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## Islamic Perspective Regarding the Promotion of Health and Participation in Sports Activities

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### Abstract

Sound health is considered a prerequisite for performing any action, whether it is participation in sports or performing any other activity of life. From the perspective of Islam, health and fitness are imperative for the appropriate performance of various religious obligations. Sports and other physical activities are considered very effective means to achieve good health. In this paper, the researchers analyzed diverse Islamic standards and rules with reference to participation in games. Moreover, researchers also analyzed the preservation and maintenance of health in the light of the teachings of Islam. After a brief discussion, it was concluded that the Islamic approach is very clear and Islam endorses the upkeep and maintenance of health, fitness and physical power. It was also concluded that sports and other physical activities of today are variations of such activities performed in the past. The study also claims that Islam promotes involvement in leisure sports and other physical activities carried out to strengthen the body and to retain fitness, while observing Islamic teachings, formulated rules and regulations. It can be inferred that the Holy Prophet (SAW) not only took part in different games but also convinced and encouraged his disciples to take part in sporting activities.

**Keywords:** health, Islamic perspective, participation, promotion, sports activities

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## Introduction

Sports and religion have coexisted and perceived as very important elements which contribute to the social well-being of individuals.<sup>1</sup> Participation in various sports may contribute to develop religious values such as honesty, punctuality, brotherhood, character building and discipline.<sup>2</sup> Studies indicate that involvement in sports is not only important for the enhancement and preservation of physical and mental health, but it also helps to provide enjoyment and satisfaction to the participants.<sup>3</sup>

Researchers have shown that involvement in physical exercise and other leisure sports activities improves the physical fitness and overall health of the participants.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the reduction of various health problems including heaviness, diabetes, high cholesterol, coronary disease and osteoporosis is associated with an increased involvement in sports and other physical activities.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Garry Crawford, *Consuming Sport: Fans, Sport and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Angela Lumpkin, "Teachers as Role Models Teaching Character and Moral Virtues," *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance* 79, no. 2 (2008): 45-50.

<sup>2</sup>Jim Mastrich, *Really Winning: Using Sports to Develop Character and Integrity in Our Boys* (New York: Macmillan, 2002); Ramón Spaaij, "Sport as a Vehicle for Social Mobility and Regulation of Disadvantaged Urban Youth: Lessons from Rotterdam," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 44, no. 2-3 (2009): 247-64.

<sup>3</sup>Ramon B Zabriskie, Neil R Lundberg, and Diane G Groff, "Quality of Life and Identity: The Benefits of a Community-Based Therapeutic Recreation and Adaptive Sports Program," *Therapeutic Recreation Journal* 39, no. 3 (2005): 176; Bonnie Kelinske, Brad W Mayer, and Kuo-Lane Chen, "Perceived Benefits from Participation in Sports: A Gender Study," *Women in Management Review* 16, no. 2 (2001):75-84.

<sup>4</sup>Adrian E Bauman, Rodrigo S Reis, James F Sallis, Jonathan C Wells, Ruth J. F. Loos, Brian W. Martin, and Lancet Physical Activity Series Working Group, "Correlates of Physical Activity: Why Are Some People Physically Active and Others Not?" *The Lancet* 380, no. 9838 (2012): 258-71; William L. Haskell, I-Min Lee, Russell R. Pate, Kenneth E Powell, Steven N. Blair, Barry A Franklin, Caroline A Macera, *et al.*, "Physical Activity and Public Health: Updated Recommendation for Adults from the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association," *Circulation* 116, no. 9 (2007): 1081; Stuart J. H Biddle, Trish Gorely, and David J Stensel, "Health-Enhancing Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour in Children and Adolescents," *Journal of Sports Sciences* 22, no. 8 (2004): 679-701.

<sup>5</sup>Bernard E. Bulwer, "Sedentary Lifestyles, Physical Activity, and Cardiovascular Disease: From Research to Practice," *Critical Pathways in Cardiology* 3, no. 4 (2004): 184-93; Stephanie Anne Devore Goldsmith, "Adolescent Participation in Traditional Martial Arts: Effects of Training on Risk Behaviors and Psychological Wellbeing," (PhD Dissertation, Loma Linda University, 2013),

