

THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC PRINCIPLES IN FOOD AND NUTRITIONAL SCIENCES: A CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This article critically examines the intersection of Islamic dietary principles and contemporary nutritional science, highlighting the continued relevance of Islamic teachings in addressing modern health and ethical challenges. Rooted in primary sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith, Islamic nutrition encompasses concepts of lawfulness (halal), wholesomeness (ṭayyib), moderation (i'tidal), and hygiene (ṭaharah). These principles form a comprehensive ethical and health-oriented framework that extends beyond ritual observance to encompass preventive health, environmental stewardship, and social equity. The study analyzes how Islamic teachings align with current public health concerns, including chronic disease prevention, food safety, and sustainability through a multidisciplinary approach. It also assesses the impact of the global halal industry and faith-based dietary interventions in Muslim and multi-religious societies. The analysis suggests that Islamic nutritional ethics provide a culturally grounded yet universally applicable model for promoting holistic well-being and responsible consumption in the 21st Century. The article contributes to ongoing scholarly discourse on religion and health by proposing integrative pathways for cross-sector collaboration between religious ethics and nutritional sciences.

Keywords: Islamic ethics, halal, nutrition, public health, food science, sustainability, religious dietary laws.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- What are the core dietary principles in Islam as derived from the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical jurisprudence?
- How are the concepts of halal, ṭayyib, i'tidal, and ṭaharah defined and contextualized within Islamic teachings?
- In what ways do Islamic dietary principles align with or differ from contemporary nutritional science and public health guidelines?
- How are Islamic food ethics practically applied in contemporary contexts such as the global halal food industry, public health interventions, and sustainable food systems?

- Can Islamic nutrition ethics offer viable frameworks for combating issues like overconsumption, malnutrition, and food injustice?
- What are the challenges of integrating Islamic principles into modern food and health discourse?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To identify and analyze foundational Islamic dietary principles, particularly the concepts of halal (permissibility), ṭayyib (wholesomeness), iʿtidal (moderation), and ṭaharah (hygiene), as derived from the Qurʾan, Hadith, and classical Islamic jurisprudence.
- To examine the alignment and compatibility of these principles with contemporary nutritional science, especially in the areas of preventive health, dietary ethics, food hygiene, and sustainable consumption.
- To investigate the practical application of Islamic food ethics in the modern world, including their role in the development of the global halal food industry, public health initiatives, and faith-based health promotion strategies.

INTRODUCTION

In an age marked by increasing health concerns such as obesity, chronic disease, food insecurity, and environmental degradation, the relationship between diet, ethics, and public health has garnered renewed scholarly and policy attention. While secular nutritional science has developed extensive frameworks to address these challenges, religious traditions have long provided holistic guidelines on food consumption and human well-being. Among these, Islam offers a rich, integrated perspective on nutrition that combines physical health, ethical responsibility, spiritual awareness, and environmental sustainability.

The Islamic approach to food is not limited to prohibitive laws but is deeply embedded in a broader metaphysical and ethical worldview. The Qurʾan and Sunnah provide comprehensive guidance on what is lawful (halal) and pure (ṭayyib), encourage moderation (iʿtidal), and emphasize hygiene (ṭaharah) and gratitude (shukr). These principles are framed within the overarching aim of Islam - maṣlaḥah, or the pursuit of human well-being and the prevention of harm. Thus, food in Islam is viewed as both a necessity and a means of spiritual discipline and social responsibility.

In recent years, scholars and healthcare professionals have begun to explore how faith-based perspectives can enhance health interventions, especially in religiously observant communities. The

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 emergence of the global halal food industry, the increasing popularity of prophetic medicine, and the adaptation of Islamic dietary principles in public health campaigns illustrate this intersection.

CORE ISLAMIC DIETARY PRINCIPLES

Lawfulness (Halal) and Wholesomeness (Ṭayyib)

In Islamic dietary ethics, the concept of halal refers to that which is lawful or permissible according to Islamic law (shari‘ah). It defines the boundaries of what Muslims are religiously allowed to consume, particularly concerning the type of food, its source, and the method of preparation and slaughter. Foods such as pork, blood, carrion, and intoxicants are explicitly deemed ḥarām (forbidden), while permissible foods must be obtained and processed under Islamic guidelines, including proper slaughtering (dhabh) for meat.¹

The ṭayyib denotes that which is pure, wholesome, clean, and beneficial to one’s health and well-being. While halal pertains to legality, ṭayyib addresses the qualitative and ethical dimensions of food, emphasizing its nutritional value, cleanliness, and freedom from harmful or impure substances.² The Qur’an often pairs the two terms, as in: “O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] halal and ṭayyib...” (Qur’an 2:168).

This pairing suggests that Islamic dietary law not only regulates what is permitted but also encourages the consumption of food that promotes physical health, moral responsibility, and spiritual well-being. Therefore, food may be technically halal but not ṭayyib, such as when it is excessively processed, nutritionally harmful, or produced unethically.

