

Part 2: Healing Our Bodies

Our journey of self-awareness and self-care must begin with healing our physical selves. In the spirit of self-sacrifice, women are usually too preoccupied with meeting the needs and demands of others to take care of their own physical health. The result is fatigue and stress, chronic aches and pains, ailments that become increasingly complicated, and bodies that feel and look much older than they actually are. Furthermore, when this sacrifice is not rewarded with the appreciation and concern that we expect, we feel frustrated and resentful, and this has a negative impact on our closest relationships.

Healing our physical selves requires, first and foremost, changes in our attitude.

First, we are not superhuman, so if we do not take care of our bodies, they *will* suffer. And **if we are physically unwell, unfit, in pain, or simply exhausted, we will be able to serve neither The Creator nor His Creation**, and our goals related to both this world and the next will remain unfulfilled. Imam Ghazzali (rah) compares the human body to the horse on which a horse-rider (the human soul) rides his way to his destination. While we do not want to make taking care of the horse a distraction that prevents us from moving towards our destination, we must ensure that the horse is capable of consistently carrying us forward. Taking care of our bodily selves with the intention of better enabling ourselves to fulfil the responsibilities that Allahﷻ has placed upon us, is as meritorious as fulfilling those responsibilities itself.

Second, **neglecting our health is not an act of piety.** Like everything else, our body does not belong to us, but rather it belongs to Allahﷻ and has been entrusted to us as an *amanah*. To neglect the needs of our body is a violation of this trust, for which we will be held accountable by Allahﷻ. On the other hand, to take care of our physical health is a *sunnah* of our beloved Prophetﷺ and with the intention of following his blessed way, becomes an act of worship.

Third, taking care of our bodily health does not only involve getting treatment when we fall sick, but rather **includes taking measures to keep our bodies functioning optimally**, as any deficiency in our physical performance will translate into a deficiency in our *deen* along with our *dunya*. If our ill-health resulting from our own negligence renders us unable to wake up for, or stand or concentrate in prayer, or unable to tend to our children's needs, who do we have to blame other than ourselves?

Fourth, **nobody else will take care of us.** If we are waiting for others to express their concern, and take out time and put in an effort to take care of us, we will undoubtedly be disappointed. **Our physical health is our own responsibility.**

What are some of the questions we need to ask ourselves in order to get started?

1. Do I have any symptoms that need to be checked? Any unexplained aches and pains, or other symptoms like a rash or dizziness MUST be checked by a doctor. If we are chronically fatigued, this is also usually a symptom of thyroid problem or a Vitamin D deficiency, and must be investigated. Remember, a Google search, or advice by a friend who experiences something similar is NOT a substitute for a certified medical practitioner.
2. Are there any prescribed medicines I should be taking? Very often women are negligent about following through with treatment prescribed by the doctor. If the doctor has prescribed a certain medication or other treatment, you must complete it as per the doctor's orders. *Remember, that obtaining the best treatment available to you is the sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ.*
3. Am I eating well? Unfortunately in this day and age, most of us eat way more than we need, but the food is not good for us. Infact, much of what we nutrient is downright harmful for our health and well-being. A lot of previously held views regarding recommended nutrient intake have now been proven wrong (e.g. fats used to be considered categorically evil, but have now emerged as actually healthy for us!), so we must educate ourselves regarding what is truly nourishing for our bodies and what is really unhealthy, learn to read labels, and make smart choices with regards to what we put in our bodies.
4. Am I drinking enough water? Water is essential for our body to thrive, and it is critical for our health to remain well-hydrated. The recommended amount in litres for every individual is their body weight in kilograms multiplied by 0.033 (So, for example, 2.3 litres/day for someone weighing 70 kg!). In order to ensure that we are drinking enough, we should fill out water bottles in that amount in the morning, and make sure that they are finished by the time we sleep.
5. Am I sleeping well? Most women are not only chronically sleep deprived, the quality of whatever sleep they do get is also poor. As a result, they suffer from a host of physical and even psychological and emotional issues, and their lives and relationships are disrupted. We must start sleeping *earlier*, sleeping *enough*, and ensure that our sleep is truly restorative. *In this regard the blessed sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ provides the best framework: sleeping soon after Isha, staying awake after Fajr and availing the barakah of the morning hours, and taking an afternoon nap.*
6. Am I moving enough? Most women live highly sedentary lives, and this lack of movement is a cause of many physical ailments, with too much sitting considered even worse for health than smoking. Experts suggest 10,000 steps everyday for optimum health; exercising a few times a week in addition to this is also highly recommended.
7. Am I stressed? Stress may be a psychological or emotional condition, but it has very real physical symptoms, which may get strong enough to incapacitate us. These include bodily pains, insomnia, hormonal imbalances, eating disorders and even inability to conceive. We must identify the stressors in our lives and eliminate them, and on the other hand, we must consciously add to our life that which relaxes us and makes us happy.

To be continued...