[https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://r.search.yahoo.com/\\_ylt=AwrJ6y1R.eJetLIAA1hXNyoA:ylu=X3oDMTEyazNpcWwwBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDQzAwOTRfMQRzZWMDc3lRV=2/RE=1591962065/RO=10/RU=http%3a%2f%2fscholarsrepository.llu.edu%2fcgi%2fviewcontent.cgi%3farticle%3d1121%26context%3detd/RK=2/RS=rCPURZaDLFGdpvs4jtzGjdOut9M-&httpsredir=1&article=1121&context=etd](https://scholarsrepository.llu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt=AwrJ6y1R.eJetLIAA1hXNyoA:ylu=X3oDMTEyazNpcWwwBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDQzAwOTRfMQRzZWMDc3lRV=2/RE=1591962065/RO=10/RU=http%3a%2f%2fscholarsrepository.llu.edu%2fcgi%2fviewcontent.cgi%3farticle%3d1121%26context%3detd/RK=2/RS=rCPURZaDLFGdpvs4jtzGjdOut9M-&httpsredir=1&article=1121&context=etd)

Islamic position is evident in terms of supporting the overall quality of health. Islam emphasizes health, fitness, and physical advancement. In this regard, the Prophet (SAW) said, “A strong believer is better and dearer to God than a weak believer, though in both is good.”<sup>6</sup> It is evident from ancient Islamic history that many games such as walking, racing, running, horse riding and racing, and archery which are popular today were also quite popular among early Muslims.<sup>7</sup> Participation in sports activities was never prohibited and considered harmful in Islam and Muslim communities. Islam’s stance about preserving and retaining physical well-being is very well known and Islam stresses nutrition, wellness, and the development of physical strength. In a famous book *Zad-al-Ma'aad*, as quoted in Ogunsanya, Jephtah and Olaniyi, are mentioned many advantages of sports.<sup>8</sup>

The book shows that Islam does not ban anything that is intended to benefit people, so sports are permitted keeping in view some Islamic rules regarding participation. These guidelines include: a) the individual sport should not result in misconduct in religious duties, b) it is obligatory that the participant should not harm other participants, c) participation is allowed with the condition that the participants should not hurt others’ feelings and spirits, d) the participants should not become biased or partial, e) the participants must avoid lying, playing foul and playing part and, f) the participants should avoid mixed-gender play. Furthermore, Ibn al-Qayyim demonstrated in *Al-Turuq Al-Hakimah* (1/406-408) that it is mandatory for the head of the state to forbid the mixing of men and women in public areas and women should not participate in those sports activities which are specified for men. The above argument stresses morality management. Moreover, over emphasis in terms of taking food, drinking or clothing is forbidden in Islam. In this regard, Qur’an affirms that “does not forbid the good things which Allah made lawful, and do not transgress that Allah has not transgressed.”<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Health in the Perspective of Islam

The word ‘Islam’ is derived from the root “SA-la-MA,” which stands for security and peace. The term ‘Muslim’ refers to the person who submits his / her will to Allah Almighty. Islam is considered a complete code of life and it is not only a religion.

### 2.1. Maintenance and Preservation of Health in the Light of Islam

Health is generally considered a condition of being well. It enables one to cope with diverse situations in a successful manner. It is imperative to stress the importance of

<sup>6</sup>Nada Ibrahim, and Mohamad Abdalla, A Critical Examination of Qur’an 4: 34 and its Relevance to Intimate Partner Violence in Muslim Families,” *Journal of Muslim Mental Health* 5, no. 3 (2010): 327-349.

<sup>7</sup>Badi Aldousari, “The History and the Philosophy of Sport in Islam,” (Ballstate University, Masters Dissertation, 2000).

<sup>8</sup>Jephtah Olaniyi Ogunsanya, “Perceived Effects of Moral and Ethics of Human Resources towards Sports Development in Southwest, Nigeria,” 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Maidah 05:87-88.

maintaining good health. It helps to lead a healthier and fuller life, which ensures a better quality of life.

Healthy people make nations and this statement seems to be valid only when we adopt and follow the principles of healthy living. It is important to consider various facts which contribute to a healthy lifestyle in order to understand the significance of maintaining good health. These include diet, physical activity, control of sleep and stress.<sup>10</sup>

For a successful life, it is obligatory to maintain an optimum level of health. For this purpose, the prime responsibility of maintaining good health falls upon the individual him / herself. In this regard, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, “Your bodies have a right upon you.”<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2. Islam and Cleanliness

Cleanliness as per the Cambridge dictionary is “the state of being cleaned or the act of keeping things clean.” It is very important to ensure cleanliness in various domains, such as physical, emotional, moral, and even economic domain. Cleanliness is the most important step towards a healthy life.<sup>12</sup> It can prevent and cure transmissible diseases among human beings. Viruses and other infectious diseases can be prevented by active cleaning. According to Kagan et al. (2002), important tips for preserving personal cleanliness include daily brushing and shaving, thoroughly washing hands before and after each meal, keeping neatly polished nails, and eating healthy food.<sup>13</sup> If individuals have good personal hygiene propensities, it is highly unlikely that germs and parasites will enter their body. Islam gives due emphasis on the need and importance of personal hygiene, either for performing religious obligations or in any other activity of life. Health, cleanliness and hygiene of the body and mind occupy an important place in Islam’s perspective. In fact, caring for hygiene is considered part of faith and good habit.

