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The Islamic Approach to Health Prevention

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Abstract

Health is a great blessing from Allah Almighty, through which we preserve our capacities and fulfill our responsibilities. This raises an important question: What is Islam's methodology in health prevention? The study aims to clarify the Islamic approach in this regard, employing a descriptive methodology supported by analysis and foundational investigation. It is structured into five key sections: the first defines health prevention; the second explores Islam's establishment upon a preventive approach; the third presents various supporting evidences; the fourth discusses preventive causes and means; and the fifth addresses the Islamic ruling on adopting preventive measures. Among the key findings is that Islam places significantly greater emphasis on prevention than on treatment, and it mandates the adoption of measures to prevent health-related harm. The study recommends further exploration of the legal rulings concerning safety and preventive measures in both Islamic jurisprudence and civil law.

Keywords: prevention, methodology, health, measures.

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Introduction

Health is a great blessing from Allah, its true value is only fully appreciated by those who have been deprived of it. Through good health, we preserve our mental and physical faculties, enabling us to fulfill our duties and achieve servitude to Allah with competence and dedication.

Islamic texts have emphasized the importance of preserving health, both through prevention and treatment. They have established principles and measures that individuals and societies alike must observe to ensure a sound and healthy life on both the personal and communal levels.

One of the most prominent aspects emphasized by Islamic law is the preventive dimension of healthcare, in line with the principle that "prevention is better than cure."

Significance of the Topic and Reasons for Its Selection:

The emphasis placed by Islamic law on health prevention stems from the fact that health serves as the vessel for both intellect and spirit. Through prevention, we avert potential harm that may afflict them. Accordingly, the key reasons for selecting this topic are as follows:

- Prevention spares individuals the time, effort, and financial resources they would otherwise spend had they not protected themselves from diseases and other health-related harms.

- Prevention is a structured methodology and system—not merely individual behaviors subject to personal desires.

- Prevention is an interconnected system in which the individual influences society, and society, in turn, influences the individual.

Research Problem

Based on the foregoing, the following research problem emerges: *What is the Islamic approach to health prevention in terms of legislation, methods, and legal rulings?*

This central question gives rise to several sub-questions, the most significant of which are:

1. What are the evidences supporting the preventive health approach in Islam?
2. What are the main legitimate causes and means of health prevention according to Islamic teachings?
3. What is the Islamic ruling on adopting preventive measures?

Research Objectives:

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To elucidate the Islamic approach to health prevention.
2. To identify the key legitimate causes and preventive measures prescribed in Islamic teachings.

Research Methodology:

The appropriate methodology for addressing the research problem is the descriptive approach, supported by both analytical and foundational (ta'sīlī) methods.

Research Procedures:

In addition to the standard research procedures, I have translated the texts, used the **King Fahd Edition translation** for Quranic verses, and referenced **the Hadith translations from the "Encyclopedia of Prophetic Hadiths" website**, and <https://sunnah.com/>, citing the book, chapter, and hadith number sequentially.

Previous Studies:

No previous study has been found to address this topic in its entirety, making this concise study a valuable contribution to the existing body of research.

Research Structure:

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, the study is organized around the following key sections:

1. Definition of health prevention.
2. The foundation of Islam upon a preventive approach.
3. Evidences of the preventive methodology in the field of health.
4. Causes and means of prevention.
5. The Islamic ruling on adopting preventive measures.

First Section: Definition of Health Prevention

Linguistically, (*al-wiqāyah*) (prevention) refers to anything that protects something else; to "protect" (*waqaytu*) means to preserve and shield something from harm. (Ibn Fāris, 1399 AH, vol. 6, p. 131)

Terminologically, it is defined as: "preserving something from that which harms or damages it; and *al-tawaqqī* is making something a shield against what is feared." (Almunāwi, 1990, p. 340)

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines prevention as: "Approaches and activities aimed at reducing the likelihood that a disease or disorder will affect an individual, interrupting or slowing the progress of the disorder, or reducing disability." (WHO Global Forum IV, 2004)

In its comprehensive sense, prevention is an integrated approach to protecting both the individual and society, safeguarding the body from illnesses and diseases through adherence to a set of teachings and guidelines. (Bellālī, 2011, p. 12)

Accordingly, health prevention refers to the adoption of measures intended to prevent the emergence of potential diseases and health harms, reduce the likelihood of contracting them, or minimize their persistence or severity.

