

Significance of blowing air from mouth on food and drinks, from *Shariah* point of view, and its explanation, based on medical and scientific research

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Keywords: *Blowing food and drink, carbonic acid, acidosis/alkalosis, EAR (Expired air resuscitation), capillaries/alveoli*

Abstract

Islam, as a complete code for human life, has enjoined formal etiquettes even for healthy food intake. Usually when the food or drink is hot we are habituated to blow air from mouth to cool it. However, the Prophet ﷺ has forbade from such an act. He ﷺ, has also forbade from breathing inside a vessel. The dangers of blowing the hot food and drinks, can be explained scientifically: The steam from the hot drinks/food is water vapor (H₂O). When we blow the food/drink, we release carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the mouth. According to the chemical reaction, the water vapor reacts with CO₂ to form carbonic acid compounds that are acidic, and which can be injurious to our health. This scientific explanation concurs with what the Prophet ﷺ told the *Ummah* fifteen centuries back. What about mouth-to-mouth resuscitation/Expired Air Resuscitation (EAR)? A person who requires EAR is usually in danger of dying from hypoxia, or loss of oxygen. Therefore, although the oxygen content is less in our expired air, it can still work to revive a person. In the matter of contagious diseases like COVID-19, this unique Prophetic advice to avoid blowing air from mouth on food and drinks is valuable to stop the spread of the disease. In fact, possibly one can relate all other mitigating methods, like mask usage, social distancing and quarantining to be originating from this unique fifteen centuries old Prophetic advice! In the matter of blowing air after reciting verses of Qur'an or a supplication (*Dua*) on oneself or on another person, this blessed act is established by the Sunnah of our beloved Prophet ﷺ. Apparently, it might look like blowing of air, but actually we say شف (Shif), which means O' Allah give *Shifa* (cure from ailments).

Introduction

Islam, as a comprehensive way of life, has codified every aspect of daily life through the blessed practices of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions. The life of the holy Prophet ﷺ and his blessed companions, is a perfect role model not just for the Muslims, but in fact for the whole of humanity till the day of judgement [1], [2]. One may overlook some of the practices of the Prophet ﷺ and the companions as insignificant, but the books of *Ahadith*, are replete with topics like food intake. One practice

which drew the author's attention, and which looked insignificant outwardly, was that the Prophet ﷺ never blew air from his mouth on food or drink and forbade his companions from doing so. When we analyze this blessed practice of the Prophet ﷺ from a scientific/medical point of view, the subject not just became highly interesting, but also made us realize that it is a health hazard, when not practiced.

The serious issue is that when this blessed *Sunnah* of the Prophet ﷺ is overlooked, and when one blows air on the

food and drinks from our mouth, then there is a high possibility of production of carbonic acid in our food/drinks and the intake of such edibles can cause an increase in carbonic acid levels in the blood, which is injurious to our health.

From this practice of the Prophet ﷺ, we learn an important lesson, that all of his *Sunnas* during his whole life, no matter how insignificant they might look, are important and significant. Be it as simple as food intake, there are plethora of references to show how intricate the Prophet ﷺ was in his practices.

Our beliefs dictate that as Muslims, we accept without any hesitation all the orders of *Allah Tala*, as implemented by the Prophet ﷺ in his blessed life, even if in some cases we have difficulty in understanding them. It is irrelevant what science says and doesn't say about it. Now, after fifteen centuries, if science comes out to positively explain some of the aspects of the blessed life of the Prophet ﷺ, that will be an extra. As Muslims, from the point of view of our beliefs, we are not dependent on science whatsoever. [1], [2]

In this paper, we have tried to explain the probable scientific/medical reasons for the Prophet ﷺ not to blow air from his blessed mouth on food and drinks, and also prohibiting his companions from doing so.