Regarding the cleanliness and purification of body, Allah Almighty says, “Truly, God loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and loves those who purify themselves.”<sup>14</sup> Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) urged his companions (RA) to live a life of peace and purity. With reference to the value of personal hygiene and cleanliness he said that “cleanliness is

<sup>10</sup>Jean-Philippe Chaput, Lars Klingenberg, Mads Rosenkilde, Jo-Anne Gilbert, Angelo Tremblay, and Anders Sjödin. “Physical Activity Plays an Important Role in Body Weight Regulation,” *Journal of Obesity* (2011), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2931400/>.

<sup>11</sup>Imam Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, Book 67, Hadith 133, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari/67/133>

<sup>12</sup>Amy Simonne, Jeffrey Brecht, Steve Sargent, Mark Ritenour, and Keith R. Schneider, “Good Worker Health and Hygiene Practices: Training Manual for Produce Handlers,” *Food and Agricultural Sciences’ General Collection* (2010): 1-11.

<sup>13</sup>Lori J. Kagan, Allison E. Aiello, and Elaine Larson, “The Role of the Home Environment in the Transmission of Infectious Diseases,” *Journal of Community Health* 27, no. 4 (2002): 247-267.

<sup>14</sup>Qur’ān: al Baqara 2:222.

half the faith of Muslims.”<sup>15</sup> The aforementioned saying of the Holy Prophet (SAW) signifies the value and place of cleanliness in Muslim societies.

### 2.3. Islam and Diet

Diet is a basic need of the individual and it is considered an important part of a healthy lifestyle. A balanced diet can help to attain and maintain a healthy weight that in turn helps to reduce the risk of chronic diseases and improves the overall health of individuals.<sup>16</sup> Malnutrition can lead to disease and chronic conditions of health. Long-term under nutritional implications include an elevated risk of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.<sup>17</sup> Allah says in the Holy Qur’ān, “Eat of the good things which we have provided for you.”<sup>18</sup> Regarding this notion, it is narrated in the Holy Qur’ān, “Eat of what is lawful and wholesome on the earth.”<sup>19</sup> On another occasion, Allah Almighty says, “Eat and drink, but do not waste, surely God does not love the extravagant.”<sup>20</sup>

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) persuaded his followers to eat moderately. It is narrated by Umar (RA) that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, “The believer is eating in one stomach while the Kāfir is eating in seven.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) guided his followers to defend themselves from diseases caused by excessive and unhygienic consumption of food and drinks. “The son of Adam does not fill any vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat a few mouthfuls, to keep him going. If he must do that (fill his stomach), then let him fill one third with food, one third with drink and one third with air.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Muslim b Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim*, “The Book of Purification,” Hadith no, 432.

<sup>16</sup>Lawrence H. Kushi, Colleen Doyle, Marji McCullough, Cheryl L. Rock, Wendy Demark-Wahnefried, Elisa V. Bandera, Susan Gapstur et al., “American Cancer Society Guidelines on Nutrition and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention: Reducing the Risk of Cancer with Healthy Food Choices and Physical Activity,” *CA: a Cancer Journal for Clinicians* 62, no. 1 (2012): 30-67.

<sup>17</sup>Cara L. Eckhardt, “Micronutrient Malnutrition, Obesity, and Chronic Disease in Countries undergoing the Nutrition Transition: Potential Links and Program/Policy Implications,” No. 583-2016-39710. 2006.

<sup>18</sup>Al-Baqarah 02:173.

<sup>19</sup>Al-Baqarah 02:168.

<sup>20</sup>Al-Araf 07:31.

<sup>21</sup>al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, Trans., Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Maktabat Dar-us-Salam, 1997), Hadith 5396, 5397. <https://icraa.org/hadith-eating-one-seven-intestines/>

<sup>22</sup>Abu Esa Tirmidhi, *Jami Tirmidhi*, “Book of Zuhd,” Chapter “Chapter: What Has Been Related About It Being Disliked to Eat Much,” Hadith no 2380; Ibn Maajah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Book of Food, Hadith 3349.