Health harms refer to any condition that affects an individual's body, mind, or psychological well-being.

Second Section: Islam's Foundation upon a Preventive Methodology

All divinely revealed legislations have included health-related guidance that promotes cleanliness, moderation in eating and drinking, and the prohibition of harmful substances and practices—particularly in the final and most comprehensive message: Islam.

The Qur'an places significant emphasis on preventive measures (Yakan, 1997, pp. 10–11), establishing the foundations of preventive medicine while also recognizing the necessity of treatment. This is because the Qur'an was revealed to guide the people toward a path of health, strength, and dignity. Allah Y says: *إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ يَهْدِي لِلَّتِي هِيَ أَقْوَمُ وَيُبَشِّرُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا كَبِيرًا* (Surah Al-Isra:9).

This Ayah means: Verily, this Qur'an guides to that which is most just and right and gives glad tidings to the believers (in the Oneness of Allāh and His Messenger, Muhammad (ﷺ), who work deeds of righteousness, that they shall have a great reward (Paradise). (Hilali_Khan, p. 369)

When the Qur'an called out to humanity: *يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا كَانَ يَدْعُ إِلَى تَقْوَىٰ ۖ يَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ* (Surah Al-Baqarah:195), it clarified the paths that lead to destruction, strongly warned against them, and promised severe consequences for those who pursue them—out of mercy for

individuals and their communities. At the same time, it outlined the means through which people may elevate themselves physically and psychologically toward health and safety, all within a unique and unparalleled scientific framework.

Islam's concern for preventive care far outweighs its focus on treatment. This renders the Islamic methodology distinct from other approaches that are primarily curative and reactive. The Islamic model actively works to shield both individuals and society from all causes and conditions of disease—whether theological, psychological, intellectual, physical, or moral—so that health becomes the norm and illness the exception. This proactive stance prevents society from becoming, as in many cases today, overwhelmed by disease and dysfunction to the point of resembling one large hospital or infirmary (Yakan, 1997, p. 39).

Modern societies, for the most part, are plagued by illness and disease due to their abandonment of preventive principles. Consequently, ailments have spread without bounds, and health has become a rarity while the healthy have become the minority. This is in stark contrast to the ideal Islamic society, where well-being is the default and illness is the anomaly.

The process of preventive health education in Islam aims to block the emergence of illness before it occurs and to protect individuals and society from it before it takes root. Through this, the Islamic environment remains preserved from the diseases, ailments, and societal afflictions that ravage other communities.

Third Section: Evidence of the Preventive Approach in Health-Related Matters

There are numerous evidences supporting the concept of preventive health in Islam, including:

A) The Qur'an:

Allah says:

﴿يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رَجْسٌ مِنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ﴾

(Surah Al-Mā'idah: 90)

This Ayah commands avoiding harmful substances like alcohol, the mother of all evils, and gambling, which are destructive and harmful to the individual and society.

Allah also says: ﴿وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الزَّوْجَىٰ إِنَّهُ كَانَ فَاحِشَةً وَسَاءَ سَبِيلًا﴾ (Surah Al-Isra:32). *This Ayah* is a clear command to avoid adultery, with its known harmful social, moral, psychological, and economic consequences.

Additionally, Allah says: ﴿وَلَا تَقْرَبُوا الْفَوَاحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَمَا بَطْنٌ﴾ (Al-An'ām:151)

This Ayah forbids all forms of indecency, both overt and covert, to protect the society from the worldly and spiritual consequences of such actions.

B) The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) said:

"مَنْ مَرَّ فِي شَيْءٍ مِنْ مَسَاجِدِنَا أَوْ أَسْوَاقِنَا بِنَبْلِ فَلْيَأْخُذْ عَلَىٰ نَصَالِهَا لَا يَعْوِزَ بِكَفِّهِ" (Al-Bukhari, 11/34/441, Muslim,45/34/120).

