

Good Habits for Good Health

For even apparently small matters like drinking water, eating food, and keeping clean and tidy, the Prophet gave advice. He is noted to have said, "Cleanliness is half of faith."

*Oh Ye People! Eat of the good things
that We have provided for you.
And be grateful to Allah,
if it is Him ye worship.*

Qu'ran 2:172

*The blessings of food lies in washing hands
before and after eating.*

Prophet Muhammad (al-Tirmidhi & Sunan Abu Dawud)

*If it did not place an excessive
burden upon my community,
I would command
them to clean their teeth with
miswak [a tooth stick] before
each of the five daily prayers.*

Prophet Muhammad (agreed upon)

*What I fear concerning my community is a large paunch, oversleep,
idleness, and the lack of certainty.*

Prophet Muhammad (Kanz al-'Ummal, 3.460)

School-Age Activities

Activity 1: Body, Mind, Spirit Balls

Materials: 3 bright, soft, rubber balls with "body," "mind" and "spirit" written on each

What to Do: Throw the balls out one at a time to children. The child who catches the ball tells something he/she would do that day to feed his/her mind, body or spirit, depending on which ball is caught. Sample ideas include reading more Qur'an and other books, watching less TV, eating less junk food, and getting more exercise.

Tips: Do this activity during morning assembly to get everyone energized and thinking healthy for the day. Encourage parents to do this activity with children at home.

Activity 2: Supermarket Field Trip

Materials: Pencils, paper, calculator, copy of "food pyramid"

What to Do: Plan a field trip to the supermarket. Determine what health-related items are important to buy for people in a homeless shelter. Use the "food pyramid" or other guidelines for healthy eating to determine priorities for shopping. Children can think of issues that might be important for running the homeless shelter, such as food storage, meal planning, as well as cost. Have children work with a budget and have them tally up the items as selected.

Tips: Contact a local homeless shelter and plan this activity with shelter organizers. Invite a shelter organizer as a guest on the field trip. Ask parents to contribute money toward this project so you can come up with a real budget, donating the bought goods to the shelter. Develop this into an ongoing service learning project. Stay safe on field trips.

Activity 3: Exercise Videos

Materials: TV, VCR, exercise videos, exercise journals, plenty of space

What to Do: Get children moving their bodies through group exercise to fun exercise videos. Choose different exercise styles and paces from energetic to calm stretching. Teach children about the different types of exercise (aerobic, anaerobic) and have them keep exercise journals recording how much they do of each type.

Tips: Islam requires modest interactions between males and females so we recommend that exercise be done in a single-sex environment. Children should wear appropriate clothing. Keep drinking water on hand.

Activity 4: Your State Banquet

Materials: A selection of foods produced in your state; a banquet set-up in the assembly hall or classroom.

What to Do: Explore food production in your state. Have a banquet serving only those foods produced in your state. What areas of the "food pyramid" are covered by the food produced in your state? Discuss export and import of food items. Determine the amount of calories in the food items served at your banquet. Calculate how much of the food can be burned by exercise and regular activity.

Tips: Use this activity to explore the geography and history of your state. If your school permits, have your class plant a garden in which you grow produce; your next banquet could be from produce grown in your school garden. Don't waste food at your banquet.

Activity 5: Give Up That Unhealthy Habit!

Materials: A variety of presentation materials, including audio-visual technologies, flipchart, easel, display boards, charts, and graphs

What to Do: Children prepare persuasive reports designed to convince others to change an unhealthy habit. These reports should include statistics and graphs. The report can suggest steps toward changing and/or eliminating the unhealthy habit. Children also develop the standards to evaluate their reports to include the spiritual, mental, and physical aspects used to convince others to change the unhealthy habit.

Tips: Have a discussion with children about all kinds of unhealthy habits and list the ones arising from the discussion. The unhealthy habits may affect bodies, minds, spirits, the environment, animals, etc. Have them think about who they are trying to persuade in their reports: parents, neighbors, children, adults, groups of people, individuals, etc. Come up with creative ideas about the kinds of forums children can use to persuade others depending on their audience: radio or TV ads, dinner table, sports arena, mosque, fast food restaurant, company board meeting, U.S. Congress, playground, etc.