

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Lifestyles for the Optimum Quality of Life.

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### **Abstract**

Adopting and maintaining positive lifestyles is an individual's choice. Having and maintaining positive lifestyles is to prevent the development of the disease and to achieve an optimum quality of life (QoL). Many quotes by known philosophers and famous celebrities denote the importance of positive lifestyles to generate happiness, satisfaction in life, and survival of humankind. Adoption of positive lifestyles requires supporting environments and self-control. Evidence from the literature has shown that long-lived populations always adopt positive lifestyles such as a stress-free daily ritual, consume mainly plant-based food, and religion, have strong social connectivity, and are supported by healthier environments. Religious practices seem to promote the individuals, families, and the community well-being through their strong belief in the teaching of religion and moderation practices in all aspects of life. For example, Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) strongly urged Muslim followers to look after their bodies through positive lifestyles such as sleeping early and rising early, eating less and stopping before feeling full, eating slowly, eating together with others, drinking water slowly, intermittent fasting and be active physically. Lifestyles that are hazardous to health such as being too sedentary, or too stressful, unhealthy dietary practices, and substance abuse should be changed or modified to prevent the development of diseases, reduce the quality of life, and sustain a long life.

**Keywords:** *Positive lifestyles, quality of life, longevity, religious teaching, negative lifestyles.*

## Introduction

Lifestyles are the way people live. It is a choice or an action we make which affects our life [1]. It is reflected in people's views about life, their action, and their culture. Examples of lifestyle behaviors include sleep habits, eating patterns, physical activity, stress management practices, and drinking habits. Positive lifestyles can benefit individuals and groups, whereas negative lifestyles can lead to poor physical, mental, and social well-being, and quality of life. Some of the diseases related to lifestyles include ischemic heart disease, stroke, non-insulin dependent Diabetes Mellitus (NIDDM), obesity, chronic obstructive lung disease (COAD), cirrhosis of the liver, cancers, etc.

Some of the positive lifestyles mentioned in the literature include adequate daily rest and sleep, increased intake of plant-based foods, eat more bread and cereals, select healthy fats, drinking a lot of water, regular physical activity, avoiding sedentary living, maintaining an ideal weight, not dependence to tobacco, illicit drugs, or alcohol, cheerful and happy life [2]. The opposite behaviors are negative and bad for health. It was shown in many studies that people can improve their health and quality of life by adopting the six lifestyle elements. These include selecting and taking of a healthy diet, performing regular physical activity, enhancing brain activity, participating in social and community activities, regularly visiting the health clinic, and avoiding risky behavior [3][4]. Lifestyle change or modification from a negative to a positive one is about changing long-term habits, usual diet, or physical activity, and keeping the new behavior going for months or years. The process is painstaking process, require perseverance, patience, and motivation [5].

The main goals of having and maintaining a positive lifestyle are to avoid the development of the disease and to achieve an optimum quality of life (QoL). QoL is the extent to which a person is healthy, comfortable with life, and able to participate or benefit from live events [6]. It is about experiencing a sense of happiness and

meaning in life, feeling satisfied, and secured, and having a sense of belonging to the community. QoL is considered a primary goal of lifestyle intervention or modification. It is measured using various indicators such as wealthiness, employability, the environmental exposure (housing/ air pollution), wellness (life expectancy, burden of disease), education, property ownership, social security, and freedom. A cross-sectional study using a self-administered questionnaire for QoL among primary health care physician in Madinah, Saudi Arabia found that lower QoL was associated with unhealthy lifestyle factors. QoL in this study was significantly lower among physicians with obesity, those using butter and animal fat for cooking, and those eating meals out > 3 times per week [7].

### Lifestyles of the long-life population

Longevity refers to the duration of life, particularly that of exceptionally long-lived individuals. Some populations were found to live longer than others. Does longevity depend on being genetically determined, on lifestyles or cultures or on the environment that they live in? Many studies had observed that the longevity in some of the population was associated with active lifestyles, healthy diets, and relaxed environment [8][9][10]. The lifestyles of these populations are well preserved, sustainable by generation due to the political stability, economically stable and successful, easily accessible to modern healthcare, good sanitation and hygiene, and communal connectivity [11]. In terms of environment, warmer climates and ocean proximity have been found to lower the mortality rates and support longevity [12]. However, WHO has found much evidence that green spaces in the urban areas are vital to support healthy living, sustained life and promote longevity [13].