This Hadīth means: "Whoever passes through any of our mosques or markets with arrows with him, he should hold them by their heads (blades) lest he injures any of the Muslims with them." (hadeethenc.com/ar/browse/hadith/5442)

And this teaches the importance of taking precautions to avoid harm to others, even unintentionally.

The Prophet said: "مَا أَسْكَرَ كَثِيرُهُ فَقَلِيلُهُ حَرَامٌ". (*Abū Dāwūd* (5/523/3681) *al-Tirmidhī* (3/442/1865) *Ibn Mājah* (4/475/3393) *Ahmad* (23/51/14703).

This hadith prohibits even small amounts of intoxicants, warning that they could lead to the consumption of larger quantities, teaching the mind to avoid all harmful substances such as alcohol, even in small amounts.

Religious texts emphasize the importance of preventive awareness, training Muslims to avoid sources of harm, which contributed to the limited spread of diseases in early Islamic communities

C) The Principle of Blocking the Means (Sadd al-Dhara'i): This principle ingrains the concept of prevention in the soul.

The word "dhari'ah" in Arabic means "means" or "path," and in Islamic jurisprudence, it refers to a means leading to harm or corruption. Imam Al-Shatibi defines it as: "The means by which a benefit is sought but leads to a harmful end" (Al-Shatibi, no date, 4/199).

Alqarāfī states: "It is the blocking of corrupt means to prevent harm." (Alqarāfī, N.D, 2/32). Therefore, any action that appears permissible but leads to harm, such as certain foods or drinks, should be prohibited in order to prevent health-related damage.

Fourth Section: Preventive Measures

Adherence to preventive health measures is achieved by following their causes, with each matter having its own specific ways. Preventive measures can be categorized into various types, among the most important of which are:

First Type: Religious Prevention

The adherence to the rulings of Allah's law protects the community, both individually and collectively, from all worldly and spiritual harms, whether we understand them in specific terms or not.

Allah has prohibited alcohol, which is the cause of many harms. He has forbidden zina (adultery), which is also a cause of numerous problems, some of which have become prevalent in modern times. He has prohibited usury (riba) because it destroys the blessings of wealth, and there are many other prohibitions for our own well-being.

Second Type: Acquired Prevention

This refers to what individuals acquire through the Islamic teachings of health measures and care, which fall under the scope of religious obligations.

The health care system in Islam is primarily based on preventive measures (Ruqayt, 1997, p. 41), with treatment being prescribed only when necessary. This approach aligns with the nature of human beings, their constitution, and their circumstances. Human experiences confirm the validity of this approach, and doctors, philosophers, scholars, and rational thinkers have unanimously agreed that "prevention is better than cure."

In addition to the previously mentioned Islamic preventive system, it is useful to focus on the following.

First Matter: Nutrition and Healthy Food Systems

Providing food security, through the provision of food and care for the body's needs, is a right for every human being and part of the order of creation. Allah created the earth and provided sustenance for all creatures.

The nutritional system is based on two principles: providing adequate and lawful food for the body, and avoiding excessiveness in consumption.

Therefore, the nutritional system is compromised in two situations:

1. Inadequate nutrition or what is termed malnutrition.
2. Excessive consumption of food.

Both conditions can lead to various diseases. Ibn khuldūn said, "Know that the root cause of all diseases is food." (Ibn khuldūn, 1988, p. 264). In the first situation, the body requires protein, vitamins, carbohydrates, sugars, fats, and so on. If the body's nutritional needs are not met, it is susceptible to diseases, weakened resistance, and deteriorating health and strength.

Malnutrition and the lack of a balanced diet are among the most prominent diseases of poverty. Muslims have been commanded to earn their livelihood, support their wives, children, and parents, and food and drink are the most important types of expenditure. Moreover, the guardians of Muslims are instructed to provide these resources for those who lack them, by facilitating means of access.

It is noticeable in the Islamic economic system that many of the zakat rules pertain to food items, such as wheat, dates, barley, raisins, and animals, in addition to money. This ensures food security and helps combat malnutrition-related diseases.