Hanafi View: The Hanafī school, known for its systematic legal reasoning and reliance on istihsan (juridical preference), maintains a strict classification of foods. Meat is considered halal only if the animal is from a lawful species. The Hanafis permit eating meat from the People of the Book, provided the slaughter meets the conditions according to Islamic Law. However, they emphasize certainty over permissibility - meaning if there is doubt about whether the meat was properly slaughtered, it is to be avoided.³

¹ Al-Qur’an 2:173, 5:3.

² Kamali, Mohammad Hashim. *The Halal and Haram Aspects of Food and Nutrition in Islam*. (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, 2010).

³ Ibn ‘Ābidīn, *Radd al-Muḥtār ‘alā al-Durr al-Mukhtār*, vol. 6.

Regarding ṭayyib, while not treated as a separate legal category, the Hanafi school recognizes that food must not be harmful (ḍarar) or impure (najis). Thus, food that is technically halal may be discouraged (makruh) if it compromises health or is obtained in unethical ways.⁴

Shafii View: The Shafii school, which heavily emphasizes textual evidence (naṣṣ) and analogy (qiyās), also considers the invocation of the Almighty's name at the time of slaughter obligatory. However, unlike the Hanafis, Shafiis generally do not permit meat from the People of the Book unless the proper Islamic slaughtering method is followed.⁵

On the issue of ṭayyib, Shafii scholars interpret it as a complementary condition to halal, meaning that food must not only meet legal criteria but also be clean, safe, and free from harm. The Shafii jurists have traditionally discouraged eating anything excessive, wasteful, or causing bodily harm, even if it is legally permissible.⁶ Thus, ṭayyib in this school plays a significant moral and health-related role, reflecting an integrated view of law and ethics.

The Hanafi and Shafii schools uphold the foundational Islamic principle that food must be legally permissible (halal) and qualitatively pure and wholesome (ṭayyib). However, they differ in specific interpretations and the degree of emphasis placed on the ṭayyib dimension. These variations highlight the richness of Islamic legal thought and its adaptability in addressing food ethics across diverse cultural and historical contexts.

Therefore, while halal pertains to the legal status of food items, such as avoiding pork, blood, carrion, and improperly slaughtered animals, ṭayyib relates to the moral, hygienic, and nutritional quality of food. This distinction broadens the Islamic food paradigm to include healthful eating, ethical sourcing, and environmental responsibility.

Moderation (I'tidal) and Balance (Mizan)

Islam advocates a balanced approach to consumption. Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) advised: "The human being fills no vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat a few mouthfuls to keep his back straight..."⁷

In Islamic thought, the principles of moderation (i'tidal) and balance (mizan) are foundational to ethical behavior, including dietary practices. These concepts emphasize a holistic approach to

⁴ Al-Marghīnānī, Al-Hidāyah fī Sharḥ Bidāyat al-Mubtadī.

⁵ Al-Nawawī, Al-Majmū' Sharḥ al-Muhadhdhab, vol. 9.

⁶ Al-Rāfi'ī, Al-'Azīz Sharḥ al-Wajīz.

⁷ Sunan Ibn Mājah, Hadith no. 3349.

physical, spiritual, and social well-being by discouraging both excess (israf) and negligence (tafrīt) in all aspects of life, particularly in consumption.

I‘tidal (Moderation) refers to maintaining a moderate and just course, avoiding both extremes of overindulgence and deprivation. It is deeply embedded in the Qur‘anic and Prophetic worldview. In the context of food and nutrition, moderation is not merely a health guideline but a spiritual and moral imperative. The Qur‘an states: “Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, He does not like those who commit excess.” (Qur‘an 7:31)

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) reinforced this principle, saying: “The son of Adam does not fill a vessel worse than his stomach...” (Sunan Ibn Mājah, 3349)

Moderation in food intake ensures physical health, fosters spiritual discipline, and cultivates gratitude and contentment (qanā‘ah). Islamic scholars such as Al-Ghazali linked i‘tidal to self-control and ethical refinement, viewing gluttony as detrimental to both the body and soul.

Mizan (Balance) means "scale" or "balance" and is frequently used in the Qur‘an to describe the natural order and moral equilibrium that Allah has established in the universe:

“And the sky He raised, and set the balance (mizan). That you not transgress within the balance.” (Qur‘an 55:7–8)

In the context of food and nutrition, mizan represents harmony and proportion, encouraging a balanced diet, ethical sourcing of food, and just distribution of resources. Islamic cosmology understands balance not just as a physical concept, but as an expression of divine justice (‘adl) in creation. Eating in balance also entails caring for the environment, avoiding waste, and ensuring that one’s consumption does not harm others or the environment.

Together, i‘tidal and mizan promote a deeply integrated approach to food ethics, encouraging dietary habits that are not only physically beneficial but also spiritually enriching and socially responsible. These principles are increasingly relevant in the modern context of overconsumption, malnutrition, and environmental degradation. Modern nutritionists echo similar concerns over portion control, caloric intake, and the dangers of excess, principles long embedded in the Islamic tradition.

In Islamic ethical thought, the principles of moderation (i‘tidal) and balance (mizan) are essential to living a healthy, spiritually mindful, and morally grounded life. These values are not limited to personal piety but extend to social conduct, health, and environmental responsibility. When applied to food and nutrition, they promote restraint, harmony, and reverence for the divine order.

