

Can We Prepare our Bodies over the Year to Cope with Ramadan Fasting more Easily? Imam Reza's Health and Dietary Recommendations for Different Months of the Year

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article type:</i> Review article</p> <hr/> <p><i>Article History:</i> Received: 24 Apr 2016 Accepted: 28 June 2016 Published: 1 June 2016</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: Health recommendations Imam Reza Monthly changes of weather Nutritional recommendations Ramadan fasting</p>	<p>Weather conditions, comprised of multiple parameters (e.g., atmospheric pressure, wind, temperature, moisture, and heat) vary during different months of the year. These variations influence almost all organisms including humans (1). Proper nutritional diet is one of the factors which can lead to human adjustment with atmospheric changes. Imam Reza, the eighth Shia Imam, has presented the most effective and thorough dietary suggestions for different months of the year. In this article, we studied his debates in his medical book, known as "Al-Risalah al-Dhahabiah fi al-Tibb" (the golden medical dissertation), using the analytical library method. We reviewed and highlighted these recommendations and tried to determine if they could promote the body stamina to cope with Ramadan fasting.</p>

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Introduction

Different factors can affect weather conditions over the year. In addition, massive stars of the solar system (e.g., the sun and the moon) can cause changes in the weather. Weather conditions, comprised of multiple parameters, such as atmospheric pressure, wind, temperature, moisture, and heat, lead to drastic environmental changes for all types of organisms, even microorganisms. The human body encounters these variations, as well.

Now, this question arises as to whether we can cope with these changes more easily. Different branches of medical sciences have proposed some suggestions in this area. However, the propositions

mainly include different types of foods and do not highlight health activities such as physical activities, sexual activities, bathing, and sleeping. Also, these recommendations are basically made on seasonal weather changes instead of monthly changes.

Imam Reza, the eighth Shia Imam, has discussed major issues in medical care with respect to monthly weather changes. On the other hand, many critiques have been issued against the Islamic ritual of Ramadan fasting. In fact, the critics blame fasting as a health depressant of the human body. However, as claimed by the proponents, fasting can be easily

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endured by devising a good plan for promoting the body stamina.

In this regard, compliance with Imam Reza's recommendations seems to be a proper solution. As recommended by Imam Reza, the best model of food consumption is eating food in appropriate seasonal cuisines (2); He has also described the characteristics of each month in each season. Here, we randomly introduce some of these features.

Imam Reza's guidelines for spring

Imam Reza has discussed the effects and features of spring months (i.e., Adar, Nisan, and Iyar). Moreover, he has introduced particular health and hygiene guidelines for each month (3).

Imam Reza's suggestions during Adar (the first month of spring) (4)

In this month, the mucus stability is damaged and blood circulation is stimulated. Therefore, the following guidelines are recommended:

- Eat light meals and drink special home-made juice.
- Add eggs to foods containing meat.
- Abstain from garlic, onion, and pickle.
- Use medical phlebotomy and different laxatives in this month.

Imam's advice for the month of Nisan (the second month of spring) (4)

During this month, days are rather long, blood circulation is stimulated through the veins, and the eastern winds blow. Therefore, adherence to the following guidelines is recommended:

- Use cold-natured foods.
- Consume less fat and meat (especially the meat of hunted animals) and use vinegar along with meat.
- Drink more water, but not before breakfast.

Imam Reza's recommendations for Iyar (the third month of spring) (4)

In this month, adherence to the following guidelines is recommended:

- Abstain from indigestible meat and salty meals.
- Abstain from exercise before eating.
- Take a shower in the morning.

Imam Reza's advice for summer

Imam Reza has also proposed certain recommendations for summer. For instance, he

has suggested abstinence from sex at the beginning of the night during summer and winter (5).

Imam's advice for Hazeraan (Sivan) (the first month of summer) (6)

- Avoid exercise and aromatic fragrances.
- Abstain from indigestible fatty meat; instead, use foods prepared with lamb or goat meat.
- Consume poultry meat and fish.

Imam's advice for Tammuz (the second month of summer)

- Drink cold water before breakfast.
- Eat light meals.
- Smell aromatic flowers (e.g., rose).

Imam's advice for Ab (the third month of summer) (7)

This month consists of 31 days, during which poisonous winds blow.

- Eat hydrating (moisturizing) meals such as yogurt.
- Smell aromatic flowers.
- Abstain from excessive sexual activities.
- Use laxatives.

Overall, these recommendations help protect the body against liver disease.

Imam Reza's recommendations for autumn

Imam's advice for Elul (the first month of autumn) (8)

- Consume lamb (the age of sheep should be less than one year) and male goat meat.
- Abstain from beef, fried meat, and different types of barbecued foods.
- Consume sweets.

Imam's advice for the first Tishrei (the second month of autumn) (9)

- Reduce the amount of consumed water.
- Consume fatty meat.
- Eat fruits, especially pomegranate after meals.
- Avoid phlebotomy.
- Perform physical exercise and activities.

Imam's recommendations for the second Tishrei (or Cheshvan, the third month of autumn) (10)

- Drink warm water in the morning (avoid it at

- night).
- Avoid vegetables such as cress, celery, and spearmint.
- Reduce sexual activities during this month.

Imam Reza's advice for winter

Imam Reza has suggested abstinence from sex at the beginning of the night during summer and winter (5).

Imam's advice for the first Kanun (Kislev) (the first month of winter) (10)

- Consume hot-natured meals instead of 'cold' meals.
- Drink hot water in the morning (avoid it at night).
- Avoid frequent showering or phlebotomy.

Imam's advice for the second Kanun (Tevet) (the second month of winter) (10)

- Drink hot water in the morning before breakfast.
- Take use of body massage with oil.
- Avoid sweets.
- Consume vegetables such as celery and cress.
- Abstain from fresh fish with yogurt.