The command of *Allah Tala* to consume what is halal and pure

Although, per se, there is no clear cut mention in the Qur'an about the prohibition of blowing air on food and drinks, but then all the *ahadithsharif* of the prophet ﷺ, are in fact the *tafseer* of the *Qur'an*. The following verses of the Qur'an, are very clear in commanding the people to consume what is halal and pure:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِى الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا أَهْوَاءَ الشَّيْطَانِ ۗ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ مُعَدِّمٌ مُّبِينٌ

O mankind! Eat of that which is lawful and good on the earth and follow not the footsteps of *Shaytan* (Satan). Verily, he is to you an open enemy. *SuratulBaqara*, verse: 168

IbneKaseer RA in his *tafseer* of this verse, states that “*Allah* stated that He is the Sustainer for all His creation, and He mentioned a favor that He granted them; He has allowed them to eat any of the pure lawful things on the earth that do not cause harm to the body or the mind.” [3]

The Act of Blowing Air from Mouth on food/drink and breathing into the vessel, and its prohibition

Usually when the food or drink is hot we are habituated to blow air from mouth to cool it. However the Prophet ﷺ has forbade such an act. He ﷺ, has also forbade from breathing inside a vessel. Blowing air from mouth to extinguish a burning candle is also discouraged. In the following *AhadithSharif*: [4], [5]

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو كُرَيْبٍ، حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّحِيمِ بْنُ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ الْمُحَارِبِيُّ، حَدَّثَنَا شَرِيكٌ، عَنْ عَبْدِ الْكَرِيمِ، عَنْ عِكْرَمَةَ، عَنْ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ، قَالَ لَمْ يَكُنْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ - يَنْفُخُ فِي طَعَامٍ وَلَا شَرَابٍ - وَلَا يَنْفُخُ فِي الْإِنَاءِ "

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It is narrated by *Ikrama (RA)* that *Ibne Abbas (RA)* said: The Prophet ﷺ never blow onto his food or drink, and he did not breathe into the vessel. Grade: *Sahih (Darussalam)* [4]

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو بَكْرِ بْنُ أَبِي شَيْبَةَ، حَدَّثَنَا دَاوُدُ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، عَنْ عَبْدِ الْعَزِيزِ بْنِ مُحَمَّدٍ، عَنِ الْحَارِثِ بْنِ أَبِي ذُبَابٍ، عَنْ عَمِّهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ قَالَ " إِذَا شَرِبَ أَحَدُكُمْ فَلَا يَنْفُخْ فِي الْإِنَاءِ فَإِذَا أَرَادَ أَنْ يُعَوِّدَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ - فَلْيَنْفُخْ الْإِنَاءَ ثُمَّ لِيَعُدْ إِنْ كَانَ يُرِيدُ "

رواه سنن ابن ماجه كتاب الأطعمة

It was narrated from *Abu Hurairah RA* that the Messenger of *Allah* ﷺ said: “When anyone of you drinks, let him not breathe into the vessel. If he wants to continue drinking, let him move the vessel away (in order to breathe) then bring it back, if he wants.” Grade: *Hasan (Darussalam)* [5]

Imam Al-Shaukani RA, explains this *Hadith Sharif* in his book *Nailul-Awtaar* [6]: Relating to his ﷺ saying (he did not breath in the vessel) this is a prohibition from breathing in that which is drunk from, in order that saliva/spit is not let out from the mouth leaving it (the vessel) unclean for the next person who drinks from it, or causing a foul smell to be attached to the water or vessel. The word (vessel) here includes the vessel which is used for food and drink. So one should not blow in the vessel in order to remove that which is in the water from dirt or what is similar to that, for verily blowing generally is not free from saliva which is deemed unclean or filthy. Likewise, one should not blow in the vessel in order to

cool down hot food, rather one should be patient until the food has cooled down itself as previously mentioned. One should also not eat the food whilst it is hot, for verily the blessing will depart from it and it is from the food of the people of the hellfire.