Imam Abu Ḥamid Al-Ghazali explores the concept of moderation extensively in Iḥya’ ‘Ulum al-Dīn (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), particularly in the "Book on the Etiquette of Eating." He

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warns against gluttony (sharāh), arguing that it leads to spiritual negligence, intensifies base desires, and inhibits intellectual and moral growth. Al-Ghazali writes:

“The stomach is the root of desire and the stronghold of disease. When it is filled, other desires awaken and spiritual insight diminishes.”⁸

He advocates eating in moderation - not to satisfy lust, but to sustain physical strength for acts of worship. For al-Ghazali, moderation is a form of spiritual discipline (riyāḍah) and a prerequisite for ethical refinement (akhlaq), aligning closely with the Qur’anic principle: “Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Surely, He does not love the extravagant.” (Qur’an 7:31)

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, in *Zad al-Ma’ad fi Hady Khayr al-‘Ibad* (Provisions for the Hereafter), integrates Prophetic guidance with traditional medical knowledge to emphasize balance (mizan) as a fundamental law of nature and health. He writes: “When the human body departs from its natural balance in diet, temperament, or habits, it invites sickness. The body was created upon balance, and maintaining that balance preserves health.”⁹

In his view, mizan applies both to the individual body and the cosmic order, echoing the Qur’anic declaration: “And the heaven He raised and set the balance, so that you may not transgress the balance.” (Qur’an 55:7–8)

Ibn Qayyim criticizes both excess and unnecessary deprivation, advocating for dietary habits that align with temperance, proportion, and prophetic wisdom.

The teachings of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Qayyim offer timeless insights into the spiritual and ethical dimensions of food consumption. Their emphasis on i’tidal and mizan speaks directly to modern concerns such as overconsumption, malnutrition, and food waste. As such, they provide a faith-based framework for complete well-being, integrating religious ethics with public health and sustainability.

Hygiene and Cleanliness (Ṭaharah) in Islamic Food Ethics

The concept of Ṭaharah, which denotes both physical cleanliness and spiritual purity, is a fundamental principle in Islam and deeply intertwined with Islamic dietary laws and nutritional practices. It transcends mere ritual purity to encompass personal hygiene, food safety, environmental sanitation, and spiritual discipline, reflecting Islam’s holistic vision of human well-being.

⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din)*, trans. T.J. Winter, *The Book of the Etiquette of Eating* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2000), 55–56.

⁹ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Provisions for the Hereafter (Zād al-Ma’ād)*, trans. Jalal Abualrub (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003), vol. 4, 130–131.

The Qur'an places significant emphasis on cleanliness as a divine command and a precondition for worship: "Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves." (Qur'an 2:222)

"And your garments purify!" (Qur'an 74:4)

Cleanliness is not only encouraged but is considered part of Iman (faith), as the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) stated: "Purity is half of faith." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 223)

These textual sources underpin the ethical and ritual dimensions of ṭaharah, which are reflected in all areas of Muslim life, including food handling and consumption.

Ṭaharah and Food Hygiene: In the realm of food sciences, ṭaharah encompasses several important principles:

- Clean utensils and preparation areas: Islamic law mandates that all cooking and eating implements be free from impurities (najāsah). The presence of contaminants - whether physical, chemical, or spiritual - is considered impermissible.
- Clean hands and body: The Prophet emphasized washing hands before and after eating, a practice modern hygiene strongly affirms. He is reported to have said: "Blessing in food lies in washing the hands before and after eating." (Sunan Abī Dāwūd, 3761)
- Pure and lawful sources: Food must be sourced from halal and ṭayyib means. This includes ensuring the purity of water, the cleanliness of slaughtering methods, and the ethical treatment of animals.
- Environmental cleanliness: Islam encourages cleanliness in living and communal spaces. This includes disposal of waste, prevention of pollution, and protection of food from contamination, aligning with modern public health standards.

The Islamic principle of ṭaharah is highly relevant in today's context of global food safety challenges, such as foodborne illnesses, contamination, and poor hygiene in food processing. It promotes a preventive approach to health, emphasizing cleanliness not just as a personal duty but as a collective ethical responsibility. Research shows that handwashing before meals can reduce diarrheal disease by up to 40% and foodborne illness by up to 30%.¹⁰ The World Health Organization (WHO) also emphasizes personal and environmental hygiene as the most cost-effective tools in disease prevention. Islamic dietary law, with its attention to purity, reflects what modern food safety protocols like Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points (HACCP) now require. Ṭaharah aligns closely with global

¹⁰ Curtis, Valerie, and Sandy Cairncross. "Effect of washing hands with soap on diarrhoea risk in the community: A systematic review." *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 3, no. 5 (2003): 275–277.

Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP), which regulate sanitation in food production. Islamic teachings on hygiene were far ahead of their time, anticipating many modern standards of cleanliness and disease prevention.

Notably, the halal food industry has integrated ṭaharah-based protocols into certification systems. Malaysia's JAKIM and Indonesia's MUI standards both require hygiene audits as part of halal certification, thereby institutionalizing religious purity alongside health compliance.¹¹

Beyond physical hygiene, ṭaharah also entails spiritual purification—a state that is essential for the acceptance of worship. Consuming impure or unlawful food is believed to spiritually pollute the soul, diminishing one's connection with God. Thus, food is not merely sustenance in Islam, but a vehicle for spiritual refinement.