Imam's recommendations for Shevat (the third month of winter)

This month involves 28 days, during which various winds blow, it rains heavily, and herbs and grass grow. The following guidelines have been proposed for this month:

- Eat poultry meat or the meat of hunted animals.
- Consume garlic, dried fruits, and nuts.
- Exercise and be sexually active.

In addition, Imam Reza has offered general advice for winter. For instance, in order to prevent the common cold during this season, he has recommended the smell of narcissus (11). In addition, he has suggested drinking hydromel three times a day to prevent common cold (12). Also, concerning headaches, he has suggested the use of fresh fish in summer and winter (13).

Discussion

All Shia Imams by relying on their divine knowledge have offered proper recommendations in order to condition the human body against seasonal changes (14). In this regard, Imam Reza

has presented the most effective and thorough recommendations concerning atmospheric changes (15). These recommendations are so remarkable that many of them are yet to be identified by modern medicine.

Imam Reza has suggested hot water before breakfast in some months, while recommending cold water in other months of the year. He has also recommended fatty meat in some months of the year, while encouraging abstinence from such meat in other months. In addition, he has suggested the meat of certain animals (i.e., mutton, beef, or goat meat) and has even specified their gender and age. In some months of the year, he has recommended sports and sexual intercourse, while he has prohibited such activities in other months. All these suggestions can be beneficial in nutritional sciences and human health. Unfortunately, in this respect, we could not find any published research articles.

In traditional Chinese and Iranian medicine, dietary recommendations have been made for various seasons of the year (16). However, these suggestions are mainly defective for each season, and no month-specific suggestions have been proposed; in fact, only seasonal and nutritional guidelines have been discussed in traditional Chinese and Iranian medicine.

Some seasonal recommendations have been proposed in modern medical sciences, as well. For instance, in spring, tender, leafy vegetables, which represent the fresh start of the season, have been recommended. In fact, the greening of nature which occurs in spring should be represented by greens on one's plate, including Swiss chard, spinach, romaine lettuce, fresh parsley, and basil.

Additionally, in traditional Chinese medicine, light and cooling foods have been recommended in summer. These foods include fruits such as strawberry, apple, pear, and plum, as well as vegetables including summer squash, broccoli, cauliflower, and corn; in addition, spices and seasonings such as peppermint and cilantro have been suggested.

In fall, use of warming, autumn harvest foods including carrot, sweet potato, onion, and garlic has been suggested. Also, there has been a great emphasis on more warming spices and seasonings including ginger, peppercorns, and mustard seeds. Also, during winter, it is suggested that we turn more exclusively towards warming foods. It should be noted that foods which take longer to

grow are generally more warming than quickly growing foods.

All animal foods fall into the warming food category, including fish, chicken, beef, and lamb, similar to most root vegetables, such as carrot, potato, onion, and garlic. Eggs also fit into this category, as do corn and nuts (17). Despite the available guidelines, lack of monthly nutritional or health recommendations is strongly felt in this area.

Furthermore, scientists have measured the seasonal rate of some diseases in various studies. For instance, in a study, coronary events, both fatal and non-fatal, were 20-40% more likely to occur in winter and spring in comparison with other times of the year (18). On the other hand, in another study, there was no significant relationship between season and mortality following aortic dissection repair (19). In addition, some researchers have published monthly and quarterly reports on the incidence of some communicable diseases (20); however, no monthly nutritional or health suggestions have been made.

Furthermore, Murray found that the degree of changes in the symptoms of seasonal affective disorder was not correlated with the degree of phase changes associated with treatment (21). In this study on 61 outpatients with complete data, the treatments were associated with significant phase advances and antidepressant effects. However, this study did not confirm that circadian phase advances could mediate the therapeutic mechanism in patients with seasonal affective disorder.

In a previous study on the circadian basis of winter depression, the authors concluded that seasonal affective disorder might be the first psychiatric disorder in which a physiological marker is correlated with the severity of symptoms before and during the course of treatment (22).

In another study on the relationship between season, temperature, and coronary diseases, the authors revealed no significant difference between the patterns of sudden and non-sudden death (occurring later after the onset of symptoms) and weather conditions (18). Also, the authors by using statistical models confirmed long-term seasonal and daily temperature effects.

According to several studies, the George Mateljan Foundation published a guideline on

optimal nourishment in every season (17). Based on this guideline, in spring, people should mainly consume vegetables, including Swiss chard, spinach, romaine lettuce, fresh parsley, and basil. Also, some beneficial foods have been introduced in summer. For instance, in traditional Chinese medicine, cooling foods including fruits such as strawberry, apple, pear, and plum, vegetables such as summer squash, broccoli, cauliflower, and corn, and seasonings such as peppermint and cilantro have been recommended. In autumn, warm harvest foods are preferable including carrot, sweet potato, onion, and garlic. Finally, in winter, warm foods including fish, chicken, beef, and lamb are suggested. Also, root vegetables, such as carrot, potato, onion, and garlic, are suggested in winter.

Overall, Imam Reza's recommendations for each month of the year show that the human body is affected by atmospheric changes; therefore, precise planning is highly required. According to our literature review, no article or research has been published in this area. We suggest that nutritionists, psychotherapists, psychologists, and other specialists pay particular attention to Imam Reza's suggestions and perform comprehensive research in this area.

Conclusion

Based on Imam Reza's guidelines for each month of the year, the human body is affected by atmospheric changes; therefore, precise planning is highly required. Also, various activities (such as physical activities and sexual activities), bathing, sleeping, smelling aromas, and medical phlebotomy are effective in promoting body stamina, besides foods and drinks. Furthermore, the size, gender, and age of animals (when used in the human food) are important factors.

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