As for the second situation, excessive eating is harmful to one's health. Islam has set guidelines for eating, protecting individuals from harmful excesses.

Some key principles derived from the prophetic medicine include:

1. Designating specific times for eating, with the measure being hunger.

2. Determining the amount of food to be consumed.
3. This practice of measuring food helps regulate its consumption and aligns with the general advice of eating one-third of the stomach.
4. Avoiding luxury in food, and focusing on its nutritional value rather than its appearance.
5. This contrasts with the current situation where people indulge in an excess of food and drink, and factories and television channels promote various dishes and snacks to entice people to eat greedily. This behavior leads to serious health risks that harm human health and well-being (Ruqayt, 1997, p. 61).

Second Matter: Mental Health

Definition of Mental Health: The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as: "A state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community." (www.who.int).¹

It is well known among doctors that mental health affects the muscular and organic systems of the body (Ṭbaaārah, 1979, p. 174).

Islamic teachings, with their focus on nourishing hearts and souls, provide a comprehensive approach to healing and managing mental health. Islam offers a set of virtues and behaviors that instill tranquility and proper conduct in the soul, eliminating fear, anxiety, disorder, and hatred, and even prohibits anger.

Modern psychology has shown that a wide range of illnesses, from a common cold to Gout² can often be traced back to psychological rather than physical causes. Poor health that afflicts many people is often merely a façade for deeper, underlying fears (Ṭbaaārah, 1979, p. 196).

Islam outlines a distinguished path to mental well-being, serving as both a preventive measure and a treatment for psychological ailments. These include:

The Obligation of Faith and Avoiding Waswasa (Whispers of the Devil): This is a source of tranquility for the soul and the secret behind its stability and uprightness.

Belief in Divine Decree and the Afterlife: Belief in Allah's will, destiny, and the Day of Judgment has a profound effect on comforting the soul, encouraging perseverance, and enabling one to face challenges without fear.

Recitation of the Qur'an: The Qur'an is a healing for what lies in the hearts. Its recitation removes anxiety, stress, and mental tension, as Allah says:

(وَنُنَزِّلُ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ مَا هُوَ شِفَاءٌ وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ) (Surah Al-Isra:82)

This Ayah means: And We send down of the Qur'an that which is healing and mercy for the believers. *(Hilali_Khan, p. 381)*

Tawakkul (Trust) on Allah and Avoidance of Weakness and Laziness: Trust in Allah and reliance on His wisdom bring peace and strength to the heart, helping overcome difficulties and frustrations.

Turning to Allah in Times of Distress: Turning to Allah through prayer, supplication, and remembrance provides solace and helps overcome mental burdens and anxieties.

One of the unique aspects of prophetic medicine is that it combines both physical and spiritual healing, thus achieving a holistic approach to health. In this way, Islamic medicine integrates both the material and spiritual aspects of healing. All praise is due to Allah.

Third Matter: Protecting and Caring for Children:

Constant supervision of children's activities and keeping them away from hazardous situations is an important aspect of preventive health care. Additionally, guidance and awareness are necessary to cultivate a sense of responsibility within them, both for themselves and for others.

Islam has placed great emphasis on the health care of children from an early age. Among the practices prescribed by Islam is the circumcision of male children, which, according to many scholars, is obligatory (Ibn Qayyim, undated, p. 127-128). This is a significant health measure that protects the child from numerous diseases. Islam also encourages breastfeeding, prescribing a two-year duration for it. Modern science has confirmed the importance of maternal milk, both for the child's health and for the mother's well-being (Ruqayyat, 1997, p. 96).

Islam has adopted a distinguished approach to the health care of children, providing a proper framework for their upbringing. This includes:

Physical activities such as swimming, archery, horseback riding, and wrestling: It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) would organize races for children.

Encouraging the use of the miswak (tooth-stick): This practice was emphasized by the early Muslims.

Fostering cleanliness in children: This includes teaching them to perform ablution, keeping their clothes and body clean for prayer, which they are instructed to perform at the age of seven and are encouraged to consistently do at the age of ten.