So, Cleanliness is both a physical and spiritual requirement in Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) instructed cleanliness in all aspects of life, including the washing of hands before and after meals and the covering of food.¹² This aligns with contemporary understandings of food hygiene, pathogen prevention, and food safety, making Islamic teachings highly compatible with modern standards of sanitation and public health.

ETHICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS

Humane Animal Treatment

Islamic jurisprudence mandates that animals must be treated with respect and slaughtered humanely. The animal must be healthy at the time of slaughter, and the act must be carried out swiftly, minimizing suffering.¹³ This ethic of compassion aligns with current concerns about factory farming, animal cruelty, and sustainable livestock practices.

One of the distinguishing features of Islamic dietary law is its strong emphasis on the ethical treatment of animals, both before and during the process of consumption. This concern is not incidental but is rooted deeply in the Qur'an, Prophetic traditions (Sunnah), and the interpretations of classical Islamic jurists. The humane treatment of animals (al-ʿinayah bi-l-ḥayawan) is regarded as a moral imperative,

¹¹ Talib, Ariff Azhar, et al. "Food Quality Assurance in Halal Food Manufacturing in Malaysia: A Literature Review." *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2016): 27, 32.

¹² 2. Al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Kitāb al-Aṭʿimah.

¹³ . Riaz, Mian N., and Muhammad M. Chaudry, *Halal Food Production* (Boca Raton: CRC Press, 2003), 35.

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encompassing aspects such as compassion, care, avoidance of cruelty, and respect for the life and dignity of all sentient beings.

The Qur'an affirms the value of all living creatures: "There is not a creature on earth nor a bird that flies with its wings but that they are communities like you." (Qur'an 6:38)

This verse emphasizes that animals form communities and have intrinsic worth. Furthermore, Islam teaches that all life is a trust (amanah) from God, and human beings are stewards (khulafa') who must treat animals with mercy and responsibility.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) provided numerous teachings and examples regarding animal welfare. Among them: "Verily, Allah has prescribed excellence (ihsan) in all things. If you slaughter, then slaughter well. Let one of you sharpen his blade and spare suffering to the animal he slaughters." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 1955)

The Prophet scolded a man who over-sharpened his knife in front of the animal, calling it a double killing (physical and psychological).

He once told a story of a woman punished in Hell for starving a cat, and another of a man rewarded with Paradise for giving water to a thirsty dog, underscoring the spiritual consequences of our treatment of animals.

Islamic law (fiqh) outlines specific rulings to prevent animal cruelty:

- Proper Feeding and Care: Owners are obligated to provide sufficient food, water, and shelter to animals. Neglect is considered sinful.
- Slaughter Ethics (Dhabḥ): Islamic slaughter laws are not only about method but ethics:
- The animal must be healthy and well-treated before slaughter.
- It must not see other animals being slaughtered.
- It should not be restrained in a cruel or painful manner.
- The slaughterer must be competent, and the act must be swift to minimize suffering.

These conditions are codified in manuals such as al-Hidayah and al-Majmu', which stress that even lawful slaughter (ḥalal) is invalidated by unnecessary cruelty.

Prohibited Practices: Islam forbids using animals for target practice, mutilation, or overburdening them beyond their capacity.¹⁴ In Shafi'i and Ḥanafī schools, abuse of animals can render meat makruh

¹⁴ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. Provisions for the Hereafter (Zad al-Ma'ad), trans. Jalal Abualrub. Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003, vol. 4, 130.

(disliked) or even haram (prohibited), especially if it results in unjustifiable pain.¹⁵ This goes beyond food law into broader ethical and theological concerns.

Islamic teachings on humane animal treatment resonate with today's growing awareness of animal rights, factory farming abuses, and ethical consumerism. The modern halal industry, in its emphasis on compliance with mechanical slaughter and mass production, has faced criticism for neglecting the spiritual and ethical components of ihsan in treatment.

Efforts to integrate traditional Islamic ethics into contemporary halal certification - such as those by Halal Monitoring Committees (HMC) or Malaysia's Jakim - increasingly stress animal welfare as essential, not optional. Islamic scholars and bioethicists argue for a "halal and tayyib" standard, where food is not only lawful but good, clean, and just.¹⁶

Additionally, the call for faith-based food ethics is gaining traction in public health and environmental sustainability circles. Islam's teachings on compassion, restraint in consumption, and reverence for life offer a model that intersects with eco-ethical frameworks.

So, this can be said that the Islamic mandate for humane animal treatment is not simply a ritual requirement but a reflection of Islam's broader vision of mercy (rahmah), balance (mizan), and moral responsibility. It bridges the gap between theology and practice, between law and compassion. As the halal food industry continues to expand, reclaiming the ethical foundations of animal welfare within Islamic teachings is not only a religious duty but a contemporary necessity.

