instead of absorbing its calcium.

Some of the people that appeared in the "Drink Milk" advertisements, such as President Clinton, were actually allergic to milk. Despite the fact that his medical records show a milk allergy, he still posed for an ad supporting milk as a source of calcium in the body.



Another source of calcium that is often rejected is vitamin and mineral supplements. Many of them, even the ones used by hospitals, are made from non-organic substances or contain allergenic coatings such as corn or wheat. The best calcium supplements contain bone marrow or oyster.

Some of the best alternative sources of calcium will come as a surprise. A tablespoon of sesame seeds (even in the form of tahini) supplies as much calcium as an eight-ounce glass of milk. Ten figs supply 270mg of calcium; one tablespoon of blackstrap molasses contains 140mg; salmon contains 208mg; and only three and a half ounces of kelp contains 1,093mg.

A good well-rounded meal can also supply a lot of calcium. A dinner of brown rice, broccoli, carrots, and shrimp with a few almonds, for example, contains as much calcium as a glass of milk (310mg). The USRDA for calcium is 800 to 1000mg.

Another wonderful way to supplement our calcium levels is through herbal teas. It is absorbed readily from comfrey and mint. Rosemary Gladstar, in her book *Herbal Healing for Women*, offers the following formula for a calcium tea: 2 parts oat straw, 1 part alfalfa, 2 parts nettle and one-half part horsetail herb.

You can also make your own calcium supplement using a lemon and eggshells. The following recipe is from Ted Morter's book, *Your Health, Your Choice*:

Lemon Egg

Place a whole, clean, uncooked egg into a clean, wide-mouth jar.

Cover the egg with freshly squeezed lemon.

Cover the jar loosely and place it in the refrigerator.

A few times a day, gently agitate the jar.

After 48 hours, when the bubbling has stopped, carefully remove the egg.

Take one-half teaspoon of this mixture each day as you simultaneously concentrate on re-building your calcium from other sources.

Q: Dear Editor,

I am new to the natural living lifestyle, and have just started using natural remedies around my house. I find that a lot of these remedies are working, but I am not sure why and I would like to



know. For instance, Echinacea actually works better than most of the antibiotics I used to take. Why is that?

K.L., Montana

Dear KL,

A Hadith states, "For every malady Allah has created, He also created its cure." Echinacea is one example of the truth in this Hadith. Many people, as you have indicated, have found that it is superior to any pharmaceutical. This is because Allah's pharmacy is created from His supreme knowledge of the way all things work, while our pharmacies are created from our limited range of knowledge.

Although antibiotics are a wonderful tool for many major viruses and have saved many lives, antibiotics have been largely abused. In fact, the main problem with the use of antibiotics is not so much the drugs themselves, but rather, the abuse of them. They were created to treat serious illnesses; however, many people are using them today for illnesses such as colds and the flu.

When they visit the doctor, many patients feel that they need to take something home other than general advice, and many doctors feel this pressure to prescribe their patients something.

The majority of people recover from colds, flu, coughs, stomachaches, fevers, and even ear infections with no intervention whatsoever. However, providing some comfort and support to an ailing body will usually at least make it easier to deal with illness, and perhaps help them recover more quickly.

The problem with antibiotics is that they do not support the natural process of recovery, but instead, they "take over" the job, killing as much bacteria as they can in the body - the good with the bad. Their overuse then creates an environment where good bacteria are weakened, which if they are not replenished, will cause the body to become even more susceptible to illness over time. Also, in a society where antibiotics are overused, the bacteria they are fighting start to adapt to them in their efforts to resist their attack and eventually become completely resistant.



■ **Let Them Eat Junk!**

Q: Dear Editor

I have two questions:

First: My daughter is a very picky eater. She is five years old and takes so long to eat. Can you help me?



Second: I do my best to provide good food for my children, but they have access to so much junk food around school and elsewhere. What can I do to make them make good food decisions of their own? Shazan

Consultant: Hwaa Irfan.