Following the Prophetic traditions regarding eating and drinking, avoiding excessiveness in food.

Sleeping on the right side, which has numerous health benefits.

Sleeping after dinner and waking up early for Fajr prayer.

Protecting children from contagious diseases.

Protecting children from the evil eye and jinn.

By adhering to these health practices, the child's well-being is preserved from an early age. And those who maintain their health in childhood will have it protected by Allah in adulthood.

Fifth Matter: The Ruling on Taking Preventive Measures

From the collection of texts related to the permissibility of prevention and the prohibition of harmful causes, it is understood that prevention is obligatory if the individual knows that these causes inevitably or likely lead to harm. The meanings of these texts do not suggest anything other than this.

Therefore, preventive measures must be taken to avoid various health-related harms.

The risks and unexpected situations in which insurance is resorted to in order to protect against financial consequences—such as the dangers of fire, floods, road accidents, industrial accidents, and fatal diseases—can largely be avoided by taking appropriate practical precautions. In the modern era, the state's responsibility in this regard is increasing (Ṣaddīqī, 1990, pp. 75-76).

Ibn al-Jawzi said: "... It is necessary for the rational person to take as many precautions as possible. If fate occurs despite these precautions, no blame should be placed. Precaution should be taken from everything that can potentially occur, and preparing for it is obligatory. This applies in every situation..." (Ibn al-Jawzi, undated, p. 458).

Taking safety precautions from accidents in various places is part of the general system of prevention that must be adhered to in order to avoid harm and to guard against it. One of the most significant causes of health and financial damages are the

accidents that occur in factories, including various types of industrial accidents, collisions, and others.

Islamic legal guidelines emphasize the need for caution and precaution, which are fundamental principles in safety measures. Therefore, a Muslim must take all preventive measures against diseases, in accordance with what is established by Islamic law or through customary practices and experience, and adhere to health and dietary guidelines.

They must take necessary precautions for safety from accidents, ensuring the proper maintenance of machinery used in daily life, the profession they practice, the car they drive, the bike they ride, and refrain from engaging in the causes of harm previously outlined.

One must seek Allah's help in all the tasks and responsibilities they undertake, placing trust in Him and asking for protection and safety.

Additionally, the ruler is legally obligated to ensure that employers take all the necessary measures to guarantee the safety of workers and protect them from harm before it occurs (Bousaq, 1999, p. 117). The equipment and machinery installed in buildings according to recognized technical and scientific standards play a crucial role in alerting about accidents and mitigating their severity.

For this reason, the system of "Hisbah" was established to prevent the production or sale of items harmful to health. Punishments were prescribed for the consumption of alcohol and drugs, for committing immoral acts such as adultery, for intentional or unintentional harm to individuals or their bodies, and for violating traffic safety laws.

Conclusion:

The results of this research include:

Prevention is: taking the necessary measures to prevent the appearance of potential diseases, the occurrence of health-related damages, the likelihood of being affected by them, or to reduce their persistence or exacerbation.

Islam's focus on the preventive aspect far outweighs its focus on the therapeutic aspect, which makes the Islamic approach unique compared to other disease-based therapeutic methods.

Numerous evidences confirm that health prevention is an intrinsic approach in Islam. The collective body of these evidences educates Muslims, both as individuals and as a community, on the prevention of various harms. This education is the reason behind the low incidence of diseases in the Islamic community in past centuries.

From the collection of texts on the permissibility of prevention and the prohibition of harmful causes, it is understood that prevention is obligatory when the individual knows that these causes inevitably or most likely lead to harm.

Preventive measures must be taken to avoid various types of health-related damages. The ruler is responsible for instructing all sectors of society to take all necessary actions and precautions to ensure safety before damages occur.

The research recommends a detailed and comprehensive examination of the rulings on taking safety and preventive measures in Islamic law and civil law.

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Web Source:

<https://sunnah.com/>

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- 1- This is the complete link: <https://www.who.int/EN/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-strengthening-our-response>.
 - 2 - Gout: A painful disease that occurs in the joints of the foot and more often in the thumbs, and was called the disease of kings.