Anti-Waste Ethos in Islamic Ethics

A central component of Islamic ethics - especially concerning food and consumption - is the condemnation of wastefulness, known in Arabic as israf (extravagance) and tabdhir (wanton waste). The anti-waste ethos in Islam is not simply a moral recommendation but a spiritually grounded obligation rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah and elaborated upon by classical jurists and ethicists. This principle connects consumption to accountability (hisab), balance (mizan), and stewardship (khilafah) concepts that resonate powerfully with contemporary concerns about overconsumption, food waste, and environmental degradation.

The Qur'an explicitly warns against extravagance and waste: "Indeed, the wasteful are brothers of the devils, and ever has Satan been to his Lord ungrateful." (Qur'an 17:27)

¹⁵ Al-Ghazali. *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din)*, trans. T.J. Winter. The Book of the Etiquette of Eating. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2000, 55.

¹⁶ Bonne, Karijn, and Wim Verbeke. "Religious Values Informing Halal Meat Production and the Control and Delivery of Halal Credence Quality." *Agriculture and Human Values* 25, no. 1 (2008): 35.

"Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, He does not like the extravagant." (Qur'an 7:31)

These verses frame wastefulness as not merely undesirable but spiritually dangerous, associating it with ingratitude and moral deviance. The Qur'an's frequent reminders to appreciate provision (rizq) and avoid excess establish a divine economy of moderation, in which all blessings are to be used responsibly and shared justly.

The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) exemplified frugality in consumption. He encouraged believers to eat modestly, share food, and avoid extravagance.

He ate in small quantities, even when food was abundant. He instructed companions to lick their fingers and clean their plates, saying: "You do not know in which part of the food the blessing lies." (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, 2034)

When performing ablution (wuḍu'), he is reported to have used less than a liter of water, even near abundant sources, showing concern for resource conservation.

Islamic legal and ethical literature elaborates on the concept of israf and tabdhir. According to al-Ghazali, wastefulness is defined not just by quantity, but by intention and context: consuming without need, hoarding while others go hungry, or indulging in luxury that fosters pride or heedlessness is considered spiritually harmful.¹⁷

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, in *Zad al-Ma'ad*, distinguishes between moderate enjoyment of God's blessings and gluttonous excess, arguing that overconsumption leads to both bodily illness and spiritual blindness.¹⁸

Hanafi and Shafii jurists permitted the use of resources for one's comfort but condemned overuse when it led to harm or neglect of communal responsibilities. This is particularly relevant in feasting, wedding banquets, or daily consumption. Food that is prepared in excess and thrown away is often regarded as sinful if avoidable.

Modern data underscores the urgent relevance of Islam's anti-waste ethic. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that one-third of all food produced globally is wasted approximately 1.3 billion tons annually.¹⁹ This not only squanders economic resources but also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and hunger.

¹⁷ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn)*, trans. Nabih Amin Faris, vol. 3 (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1962), 102–104.

¹⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Provisions for the Hereafter (Zād al-Ma'ād)*, trans. Jalal Abualrub (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam, 2003), 4:203–205.

¹⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *Global Food Losses and Food Waste – Extent, Causes and Prevention* (Rome: FAO, 2011), 4.

In Muslim-majority countries, food waste increases significantly during Ramadan, despite the month's emphasis on spiritual discipline and empathy with the poor. Scholars and activists have called for a revival of the anti-waste ethos of Islam, encouraging more ethical consumption, meal planning, donation of excess food, and policy interventions informed by religious values.

Several Islamic environmental organizations now promote faith-based sustainability education, integrating hadiths and Qur'anic verses into food campaigns. For example, initiatives in Malaysia and Indonesia aim to reduce food waste during religious festivals through mosque-led awareness drives. Therefore, anti-waste ethos in Islam exemplifies the religion's deep alignment with values of sustainability, moderation, and social justice. It calls upon individuals and societies to treat all resources, especially food, as divine trusts to be used responsibly, shared generously, and never discarded heedlessly. Reviving this ethical tradition offers a powerful contribution to global efforts addressing food insecurity and environmental crisis, illustrating how Islamic teachings remain both spiritually rich and practically urgent in the modern world.

PREVENTIVE HEALTH AND FUNCTIONAL NUTRITION

The Islamic worldview promotes a holistic understanding of health that encompasses physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being. Central to this perspective is the idea of preventive health care - taking proactive measures to maintain health and prevent illness before it occurs. This aligns closely with the modern field of functional nutrition, which emphasizes dietary choices that support bodily functions, immunity, and long-term vitality. In Islamic thought, food is not only a source of sustenance but also a vehicle for healing (shifa') and a manifestation of divine mercy (rahmah).

The Qur'an speaks frequently of food in the context of health and healing: "Eat of the good things We have provided for you." (Qur'an 2:172), "And We send down from the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe..." (Qur'an 17:82), "There emerges from their bellies a drink, varying in colors, in which there is healing for people." (Qur'an 16:69) referring to honey, widely recognized in both Islamic and modern medicine for its antimicrobial and antioxidant properties.