As salamu `alaykum Shazan

The problems you are facing are typical for a child of that age. They are more physically and active, so they have lots of energy to burn, lots to do, lots to prove and not time to do it all. A friend of mine faced the same problem which meant preparing food for her children not a joyful or thankful task. One affects the other. If your children are going to prove difficult each time you prepare food for them to eat then both you and they children are bound to feel anxious about it all.

My friend's family members were meat eaters, and we were not. For the first time in 11 years, her and her husband had decided to take that long weekend off for themselves. They never had a moment's break, not even time for a honeymoon. So I was the candidate to take on her children so that she could have a well deserved break.

So there we were one weekend with temporary additions to our family, full of boundless energy and generally not used to taking time-out for quiet periods. So an eventful weekend was had with outings to the local (massive park), which I turned into an adventure. We took a picnic, went sailing, climbing, foraging through the forest etc. We returned to make supper and tell "Don't Be Afraid of the Dark" stories and literally turned the reception area into a cave.

What is the point of me sharing this with you?

Well, their days were full of activity and as such had healthy appetites for each meatless mealtime. They ate their fill and whatever



was on the plate was where it should be, in their stomachs. They had little appetite in between, but had room for some treats which were already bought in. They would have crisps, one packet of sweets and home-made milk shakes which are rather filling. No more than we would give our daughter. When their parents returned to collect them at the end of the weekend, they naturally thought we must have had a difficult time as far as food was concerned, but they were surprised that they were bursting to tell them what they did and that there were no food complaints.

The long and short of it all is when children make the most of their day, and eat full meals at meal times, they are less likely to eat junk, because fresh fruits, vegetable long with pulses and grains are filling foods because they contain lots of roughage which provides the bulk from plant food for the digestive system to work on. This does not mean that your children should not eat meat, but it just goes to show, how much junk food provides empty calories that do not satisfy ones hunger. This makes treats remain treats and not alternatives to food. With our daughter at that age, I never bought treats with her around so that she would not develop that habit that she could have what she wanted. What I did was to but in treats for the week and in this way, these treats would be considered allowable, and not the forbidden that she would hanker after.

By establishing a pattern at home, your children will develop the habit of eating at mealtimes, which also sets up a pattern for their digestive system. In this way, they will unconsciously become food-wise because they develop a limit as to what they can eat and how much in between mealtimes.

In the U.K. they are developing a trend of returning back to family mealtimes instead of take-aways as a means to overcome their growing problem of obesity. By eating together as a family, there is a more relaxed environment with less distractions as to who-is-doing-what, - and - if –they - can - I - can – too syndrome. In a relaxed state one eats more, enjoys more what one is eating and is more able to digest properly.



■ The Golden Rule On Sweets!

Name of

Questioner: Umm
'Ali.

Question: What is a good rule of thumb for how often children should be allowed sweets? If it were up to my kids, they'd eat them for breakfast; if it were up to me, they wouldn't have any at all. We need to find a compromise.



Consultant: Mona Salama.

As salamu 'alaykum,

Dear sister, great are the responsibilities that lies upon the mother's shoulders, not only does she care for her children's faith, manners, studies, friends, chase them all the time for prayers, but also

their health, fitness and nutrition. It is very important for a child or a grown up to eat a healthy balanced diet as this is the way where our bodies can maintain good levels of each nutrient. Thank God that this mission, although sometimes difficult, yet it is one of life's pleasures.

When it comes to food, it is imperative that we teach our children healthy eating patterns as we can't watch them all the time. These patterns are taught from their early childhood where the taste buds start before they develop bad habits.

Looking at any Food Pyramid Guide, you will get a good idea about the right percentage and amount of food from different food groups. It is also so clear that sweets are on the top of the pyramid as they are needed in the least amount possible.

Consuming a lot of sweets may lead to obesity as they contain a lot of calories, and unfortunately they are Empty Calories (without beneficial vitamins and minerals your body needs to grow and keep working like it should.) Sweets are also the cause of a lot of cavities. Eating sweets in excess can affect their mode and cause them to be hyper active and nervous and later they will be lethargic.