Imam Al-Nawawi RA elaborated on the *Hadith* about the prohibition of breath and blowing into food and drink, and said: "The prohibition of breathing in the vessel including ethics because feared it contaminates water or cause the smell awful or it is feared there was something from the mouth and nose are falling into it and things of that sort." [7]

Imam Ibnu al-Qayyim RA commented on the *Hadith* that it is forbidden to blow into hot drink: "There is prohibition to blow into drinks because it raises the awful odor that comes from the mouth. Smells bad and can cause people not to drink it, more so if the person who blew the whiff of mouth are changed. In summary this caused the breath of the people who blow it would be mixed with drinks. Therefore, the Prophet ﷺ forbade two things at once, i.e. breathe into the vessel and blow it." [8]

Possible scientific explanations for these prohibitions [9]

The dangers of blowing the hot food and drinks, can be explained scientifically. The steam from the hot drinks/food is water vapor (H_2O). When we blow the drink/food, we release carbon dioxide (CO_2) from the mouth. According to the chemical reaction, the water vapor reacts with CO_2 to form carbonic acid compounds that are acidic: $CO_2 + H_2O \Rightarrow H_2CO_3$. Actually there is already naturally occurring carbonic acid (H_2CO_3) in blood that is useful to adjust the pH (acidity level) in the blood. Blood is the buffer (which can maintain the pH of the solution) with a weak acid H_2CO_3 and the conjugate base of HCO_3^- so that the blood has a pH of 7.35 to 7.45 with the following reaction:

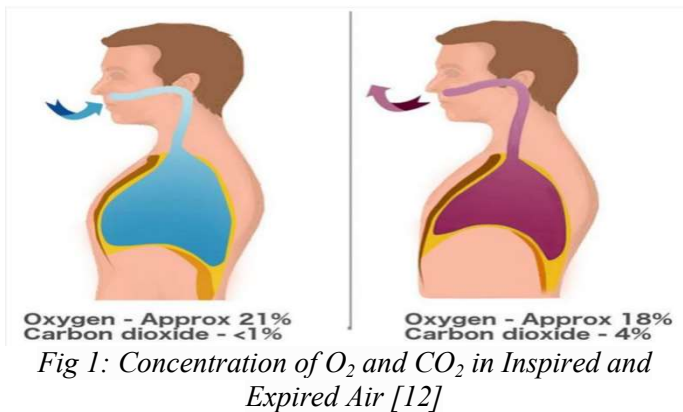


The body uses a pH buffer in the blood as a protection against the changes which occur suddenly in blood pH. Abnormalities in the mechanisms controlling the pH, can cause one of two major diseases in the acid-base balance, namely acidosis or alkalosis. Acidosis is a condition where the blood has too much acid (or a very low base) and often causes decreased blood pH. While Alkalosis is a condition where the blood has too much base (or too

little acid) and sometimes cause increased blood pH. Carbonic acid (H_2CO_3) affect the level of acidity in the blood and it leads to a situation where the blood becomes more acidic than it should be. This results in the decrease in the blood pH, and it is known as Acidosis. Along with decreasing pH of the blood, breathing becomes deeper and more rapid as the body makes effort to reduce excess acid in the blood by lowering the amount of carbon dioxide. In the end, the kidneys also try to compensate this situation by issuing more acid in the urine. But both of these mechanisms will not be useful if the body is constantly producing too much acid, resulting in severe acidosis. In line with the worsening acidosis, the person begins to feel fatigue, drowsiness, nausea and experiences more confusion. If acidosis worsens, blood pressure may fall, causing shock, coma and even death. Our explanation is supported by similar studies by SitiHamidatulKhairah and DadangKahmadin 2021 [10], and by Laila Fathiyyah, in her thesis titled "The prohibition of blowing food and drink." [11]

The mouth-to-mouth resuscitation [12]