The Prophetic tradition (Sunnah) further emphasizes moderation, cleanliness, and the consumption of beneficial foods: "The stomach is the house of disease, and abstinence is the most important medicine." (al-Ṭabarani, al-Mu'jam al-Awsat)

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said: "No human ever filled a vessel worse than the stomach." (Sunan al-Tirmidhi, 2380)

He promoted a pattern of balanced, frugal eating - often fasting intermittently, avoiding excess, and consuming functional foods like dates, olive oil, black seed (habbat al-barakah), barley, and honey. Several foods highlighted in Islamic tradition are today classified as functional foods - those that offer benefits beyond basic nutrition, such as boosting immunity or reducing disease risk, for example:

- Dates (al-tamr): Rich in fiber, potassium, and antioxidants. Used traditionally to break fasts and support energy levels.
- Honey (ʿasal): Revered in the Qurʿan for its healing properties; modern studies confirm its antibacterial and anti-inflammatory effects.
- Black Seed (habbat al-barakah): Mentioned in a hadith as a cure for "every disease except death" (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari, 5688). Contains thymoquinone, shown to have immunomodulatory effects.
- Barley (shaʿir): Recommended for fevers and used in the prophetic dish talbinah - now studied for its cholesterol-lowering properties.
- Vinegar, olive oil, milk, and pomegranate are also cited in hadith and Qurʿanic references for their health-promoting qualities.

These align with nutrigenomics and diet-based prevention, which examine how certain foods modulate biological pathways and reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disorders, and obesity. Islamic dietary teachings thus offer a form of traditional functional nutrition, emphasizing preventive health measures centuries before the formal emergence of nutritional science.

In addition to specific foods, the Prophetic lifestyle emphasized:

- Intermittent fasting: The Sunnah of fasting Mondays and Thursdays aligns with current evidence showing benefits of time-restricted eating for metabolic health.
- Mindful eating: Eating slowly, in moderation, and with gratitude (shukr), which fosters both physical and spiritual health.
- Physical activity: The Prophet walked regularly, engaged in sports like horseback riding and archery, and encouraged physical strength.
- Emotional and spiritual well-being: Stress management through prayer, dhikr (remembrance of God), and reliance on divine decree (tawakkul)—important elements of psychosomatic health.

The Islamic framework offers a faith-based model for preventive health that can be valuable in Muslim-majority societies and minority Muslim populations in the West. It promotes:

- Health education grounded in faith.
- Culturally appropriate dietary guidelines in line with halal and ṭayyib standards.
- Community health interventions during Ramadan, Hajj, or mosque-based programs.
- Reduction of overconsumption, sedentary lifestyles, and non-communicable diseases through Islamic teachings on moderation and responsibility.

Research increasingly recognizes the effectiveness of faith-based interventions in promoting dietary change, especially when they align religious values with evidence-based nutrition.²⁰

So, preventive health and functional nutrition are deeply embedded in Islamic ethics, reflecting a vision of human well-being that transcends biomedical models. Through the Qur'an, the Sunnah, and centuries of scholarly interpretation, Islam encourages dietary habits that support health, spiritual mindfulness, and ecological balance. In a time when lifestyle-related illnesses are among the world's greatest health burdens, Islamic teachings offer a powerful framework for health promotion rooted in faith, science, and holistic well-being.

CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS AND GLOBAL RELEVANCE

The Halal Industry and Ethical Consumption

The halal food industry has evolved from basic compliance to include ethical, environmental, and health-conscious concerns. Many halal certification bodies now consider factors such as hygiene, humane treatment of animals, and contamination with harmful substances. This convergence of faith and ethical consumerism speaks to a wider relevance of Islamic food ethics in the modern marketplace. One of the most visible applications of Islamic dietary principles today is the expansive growth of the halal food industry, which now exceeds \$2 trillion globally.²¹ Halal certification has evolved beyond ritual slaughter to encompass traceability, hygiene, ethical sourcing, animal welfare, and environmental impact.²² Countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Gulf states have developed regulatory authorities and halal standards that incorporate Islamic jurisprudence alongside modern quality control systems.

²⁰ Nasir, Naeemah, et al. "Islamic Perspectives on Food and Nutrition: A Narrative Review." *Journal of Religion and Health* 61, no. 1 (2022): 745–763. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01285-3>.

²¹ State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2022, DinarStandard and Salaam Gateway (Dubai: Dubai Economy and Tourism, 2022), 12–14.

²² Syed Farid Alatas and Noraida Endut, "The Ethics of Halal Certification: Beyond Ritual to Responsibility," *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 4, no. 1 (2020): 55.

This has led to collaborations between religious scholars, scientists, and food technologists to ensure that food products not only meet religious criteria but also satisfy global consumer safety and ethical expectations.²³ The integration of ṭayyib, once understated, is increasingly seen as essential to halal integrity, linking Islamic law with functional nutrition, purity, and sustainability.²⁴

Health Promotion through Faith-based Approaches

Islamic principles are increasingly employed in faith-based health initiatives, particularly in Muslim-majority and Muslim-minority contexts. Health campaigns related to obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and food hygiene have begun to integrate Qur'anic teachings, hadiths, and spiritual motivations to encourage healthier lifestyles. for example,

- Mosque-based health screenings and nutrition workshops in the UK, US, and Malaysia.
- Ramadan-focused health education programs teach people how to fast healthily, avoid overeating, and maintain hydration.
- Use of Prophetic dietary models (e.g., Sunnah superfoods) in public messaging to improve nutritional literacy and combat malnutrition.