## 2.4. Islam and the Use of Narcotics

Gambling, cheating and the use of narcotics are injurious to health.<sup>23</sup> Islam and health education both discourage all those activities which are harmful / damaging to human health. Research revealed that drinking too much wine weakens the immune system and makes the body inclined towards multiple diseases.<sup>24</sup> Likewise, research also indicated that psychological attributes such as self-identity, self-consciousness are affected due to the use of alcohol. It can also result in nervousness, and impaired judgment.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from these, Wang et al. (2012) showed that liver is especially vulnerable to damage (which often leads to brain impairment) due to alcohol intake<sup>26</sup>. Armaghani et al. (2013) concluded that alcohol warnings and use of narcotics together increase the risk liver diseases and reduce the immunity.<sup>27</sup> Wine is intensely prohibited in Islam and this prohibition was implemented stride by stride. Allah Almighty gives an ultimatum in the Holy Qur'ān and calls on the believers not to drink wine, "Oh you who believe! Wine, gambling, (sacrificing to) idols and lottery is unclean and Satan's works; shun it to be saved." According to the saying of Qur'ān, "Satan only desires to cause enmity and hatred to spring in your midst by means of wine and gambling, and to keep you off from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. Will you then desist?"<sup>28</sup> In the same context with reference to the prohibition of intoxicants, Allah Almighty says, "O you who believe! Do not go near prayer when you are intoxicated until you know (well) what you say."<sup>29</sup> In another verse Qur'ān says, "They ask you about wine and gambling. Say: In both of them there are a great sins and few profits for men. However, their sin is greater than their profits."<sup>30</sup> Umme Salmah (RA), referring to the use of intoxicants, recited that Hazrat Muhammad (SAW) prohibited all intoxicants and *Mufattir*.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, on one occasion,

<sup>23</sup>Mohammadreza Sattari, Siminozar Mashayekhi, and Solmaz Mashayekhi, "Islam and Addiction," *Pharmaceutical Sciences* 18, no. 3 (2012): 151-158.

<sup>24</sup>Elizabeth J. Kovacs, and Kelly A. N. Messingham, "Influence of Alcohol and Gender on Immune Response," *Alcohol Research and Health* 26, no. 4 (2002): 257-263.

<sup>25</sup>H. Joe Wang, Samir Zakhari, and M. Katherine Jung, "Alcohol, Inflammation, and Gut-Liver-Brain Interactions in Tissue Damage and Disease Development," *World Journal of Gastroenterology* WJG 16, no. 11 (2010): 1304-13.

<sup>26</sup>H. Joe Wang, Bin Gao, Samir Zakhari, and Laura E. Nagy, "Inflammation in Alcoholic Liver Disease," *Annual Review of Nutrition* 32 (2012): 343-368.

<sup>27</sup>Sheyan J Armaghani, Dennis S. Lee, Jesse E. Bible, Kristin R. Archer, David N. Shau, Harrison Kay, Chi Zhang, Matthew J. McGirt, and Clinton J. Devin, "Preoperative Narcotic Use and its Relation to Depression and Anxiety in Patients undergoing Spine Surgery," *Spine* 38, no. 25 (2013): 2196-2200.

<sup>28</sup>Al-Maidah 05:90- 91.

<sup>29</sup>An-Nisa 04:43.

<sup>30</sup>Al-Baqarah 02:219.

<sup>31</sup>*Sunan Abu-Dawood*, "Kitaab al Ijara," 280/3.

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, “One who is disobedient to parents, gambles, harsh after charity and is a habitual drunkard shall not enter paradise.”<sup>32</sup>

### 2.5. Islam and Participation in Sports Activities

In Islam, healthy and powerful individuals are preferred. Upon this notion the Prophet (SAW) said, “A strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer.”<sup>33</sup> Prophet Muhammad (SAW) urged his followers to learn basic techniques for activities such as wrestling, camel riding and horse riding for maintaining their physical health and strength, so that they could protect their faith from their enemies.