Expired Air Resuscitation (EAR), also known as mouth to mouth resuscitation, involves the transferring of expired air from a person to a victim of drowning, etc. Being able to give a person a fresh lease of life is undoubtedly one of the rarest and purest gifts of life that one can give. This is a form of artificial breathing or ventilation wherein the victim requires assistance in normal breathing. Air is forced down their respiratory tract until it reaches the lungs. This is done a number of times until that person can breathe on their own or until medical help arrives. When performing EAR on a person, we force our exhaled air into their mouth. However, basic biology tells us that the air we exhale is low in oxygen, and higher in carbon dioxide. Therefore, it is normal to wonder about the effectiveness of EAR. If a person is already in distress, then blowing carbon dioxide into them should bring about a negative effect? The answer lies in understanding the composition of the air that we inhale and exhale. The inhaled air has approximately 21% oxygen and less than 1% carbon dioxide (see fig. 1). Once the air enters our lungs, gaseous exchange takes place. The air that we exhale contains about 4% carbon dioxide and 18% oxygen. We use only about 3-4% of the oxygen that we take in. A person who requires EAR is usually in danger of dying from hypoxia, or loss of oxygen. In such a case, it is imperative that they receive oxygen. Therefore, although the oxygen content is less in our expired air, it can still work to revive a person. After all, half a loaf is better than no bread at all.



oxygen and rich in carbon dioxide (see fig. 3). When we exhale, we breathe out this carbon dioxide enriched, oxygen-poor air.

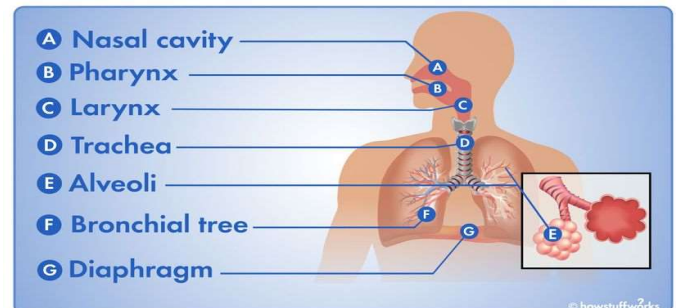


Fig 2: Human Pulmonary System [14]

Composition of inhaled and exhaled air [12]

Inhaled air by volume is 78.08% nitrogen, 20.95% oxygen and small amounts of argon, carbon dioxide, neon, helium, and hydrogen. The gas exhaled is 4-5% by volume of carbon dioxide, about a 100-fold increase over the inhaled amount. The volume of oxygen is reduced by a small amount, 4-5%, compared to the oxygen inhaled. The typical composition is: 5-6.3% water vapor, 74.4% nitrogen, 13.6-16 % oxygen, 4-5.3% carbon dioxide, 1% argon and several parts per million (ppm) of hydrogen and carbon monoxide, 1 ppm of ammonia and less than 1 ppm of acetone, methanol, ethanol and other volatile organic compounds.

Breathing-a gift of life [13]

Breathing (or ventilation) is the process of moving air into and out of the lungs to facilitate gas exchange with the internal environment, mostly by bringing in oxygen and flushing out carbon dioxide. We breathe air that is 21 % oxygen, and we require oxygen to live. Our lungs are basically a long series of tubes that branch out from our nose and mouth (from trachea to bronchi to bronchioles) and end in little thin-walled air sacs called alveoli (see fig. 2). Surrounding each alveolus are small, thin-walled blood vessels, called pulmonary capillaries. Between the capillaries and the alveolus is a thin wall (about 0.5 microns thick) through which various gases (oxygen, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen) pass. When we inhale, the alveoli get filled with this air. Because the concentration of oxygen is high in the alveoli and low in the blood entering the pulmonary capillaries, oxygen diffuses from the air into the blood. Likewise, because the concentration of carbon dioxide is higher in the blood that's entering the capillaries than it is in the alveolar air, carbon dioxide passes from the blood to the alveoli. The nitrogen concentration in the blood and the alveolar air is about the same. The gases exchange across the alveolar wall and the air inside the alveoli becomes depleted of