These initiatives reflect growing recognition that religious values can reinforce public health objectives, especially when tailored to cultural contexts.

Alignment with Global Health Goals

The integration of Islamic dietary ethics with global health agendas reveals a strong alignment between religious values and international public health frameworks. In particular, Islamic principles surrounding lawful (halal), wholesome (ṭayyib), moderate (i'tidal), and clean (ṭaharah) consumption naturally resonate with the aims of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and World Health Organization (WHO) initiatives on nutrition, non-communicable diseases (NCDs), hygiene, and sustainable food systems.

1) SDG 2: Zero Hunger – Promoting Wholesome and Equitable Nutrition

Islamic teachings emphasize nutritional adequacy and food justice. The Qur'anic injunction to give from “the best” of what one consumes (Qur'an 2:267) and the command to care for the poor, orphans, and wayfarers (Qur'an 76:8 - 9) highlight food as a shared right rather than

²³ Fadzilah Majid Cooke et al., “Halal Food Certification and the Transformation of Food Markets: The Case of Malaysia,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 35, no. 1 (2018): 1.

²⁴ Hisham M. Ramadan, *Understanding Halal: The Case for Tayyib as the Future of Halal Certification* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM Press, 2020), 34–50.

a mere commodity. This resonates with SDG 2's emphasis on ending hunger, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture.

The emphasis on ṭayyib foods - those that are pure, nutritious, and safe- reinforces the importance of quality nutrition, particularly in addressing malnutrition in vulnerable communities.

2) SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being Preventing Lifestyle Diseases

Islamic dietary guidance, especially moderation (i'tidal) and prophetic practices such as fasting and natural healing, align closely with SDG 3's goals to reduce premature mortality from NCDs, promote mental health and well-being, and encourage preventive health strategies.

Intermittent fasting, widely practiced during Ramadan and on recommended days like Mondays and Thursdays, is increasingly validated by modern science for its metabolic benefits, including improved insulin sensitivity and reduced inflammation.²⁵ The Qur'anic condemnation of excess - "Eat and drink, but be not excessive" (Qur'an 7:31) - reinforces the ethical imperative against overconsumption and its associated health risks.

3) SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation – Hygiene and Public Health

The Islamic principle of ṭaharah (purity) encompasses personal hygiene, food safety, and water cleanliness. Ritual ablution (wuḍū'), the prophetic instruction to cover food, and the emphasis on sanitary slaughter all reflect early models of public health.

These practices align with SDG 6, which aims to ensure universal access to safe water and sanitation, reduce communicable diseases, and promote hygiene, especially in healthcare and food service contexts. Studies show that handwashing with soap - a core Islamic practice - can reduce diarrheal mortality by over 40%.²⁶

4) SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production – Anti-Waste Ethos

Islamic ethics strongly advocate for sustainability and the avoidance of waste. The Qur'an warns: "Do not waste, for God does not love the wasters" (Qur'an 6:141), and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) discouraged wasting water even when drawing from a flowing river.²⁷

²⁵ Satchidananda Panda, "Circadian Rhythm and Fasting: A Match for Metabolic Health," *Cell Metabolism* 29, no. 6 (2019): 1091.

²⁶ Curtis, Valerie, and Sandy Cairncross. "Effect of Washing Hands with Soap on Diarrhoea Risk in the Community: A Systematic Review." *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* 3, no. 5 (2003): 275.

²⁷ Sunan Ibn Mājah, 425 (on not wasting water).

These teachings support SDG 12, which promotes efficient use of natural resources, reduction of food waste, and sustainable consumption. The anti-extravagance ethos of Islam provides moral support for policy efforts aimed at reducing the ecological footprint of food systems, including meat overproduction and packaging waste.

5) Global Health Campaigns and Interfaith Cooperation

Faith-based approaches are increasingly acknowledged by global institutions like WHO, UNICEF, and the Faith for Positive Change for Children, Families and Communities (FPCC). In Muslim-majority contexts, Islamic teachings on cleanliness, caregiving, nutrition, and dignity can offer culturally resonant paths to:

- Improve vaccine uptake,
- Promote breastfeeding and maternal nutrition,
- Address mental health and disability stigma.
- The Islamic principles of *maṣlaḥah* (public welfare), *amanah* (trust), and human dignity support interfaith partnerships for health equity and community resilience.

Islamic dietary and health principles present a holistic and ethical framework deeply compatible with contemporary global health goals. From food justice and hygiene to environmental stewardship and preventive medicine, Islam offers timeless guidance that can enrich public health policy and practice. As international agencies pursue culturally sensitive and value-based strategies, the incorporation of Islamic principles holds substantial promise for faith-informed, evidence-driven global health initiatives.

CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

While the ethical and scientific richness of Islamic dietary principles holds great promise for enhancing global health and food sustainability, several substantive challenges must be addressed for their full potential to be realized in contemporary contexts.