Islam promotes good nutrition. It allows both gender (males and females) to involve themselves in healthy physical activities in order to attain and uphold a strong and vigorous lifestyle. Islam requires women to participate in sports activities but within four walls, there are some limits for them. Muslims are allowed to take part in sports activities to protect and preserve their health and well-being. With respect to participation in sports, the teaching of Qur’ān is clear and the Holy Qur’ān affirms that “the good things that God has made lawful are not forbidden and that they do not go beyond the boundaries that Allah has not limited.”<sup>34</sup>

Unlike the common misconception that athletic practices are disallowed in the religion of Islam, after the current debate it appears that Islam encourages not only participation in sports but also human welfare. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) also stressed the significance of sports, “Entertain yourself and play, for indeed I dislike harshness to be seen in your religion.”<sup>35</sup>

The Holy Prophet (SAW) used horses, camels, mules and donkeys for riding and travelling. It is evident from the classical literature that the animals he most often used for riding were horses.<sup>36</sup> On one occasion, Allah Almighty says in the Qur’ān, “For you to ride and [as] ornament, he has created the horses, mules and donkeys. And He makes what you don’t know.”<sup>37</sup> Regarding the use of horses, the Prophet (SAW) said, “Everything with which a man amuses himself is vain except three (things): a man’s training of his horse, his playing with his wife and his shooting with his bow and arrow.”<sup>38</sup> Regarding the benefits of horses, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said, “There is goodness in the forelocks of horses till the Day of Resurrection.”<sup>39</sup> The Holy Prophet (SAW) personally participated in

<sup>32</sup>*Sunan Nasai*, “Kitaab al Ashriba,” 318/8.

<sup>33</sup>Muslim b Hajjaj, *Sahih-Muslim*, Book of Destiny, Hadith no 2664. <https://sunnah.com/urn/264410>

<sup>34</sup>Al-Maida 05:87.

<sup>35</sup>*Jami as Suyuti*.

<sup>36</sup>Abu-Dawood: 2565

<sup>37</sup>An-Nahl 16:08.

<sup>38</sup>Abu Dawood Sulaiman b Ash’as, *Sunan Abu Dawood*, “Book of Jihad,” Abu-Dawood:2507, <https://sunnah.com/abudawud/15/37>

<sup>39</sup>Ibn Majah, *Sunan Ibn Majah*, “The Chapter of Business Transactions,” Hadith 2305, 2393.



various walking and racing activities. Hazrat Ayesha (RA) said while she was on a journey along with the Messenger of Allah (SAW). I had a race with him (the Prophet) and I outstripped him on my feet. When I became fleshy, (again) I had a race with him (the Prophet) and he outstripped me. He said: This is for that outstripping.<sup>40</sup> As narrated by Hazrat Ali (RA), “When he walked, because of the speed and force of the legs, it seemed as if he was descending from a high place.”<sup>41</sup> Abu Huraira narrated in the same context with reference to the vigorous walk of the Holy Prophet, “I did not see anyone walk faster than him, as is the earth folded for him. A few moments ago, he would be here, and then there. We found it difficult to keep pace when we walked with him and he walked at his normal pace.”<sup>42</sup> Archery had a momentous place in the life of the Holy Prophet as he said, “All of you should be entertaining. It is the best thing that you do for entertainment.”<sup>43</sup> The Holy Prophet (SAW) always praised those who were good at shooting arrows among his followers. He used the sentence, “May my mother and father be sacrificed for you.”<sup>44</sup>

### 3. Conclusion

Keeping in view the above brief discussion, it can be concluded that Islam strenuously endorses the upkeep and maintenance of health. For this purpose, Islam strictly discourages the use of all those things which are harmful for human health whether it is excessive food, use of intoxicants or even an unhygienic way of living. The current study also reaffirmed that Islam encourages participation in sports and physical activities for firming up bodily strength and fitness, while considering and following the Islamic teachings and framed rules and regulations. It can also be concluded that the Holy Prophet (SAW) not only participated in various games but persuaded and encouraged his followers to participate in sports activities aimed to prepare people to war and that were called games with a purpose. These games included horse riding, archery, throwing spears, swimming, wrestling, horse and camel racing. It is hoped that this study will be significant in highlighting the importance of sports in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

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<sup>40</sup>*Sunan Abu Dawwod*, “Kitab-al-Jihād,” Book 14, Hadith 2572.

<sup>41</sup>At Tirmidhi, *Shamail-e-Muhammadiyah*, “The Walking of Rasulullah,” Hadith 117.

<sup>42</sup>Tirmidhi, *Shamail-e-Muhammadiyah*, “The Walking of Rasulullah,” Hadith 116. <https://sunnah.com/shamail/19>

<sup>43</sup>Kanzu’l-Ummal, 4:292

<sup>44</sup>Imam Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, “Good Manners and Form al-Adab,” Chapter: Saying “Let my father and mother be sacrificed for you,” Hadith 6184.

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