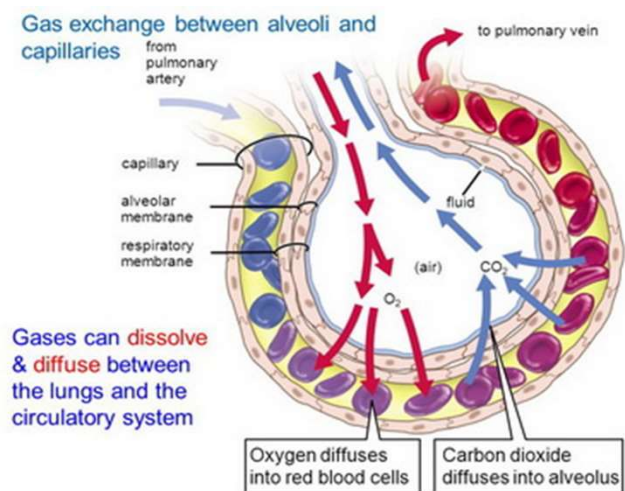


Fig 3: Gas exchange between alveoli and capillaries [15]

Alveoli

As illustrated in fig. 3, the alveoli are small air sacs within the lung parenchyma that originate from the terminal ends of alveolar sacs and ducts. The greater the surface area the lungs have for gas exchange, the greater is their efficiency to absorb oxygen. The 700 million (or more) alveoli found in both lungs, if flattened out, would cover an area of some 50-100 square yards. This is approximately the size of a tennis court, and is all neatly folded and bundled into the chest cavity. Each alveolus has a wall that is only one cell thick. A capillary wall has about the same thickness. The distance between air and blood is about 1/1000th of a millimeter. The oxygen is transported by the red blood cells, which squeeze single file through the pulmonary capillaries. Red cells are packed with hemoglobin, or red pigment, that attracts the oxygen. Carbon dioxide is diffused in the same way back through the capillaries and alveolar walls to be exhaled. [16], [17]

فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ

So, are we not Correct?

Was not the Prophet ﷺ correct, when he ﷺ forbade blowing air on food and drinks? Now, after fifteen centuries science is proving after a thorough research, that what the Prophet ﷺ said was true!

Possible Mitigation of the contagious Diseases like COVID-19

A possible correlation might exist between this valuable Prophetic advice and the spread of contagious diseases like COVID-19. This unique Prophetic advice to avoid blowing air from mouth on food and drinks may be valuable to stop the spread of Corona Virus (SARS-CoV-2.) and for that matter, stopping the spread of any other virus or bacterial infection, any time, as a safe practice. Indeed, possibly one can relate all other mitigating methods, like mask usage, social distancing and quarantining to be originating from this unique Prophetic Sunnah. [1]

Blowing air after reciting the verses of the *Qur'an* or a Supplication (*dua*) on oneself or on another person?

This blessed act is established as a Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ. Actually, in essence this act is not blowing of air from mouth. Apparently, it might look like blowing of air, but according to the author's learned teacher and mentor *Moulana Abdul Mateen Nomani Sahib, RA* (personal communication), actually we say شف (Shif), which means O' Allah give *Shifa* (cure from ailments)!

Conclusion

From the time of our birth till our death, Islam plays a crucial role in our lives, which we may not realize. Whether it is a minor or a major event, there is Islam which is having its footprints in our lives. There are thousands of *Sunnahs* of the Prophet ﷺ which can be proven scientifically. For example, take this Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ of avoiding to blow air from mouth on food and drinks. Now scientifically and medically it is established that how much important it is to follow this Sunnah to save our bodies from injurious habits. It is important that the *Ummah* start sincerely practicing all the *Sunnahs* of the Prophet ﷺ, and inform the world the immense benefits of following them. [1], [2]

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