1) Reductive Interpretations and Legal Formalism

One of the most significant challenges is the widespread misconception that Islamic dietary laws are purely ritualistic or legalistic, concerned solely with the binary of *halal* (permissible) and *haram* (forbidden). This reductive view often overlooks the deeper ethical dimensions of *tayyib* (wholesomeness), *i'tidal* (moderation), and *mizan* (balance), which emphasize not only

what is lawful but also what is beneficial, nutritious, and ecologically responsible. As a result, many consumers and even industry practitioners conflate halal with ritual compliance alone, without considering broader public health, environmental, or ethical implications. Overcoming this narrow interpretation requires educational initiatives that promote a holistic understanding of Islamic dietary ethics grounded in the maqāṣid al-sharī'ah (higher objectives of Islamic law).

2) Insufficient Collaboration Between Scholars and Scientists

There is a critical lack of sustained collaboration between religious scholars, food scientists, public health experts, and policymakers. This disconnect results in a fragmented application of Islamic principles in modern nutrition policy and food regulation. For instance, the halal certification industry often operates independently of nutritional science, focusing primarily on legal and procedural compliance rather than nutritional value or food sustainability. Conversely, many public health campaigns in Muslim-majority contexts fail to engage with the cultural and religious frameworks that shape dietary behavior, thereby limiting their reach and impact. To address this, interdisciplinary platforms and think tanks are needed to foster dialogue between ulama', scientists, and healthcare professionals, ensuring that Islamic principles are not only preserved but also adapted to meet contemporary needs.

3) Need for Empirical Research on Health Outcomes

Another pressing challenge is the paucity of empirical research on the health outcomes associated with Islamic dietary practices. While many Islamic teachings promote behaviors that align with current nutritional science, such as moderation in eating, fasting, hygiene, and ethical sourcing, limited data is quantifying their impact on non-communicable diseases, metabolic health, or mental well-being. For example, the benefits of Sunnah fasting or prophetic dietary recommendations (like honey, dates, and vinegar) are often cited anecdotally or in theological literature, but not always substantiated by rigorous clinical or population-based studies. Future research must bridge this gap by applying epidemiological, behavioral, and clinical methodologies to evaluate the health implications of Islamic dietary models, thereby strengthening their credibility and applicability in global health discourse.

4) Cultural Competency and Public Health Integration

In both Muslim-majority and minority contexts, public health systems often lack the cultural competency to integrate Islamic dietary ethics into nutritional education and policy. This can alienate Muslim communities from mainstream health initiatives and reduce the efficacy of

programs aimed at promoting balanced diets, hygiene, or food safety. Moreover, in multicultural societies, Muslims may face dietary marginalization in institutions such as hospitals, schools, and prisons due to the absence of appropriate halal options or a misunderstanding of Islamic dietary restrictions. Future directions must include culturally sensitive health education, tailored to Islamic values and delivered through community networks such as mosques, Islamic schools, and halal food providers.

5) Ethical and Technological Frontiers

The rise of biotechnology, synthetic foods, and novel processing methods presents new ethical dilemmas for Islamic dietary law. Issues such as lab-grown meat, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), and food additives derived from ambiguous sources require timely and nuanced religious rulings that consider both classical jurisprudence and contemporary science. However, many current fatwas remain reactive rather than proactive, often issued without consultation with food scientists or nutrition experts. Addressing this requires the establishment of Islamic bioethics councils and research centers equipped to evaluate emerging technologies using both fiqh and scientific criteria. These institutions should aim to develop ijtihād-based frameworks that uphold Islamic ethical integrity while remaining adaptable to innovation and change.

Future work must encourage interdisciplinary dialogue, support culturally competent health education, and develop evidence-based strategies for integrating Islamic ethics into mainstream nutritional science.

CONCLUSION

The enduring relevance and multifaceted role of Islamic principles in shaping contemporary understandings of food, nutrition, and public health have been critically examined. Drawing from core Qur'anic concepts and prophetic traditions - particularly ḥalal (lawfulness), ṭayyib (wholesomeness), i'tidal (moderation), mizan (balance), and ṭaharah (hygiene) - the analysis demonstrates that Islamic dietary ethics extend far beyond ritual permissibility. These teachings promote a comprehensive vision of physical, spiritual, and societal well-being that resonates with many modern concerns, including nutritional adequacy, food safety, environmental sustainability, and ethical consumption. The compatibility of Islamic dietary guidance with contemporary nutritional science is evident in areas such as preventive health, functional nutrition, hygiene practices, humane animal treatment, and anti-waste ethics. Moreover, Islamic food principles align closely with several

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of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those targeting hunger, health, sanitation, and responsible consumption. As such, these principles offer a culturally grounded and ethically robust framework for addressing global food challenges and promoting public health in both Muslim-majority and multicultural societies.

However, the practical realization of these ideals faces significant challenges, including legal diversity, commercial reductionism, gaps in health policy integration, and ethical ambiguities around emerging technologies. Addressing these requires renewed engagement between scholars of Islamic law, nutrition science, and public health, as well as the development of interdisciplinary and faith-informed frameworks that are both theologically sound and scientifically demanding. Islamic principles in food and nutrition hold transformative potential for creating more equitable, ethical, and sustainable food systems.

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