Life expectancy refers to the number of years a person can expect to live or the average remaining years of life that can be expected at a given age. It reflects the overall health status of a country. It is associated with better medical care,

economic security, and healthy lifestyles among the population [14]. It may fall due to famine, war, disease, and poor health. At the current time (2022), Hong Kong has the highest life expectancy in the world (87.8 years for females and 82 for males) followed by Japan (84.7 years), Switzerland (83.8 years), Singapore (83.7 years) and Spain (83.6 years). Hong Kong high life expectancy could be attributed to the lowest infant mortality rate and high-quality child health care. Japan, possibly due to nation's healthy diets, regular physical activity and extended working years after retirement. Switzerland, possibly due to wealthiness, a sense of well-being, and diet, which consists of lots of dairy products. Singaporeans can anticipate living longer due to efforts being put by the government for early prevention and detection of chronic illness and for Spain, their healthy Mediterranean diets, and low-stress lifestyles [15].

Some areas are home to the highest number of centenarians (100 years) which is known as blue zone. People live in the blue zones have the longest and healthiest lives [16]. Known reported blue zones include Caucasus region of Georgia, Boma County (China), Hunza (Pakistan), Okinawa Island (Japan), Loma Linda (California, USA), Ikaria (Greece), Sardinia (Italy) and Nicoya Peninsula (Costa Rica). It seems that longevity is the product of living in the right environment [17]. Much research has been conducted in blue zone areas and found almost similar findings. People living in blue zones are adopting a stress-free daily ritual like napping, praying, and having a long happy hour. Their eating habit is eating up to 80% full and eat the smallest meal during early evening. They know the purpose of life from waking up in the morning, feeling happy and energetic throughout the day and knowing how they are going to spend their day. They consume a lot of beans, fresh vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, and a small amount of meat. Finally, they have a strong bond with family and friends through physical contact and interaction.

Take an example of people live in Sardinia, Italy. Most of them are shepherds whose typical daily food is a Mediterranean diet that is very high in beans and bread. People in Ikaria, Greece also take the Mediterranean diet and drink a lot of herbal tea. They also embedded exercise regularly in their daily activities, drink moderate amounts of alcohol, get enough sleep and have good spiritual, family, and social networks [16]. Okinawan women, which are known as the longest-lived women in the world, eat a daily diet that mostly plant-based such as tofu, bitter melon, and turmeric. It is also known that in Japanese culture, people should have a sense of purpose in life (known as ikigai) and a strong social network (known as moai). For the people of Nicoya, they consume a lot of corn tortillas and tropical fruits, all year round. For a population in Loma Linda, who belongs to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church group, longevity is associated with vegetarian dietary habits, lifestyles of abstaining from smoking and alcohol drinking and practicing religion and companionships.

Many studies also found that the key to longevity among these populations are associated with behaviors developed early in life (young children) [18][19]. Regardless of level of socioeconomic status, healthy habits or positive lifestyles are developed as children experience the diet, form of exercise, spirituality, charity, and relationships in their community as they grow up. This provides a strong foundation for good behavior development to help alleviate the burden of chronic disease during adulthood. When people live longer, it is because of the longevity aspirations that they created early in life which is related to the right environment they live in. In all the blue zone areas, beans, grains, and fresh vegetables are readily available, cheap, and easily accessible. It is an environment that supports the people here to eat a plant-based diet. These communities also have an effort to develop recipes to make their plants taste good and liked by all age groups.

It seems that to get healthier individually, the effort must be made to get the whole

community healthier. Healthier environments like blue zone areas can only be created if people in the area are nudged into eating more plant-based diet, involve in active lifestyles, socializing more, having a sense of purpose in life and get connected with others.

