

Eat to Live or Live to Eat?

By Rabia Salim, Manchester

I am a mother of three fairly young children, and after I had the kids, I realised how great fasting was for setting a routine, getting healthy and simplifying my life. Also there are many Islamic etiquettes of eating that I have passed on to my children. When my oldest would try to eat on the go, my aim was to get her to sit down at a fixed time, eat with her right hand, eat what was in front of her and try everything on her plate¹. These things are in Islam because it affects spirituality and our morals². What also changed in our lives is my husband developed a disease of the colon, ulcerative colitis, which is the inflammation of digestive body cells. It is also related to the immune system, but I learnt it is largely connected to the food he ate. I knew we needed to focus more on the effect of food and eating.

Diligently my neighbour and I read up on conditions that bothered my family and hers such as asthma, eczema and the major things that were affecting our home, diseases called auto immune diseases. Her husband has Multiple Sclerosis and mine had Ulcerative Colitis. I say it in the past tense, as we had to get his colon removed ultimately, it was so severe.

Seeing as we were the gatekeepers of our kitchens, we both tried to cook differently. This meant foods low in sugar and carbs. And less processed. We could do this! She exclaimed to me one day that her son's eczema had really cleared up. She also was amazed as her holistic doctor had prescribed a gluten and lactose free diet to

achieve this! Which made me wonder; was my husband's condition afflicted by common foods? It was too late to reverse the disease. Her son's eczema was gone, our husbands still had a way to go.

8 years on we eat differently and my husband has improved. His colon had to go but would his body adapt? Spice and fat levels need to be constantly controlled. I learnt about eating to live, as we were doing a kitchen science on how food affected our energy levels, health and even mood.

At the same time I was realising how Ramadan was detoxing my poor gut from all that work. My body was healing and my time management improved when I fasted in this month from focusing on spirituality and those less fortunate than me. So this is how food affects our morals and empathy for others.

Our lives have changed but my husband can still eat; with embracing food that doesn't stress his body out, with health benefits for me and the children too. I felt like chocolate bingeing today but we went for a smaller dose of chocolate, an avocado salad, vegetable rice, a protein, a fruit salad, banana pancakes, a smoothie, an omelette, homemade bread and nuts and milk for snack, and one sweet. None of it sounds that bad and it sure didn't taste bad. I feel our approach fits in with Islamic guidelines as well of eating food that is pure ('tayyeb') and halal. My neighbour and I have many life changing, healthy, delicious recipes, shared by that holistic doctor who understood the link between food and health.

All praise belongs to God, gone are the pre operation, helpless days when the disease took over and my husband was eating boiled rice and steamed chicken just so he

had enough energy to get up and gradually to get moving and back to work.

Sometimes if I get too conscious about what we're eating, Chapter Al-Nahl of the Holy Qur'an really heartens me. It states God's bounties for humans for example in verse 12, "Therewith He grows corn for you, and the olive and the date-palm, and the grapes, and all manner of fruit. Surely, in that is a Sign for a people who reflect"³. There is a mention of land animals and seafood too. (4) Sounds delicious to me, and it's about eating balanced, and more of the good

things, rather than overindulging in detrimental things. It depends on individuals lifestyles. My neighbour and I didn't completely clear out our old foods, but only small changes made a difference. Some patients with major diseases have to completely transform their diets. Anyway our changes were worth my time, and money. As for people that can't afford to go with cleaner ingredients, some recipes only require 3 basic items many of us have at home. It's just getting the best you can afford and cooking it. May God bless us with brilliant health.

REFERENCES

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- (3) The Holy Qur'an 16:12.
- (4) The Holy Qur'an 16 : 6, 15.