Sometimes (in fact a lot of times) it is our fault that they eat sweets in excess as we use it as a bribe so they will do something or behave in a particular way.



Other children consume a lot of sweets not just because they taste good, but also because sweets make them feel good, so dealing with the reasons is a part of the solution.

So, the rule of thumb that you asked for is:

"Try to make sweets a sometimes treat rather than every day.

"Don't use it as a reward anymore (research has shown that a child's preference for a given food increases significantly when the food is presented as a reward) but instead use non-edible ones e.g. a sticker chart, an activity he's been looking forward to, social rewards (attention, recognition, praise, and thanks) affirm a child's worth etc.

"Encourage your child to enjoy natural sweet and delicious foods like fruits, and emphasize that fruits not only taste great but also help to keep the body healthy and strong.

"Give him a good mix of fruits, vegetables, protein foods, dairy foods, and grains. Then, there will naturally be a smaller part left for the bad stuff in his diet.

"Choose sugar free candies whenever possible, and make compromises, e.g. you can have a small serve of cake or a piece of candy or a small cup of soft drink but not all of them and not daily.

(Note that soft drinks usually have a lot of sugar in them which you do not need, they are also dangerous to our bodies on the long run especially those which contain cola).

“In helping our children developing healthy habits it is not right to eliminate sweets totally from their diet...

“First, this will lead to the opposite result and they may eventually love it even more.

“Second, this could push them to lie while eating it behind your back which is much more serious problem as fixing teeth is much easier than "fixing" manners.

So moderation and balance are the key words here. This world is created in balance and so was our bodies, try not to spoil this balance

And finally - Any good is from Allah and any mistakes are from myself.



■ **How to Avoid the Charm of Junk Food Ads on Kids?**

Name of Questioner: Mother

Question: I know that fast food, sweets, and potato chips are among the most common reasons for children obesity. However, it is really tough to abandon these things in the time that children see their ads everywhere. What do you think?

Counselor: Karima K Burns.

Salam Dear Sister,

Thank you so much for asking this question as I believe many parents have the same worry nowadays with the advertising industry growing at exponential speed especially for junk foods. Hope you benefit from the advice below by Dr. Karima Burns.



Develop Their Sense of Taste

Children, when exposed to many healthy nutritious foods more often than unhealthy ones, will develop a better sense of taste. This sense of taste will allow them to distinguish the difference between "real food" and "fake food".

Make sure that children learn how "real food" tastes from a young age.

- Baby food should be processed by hand or smashed up from freshly cooked homemade foods and not fed to children from jars or cans.
- Toddler snacks should consist of foods like sliced apples, grapes, bits of quality cheeses and fresh breads and not packaged nutrition bars, snack crackers or cereals.
- As children grow older and want to try things like hamburgers, ice cream, chocolates, sweets and potato chips, introduce them to the homemade "healthier" versions first.

A child who is raised on mostly healthy and whole foods will naturally migrate back to those foods and will prefer them. You will notice a child who has been raised this way will not even want a



hamburger from a fast food place. They will taste it and say "Yuck, this doesn't taste like a hamburger."

How to Avoid Junk Food Ads

- Children may see ads on TV or in the supermarket, but parents still have control over what they are eating for a long time. Use this control to purchase the best foods for them and provide them with only healthy choices at home. If you don't buy it and have it around, they won't eat it.

If they find it difficult to shop without asking for treats then leave them at home with a babysitter, sibling, father or relative while you shop. If they watch TV have them watch videos rather than cable to reduce their exposure to commercials.

The medical recommendations and advices stated in the previous specialised responses are publicly general and purely based on the limited and the personal information that was provided in the questions for each case. You are strongly advised to seek face-to-face counseling and consult your physician or therapist when making a drastic change in your lifestyle in terms of behavior, medication or diet etc.)