### **Lifestyles quotes.**

Embracing a good and healthy lifestyle is an aim for most living things, especially human beings. There are many quotes on life and lifestyles to provide a direction and purpose of our existence [20]. It is well known fact that life is a beautiful journey that is meant to be embraced to the fullest every day. Dalai Lama, a well-known Buddhist monk stated that the purpose of our lives is to be happy. Albert Einstein proposed that if you want to live a happy life, tie it to a goal, not to people or things. He believes that life is like riding a bicycle, to keep your balance, you must keep moving. However, life is not as a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced (Soren Kierkegaard), so get busy living or get busy dying (Stephen King). Don't settle for what life gives you; make life better and build something (Ashton Kutcher) but life always imposes things on you that you can't control, but you still have the choice of how you're going to live through this (Celine Dion). Confucius said that life is simple, but men insist on making it complicated. If your goals in life cannot be reached, do not adjust the goals, but adjust the action steps. Always think that live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever (Mahatma Gandhi). So do not just sit back and let things happen to us (Leonardo Da Vinci). The best way to predict your future is to create it (Abraham Lincoln). There are three things you can do with your life: You can waste it, you can spend it, or you can invest it. The best use of your life is to invest it in something that will last longer than your time on Earth (Rick Warren). You choose the life you live. If you don't like it, it's on you to change it because no one else is going to do it for you (Kim Kiyosaki). So, follow your dreams, work hard, practice and persevere. Make

sure you eat a variety of foods, get plenty of exercise and maintain a healthy lifestyle (Sasha Cohen). However, the body needs its rest, and sleep is extremely important in any health regimen. There should be three main things: eating, exercise, and sleep. All three together in the right balance make for a truly healthy lifestyle (Rohit Shetty).

In the nutshell, life is something to be experienced by a human being, it is a form of choice that we must make to be meaningful. Make the life simple by adopting the lifestyles that lead to a prosperous and happy life. Some factors in life are beyond our control, but do not stay still and let things happen to us. Invest our time, work hard, and persevere to get our goal in life achievements. Healthy lifestyles are good choices to adapt to realize our dream.

### **Belief and faith on lifestyles.**

Religious practice promotes the well-being of individuals, families, and the community. Following and practicing religious teachings was found associated with a reduction in the incidence of domestic violence, crime, substance abuse, and addiction [21][22]. In addition, religious practice can enhance physical and mental health, longevity, and educational success. It was found that the American people who are highly religious were more engaged with their extended families, more likely to volunteer in community works and generally happier with their lives. About two-thirds of highly religious adults (65%) say they have donated money, time, or goods to help the poor in the past week, compared with 41% who are less religious [23] (Pew Research Center, 2016). 40% of highly religious U.S. adults describe themselves as "very happy," compared with 29% of those who are less religious. When it comes to diet and exercise, highly religious Americans are less likely to overeat, and more likely to exercise regularly. Highly religious people also were more likely to recycle their household waste and plan proper goods and services to purchase.

There is a lot of evidence in the literature that spiritual practices can reduce stress, reduce blood pressure, strengthen the immune system, and prevent mental illness [24][25][26][27]. Strong religious belief encourages healthy behavior such as propagating the health message “don’t drink alcohol, don’t smoke, don’t abuse the drugs, don’t chew tobacco, and don’t involve in promiscuity [28]. It is known that stress is associated with raised blood pressure and reduce the immune system. Prayer and spiritual activities have been shown able to reduce high blood pressure due to stress through enhancing the body’s relaxation response. Prayer also can heal people from injury or illnesses through strongly believe in accelerated healing. Religious faith gives people a sense of meaning and purpose in life, which is linked to better health, protect against depression, and reduce risk of suicide [29]. Social involvement in religious activities such as giving a donation to a poor person, providing food and shelter for homeless people, pay tithes will lead to greater life satisfaction and happiness. Getting together with others at prayer hall or mosque allows people to build social networks, closer ties and, ultimately, more life satisfaction [30].

The World Health Organization (WHO) has been proposing the use of religious doctrines to improve the lifestyles of various communities in Muslim countries. The organization has proposed programs to reduce the risk factors of chronic obesity, diabetes, hypertension, osteoporosis, and cancer based on religious teachings [31]. People are urged to have the ability to obtain, choose, and consuming appropriate foods, avoiding contaminated food and forbidden foods. At the same time, eating vegetables and fruits, poultry and fish, properly cooked food is encouraged. People are also advised to chew food well, eat slowly and calm, washing hands before and after meals. Cleaning the mouth and brushing teeth is strongly recommended following a meal.

God the Almighty says in the Holy Quran: “And that fasting is better for you, if you know”.

Healthy fasting helps to reduce excessive water in the body, remove obstacles in the digestive tract and bloodstream, purifying blood and contributing to general well-being. It reduces the deposition of fat in the arteries, prevents atherosclerosis and removes toxins and dense waste [32][33].

### **Lifestyles of the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh)**

Believers in Islam follow their Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) lifestyles through his Sunnah. The collection of his sayings and his conduct were preserved in writing called Hadith. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) prophesied that Muslim must take care of their spiritual, emotional, and physical health to safeguard the most complex machine (human bodies) trusted by God [34]. Based on his teaching, diet and nutrition play major roles in maintaining optimum health. Islam gives emphasis on a simple diet combined with physical exercise to achieve a healthy body.

Some of the habits practiced by Prophet Mohammad (pbuh) are slept early and rise early, eating less and stop before feeling full, eating slowly, eating together with others, drink water slowly, intermittent fasting, eat pomegranates and dates frequently and be active and energetic physically. It was later found scientifically that these habits have proven beneficial in maintaining good health. Waking up early will benefit your lung with breathing fresh air and make you energetic and productive. Eating less (80% full) and slowly will improve digestion. Eating and sharing food together is not only strengthening bonding between families or friends, but also will reduce stress and anxiety. Drinking slowly (several gulps) will reduce electrolyte imbalances, dizziness, and headache. Pomegranate and dates are considered the healthiest food which contains many minerals, vitamins, antioxidants etc. that protect our bodies against tissue damages.

Intermittent fasting has been shown to stabilize hormone levels, prevent oxidative stress and reduce inflammatory responses that are responsible for the development of many diseases

such as diabetes, heart disease and arthritis [35]. Staying active is important for Muslims to perform many obligatory rituals in Islam, such as prayer (a minimum of 5 times daily), fasting and performing Hajj. Being active will stray from laziness, overeating and obesity. Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) encouraged his followers to practice brisk walking, horse riding with archery, wrestling, swimming, and sports. Active movement of the body helps the body to get rid of body toxin and strengthen the body's immune system. Islamic holistic way of life, promoting the moderation of everything in life [36]. In term of eating, exercising and other behavior, moderation in all aspects is demanded to all believers. Extreme or fanatic behaviors are prohibited.

### **Positive lifestyles**

Positive lifestyle choices include eating a balanced diet, taking part regularly in physical activity, getting sufficient sleep, and balancing life commitments. Proper intake of diet in term of quantity and quality according to age, gender, level of activity and socio-economic status has been recommended by many researchers, scientific communities, health organization etc. [37]. Adequate intake of water is vital for keeping our body well hydrated that can boost our energy and mood while not drinking enough water will decrease our energy and promote inflammation [38]. Being active such as going for a walk is highly recommended since this low-impact exercise may reduce the risk of diabetes, heart disease and many other non-communicable diseases [39]. Exposure to early morning sunlight may energize our energy and enhance our immunity against infection and some cancers [40]. Our body requires rest after being active whole day so getting adequate amount of sleep and rest helps us to wake up fresh and prevent us from developing health problems [41][42]. Healthy body associated with healthy mind, so keep our minds with positive thinking, such as reading inspiring quotes, listening to inspirational music, or discovering the beauty of nature [43]. Take a break such as holidays with the family to reduce

stress and gaining more creative insights by removing people from the activities and environments that they associate with stress and anxiety [44].

Time management is the most precious matter in our life especially when you reach an old age, so put our time to a good use can result in a long-term sustainable lifestyle. Read storybooks or a novel can get rid of stress. Engage in social and productive activities you enjoy most, such as joining a social club, art class or becoming a volunteer in your community, may help to maintain your well-being and independence as you age. For a Muslim, reading Alquran and zikrullah, joining religious classes may generate an internal peace feeling and calming effect [45]. In case our health is in jeopardy, good management of the current state of health such as compliance to medical prescription and attending regular medical appointments can make us feel better and prevent avoidable damage. For an elderly person, keeping our brain activity such as continue working, involve in strategic thinking activities, playing puzzles, solving mathematical problems, learn other languages, memorize the Quran (for Muslim) may possibly delay dementia [47]. By adopting and practising good positive lifestyles persistently with high motivation, confidence, faithfulness and full of discipline may lead to happy life, good quality of life and longevity.

### **Negative lifestyles**

On the other hand, some lifestyles may be hazardous to our health. Sedentary lifestyle (sitting or lying down for long periods), adopting poor dietary habits (eating too much or too little), eating too much of fats, sugar, or salt, not getting enough sleep or rest, abusing drugs or addictive chemicals (may affect the body in the long term). Eating too much carbohydrate may lead to obesity and cardiovascular diseases among people of all ages [47]. On the other hand, eating too little may lead to protein malnutrition (marasmus, kwashiorkor, stunting) and nutrient deficiencies (scurvy, beriberi, pellagra etc.) [48]. Adopting

sedentary lifestyles at home and the workplace may affect our muscular strength and immunity against many diseases [49]. Inability to cope with stressful life problems due to work overload, highly demanding job, time pressure, lack of skills in solving the problem, social relationship problems at home and the workplace may lead to mental illness [50]. Stressful lifestyles also are associated with lack of sleep and rest. All in all, the body may not be able to stand the pressure and fail to function normally.

Medicine and substance abuse has been on an increasing trend in the community [51]. Many people have been taking medicine without any prescription and disregard the dangers of drugs. Drugs are easily available through online purchases or drug stores. Psychotropic drugs and addictive drugs are also accessible in the black market. Addiction to different substance is regarded as unhealthy such as addiction to cigarette (smoking), alcoholic drinks or other drugs. Substance abuse has been associated with many medical problems like asthma, cancer, brain injury and cardiovascular diseases etc. [52]. The latest addictive lifestyle that affects millions of children is uncontrolled digital entertainment. The habits may lead to stunted growth of the children, physically, mentally, and socially [53].

Adoption of negative lifestyles may lead to life destruction and poor quality of life. The reversal sometime difficult due to the additive effect of the lifestyles such as alcohol drinking and substance abuse. Some behavior modification requires external help from a counsellor, behavior therapist or health professional. In most cases, prevent or avoidance is a better choice before the behavior becomes permanent. Moderation in all what we do and self-control probably the best way to avoid adoption of negative lifestyles [36][54][55].

### **Promotion of positive lifestyles**

Promotion of healthy lifestyles is regarded the responsibility of the person, the family, the community, and the country. Health promotion is

the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their health [56]. The behaviors of the people depend very much on their surroundings or environments. The adoption of certain behaviors or lifestyles lies in the ability of people to identify factors that influence these behaviors and take appropriate action towards a wide range of social and environmental interventions. There are many psycho-social models that able to explain the behavioral change in the individual, such as a health belief model, theory of planned behaviors, cognitive theory and trans-theoretical model [57].

Health belief model (HBM) is one of the most widely used models for understanding health behaviors [57]. It is used to explain and predict individual changes in health behaviors. The person would take action to change their behavior if they perceived the severity of the condition, perceived the susceptibility towards the condition, perceived the benefits of acting, perceived barriers to the proposed action, having cues to action, and having self-efficacy or skill to take the action. Someone who is not smoking cigarette will continue to sustain this lifestyle if he/she perceived the hazardous effect of smoking, perceived the benefit of smoke free environment, perceived the importance of moving away from smoking environment or smoking peers and having strong will power or motivation to keep a smoking free status. For those who have been smoking, changing back to the free smoke status will require strong willingness and commitments. They should perceive the seriousness of disease that may occurred or has occurred such as ischemic heart disease or lung cancer. They should perceive the threat such as having sign and symptom of the disease. They should perceive the benefits of abstinence from smoking such as reduce risk of developing severe diseases, less symptoms and do not expose others to the risk of getting a disease. The person will take an action to stop smoking if he/she has cues to act such as experiencing life-threatening situation, reminders from a doctor or a family member to attend the smoking cessation clinic and have ability to act

such as comply to medication and regular follow-up.

The behavior change model that impacts the community at large is a diffusion of ideas model [58]. People are more likely to adopt a new behavior when someone they respect or admire endorses the behavior. If the community would like to introduce early morning walking as the lifestyle intervention to get people physically fit and healthy, the leaders in the community should influence some motivated followers to start the intervention. Once the new social norm is established, the rest of the community will follow. The activities should be supported initially by enablers such as having organizers, safe vicinity, proper walking lane or route,

subsidized sport shoes and gadgets, having regular competition and rewards etc.

### **Conclusion**

Adopting and maintaining positive lifestyles is the individual's choice. It requires a supporting environment and self-control. Lifestyles that are hazardous to health such as being too sedentary, or too stressful, unhealthy dietary practices, substance abuse should be changed or modified to prevent the development of diseases, decline in the quality of life, and sustain life.



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