

HALACHICALLY SPEAKING

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{ TOPIC }

Staying Healthy in Halacha



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► Each issue reviews a different area of contemporary *halacha* with an emphasis on practical applications of the principles discussed. Significant time is spent ensuring the inclusion of all relevant *shittos* on each topic, as well as the *psak* of *Harav Yisroel Belsky, Shlita* on current issues.

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Staying Healthy in Halacha

The topic of health is discussed at great length today in medical journals and other publications. This issue does not discuss medical advice, but the obligation to preserve our health in general and in certain instances based on the writings found in the *Gemorah*, *Rishonim* and *Achronim*. The *Rambam* in particular wrote a tremendous amount of material concerning health. We will quote some of his writings.

Food plays a major role in our lives. We enjoy three meals on *Shabbos*, *Yom Tov* including *Melava Malka*, *Bar Mitzvahs*, weddings, and *kiddeishim*. It can be difficult to maintain one's health if he is not careful about what he eats and how much he eats. One would never think of eating non-kosher food or eating on a fast day, but we do not seem to think that the *Torah* requires us to control our eating to preserve our health. In addition, when learning or studying we tend to stay in one position. It is clear from discussions in the *Gemorah* and *halacha* that in the earlier days Jews were very active. We will also discuss overeating and exercising.

Watching One's Health – Sources

There are many sources in *Torah* literature which discuss the importance of preserving one's health.

The *Rambam* writes, "Keeping the body healthy and whole is part of the ways of *Hashem*, as it is impossible to understand the Will of *Hashem* if one is sick. Therefore, one has to be careful to distance himself from things which ruin the body.¹ He should only eat when he is hungry, only drink

1. This is also mentioned in the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 32:1.

when he is thirsty, and not wait when he has to use the facilities.”²

The *Ritvah*³ says one should not eat any unhealthy food. The *Chinuch*⁴ explains that one may not bring danger to himself because *Hashem* gave us a *nefesh* which resides within the body. To protect your *nefesh*, you are obligated to protect your body. The *Be'er Hagolah*⁵ says *Hashem* created the world with kindness for the purpose of doing good to His creations. If one puts himself in danger, he is implying that he does not want the good that *Hashem* gave him. There is no greater *apikores* than such a person.

The *Tur* says, “It is a *mitzvah* to watch one’s self to make sure he stays healthy in order to serve *Hashem*.”⁶

“It Doesn’t Matter What I Eat.”

Many people say that it does not make a difference what type of food they eat, as *Hashem* will ultimately decide how long they live. Therefore, it there is no need to choose healthy food. However, this is a wrong assumption. Although the *Gemorah*⁷ says that one does not hurt his hand without it being preordained from *Hashem*, one can bring pain onto himself even if *Hashem* did not prescribe it for him. This is illustrated by the *Medrash*⁸ that says that sickness and death are 99% negligence and 1% from *shomayim*. The commentaries define negligence as not keeping warm during the winter, and not caring about

2. Rambam Hilchos De’os 4:1.

3. Meseches Shavuos 27a.

4. Mitzvah 73.

5. C.M. 427:10.

6. O.C. 155.

7. Chullin 7b.

8. Vayikra Rabah 16:8.

כל השווה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא בן עולם הבא... (מדה עב)

diet. The *Gemorah*⁹ says that 99% of people die before their time is up, and only 1% die on time. It is obvious that it is possible to die before the proper time.

The *Sefer Chassidim*¹⁰ says that a *baal kas* (angry person) has no life and dies before his time.

The *Chovos Ha'levovos* quotes¹¹ a *Gemorah*¹² that one should not stand in a place of danger and say a miracle will occur, because maybe it will not happen. If a miracle does happen then his merits will be decreased. This concept also applies to someone who is not careful about what he eats.

The *Ma'aver Yabok*¹³ says that one who follows his desires is killing himself and he has to give a *din* and *cheshbon* on it.

Advice From Early Sources on Digestion and Overeating

We will discuss digestion (since most of ones health depends on this, see below) and overeating in *halacha*. The *Rambam*¹⁴ says a very important rule with a healthy body: "As long as one exercises (see below) does not eat a lot (see below) and he has soft bowel movements (he is not constipated) no sickness will come upon him and his strength will be great even if he eats bad foods."

Digestion

A study of the digestive system will bring one to instant *yiras shomayim*. The *Rambam*¹⁵ and others¹⁶ say that most of

9. Bava Metziah 107b. Refer to Chovas Halevovos shar habitachon 4.

10. 145.

11. Shar Habitochon 4.

12. Meseches Shabbos 32a.

13. Korbon Taanis 5:page 3 (old).

14. Hilchos De'os 4:14.

15. Rambam Hilchos De'os 4:15.

16. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 32:2

איך ללמוד להלכה של אמת של הלכה בלבד... (ברכות ח)

כל השווה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא בן עולם הבא... (תדה עב)

the health and sickness of the body are dependent on how one digests his food. One who does it in the proper way will be a healthy person, but one who does not do it right will be a weak person and can bring himself to danger. The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*¹⁷ says digestion is good if the food is easy to digest.¹⁸ One should eat light foods before heavy foods.¹⁹ A full stomach cannot digest the food properly, because it cannot grind the food properly.²⁰

The beginning of the digestion process takes place in the mouth, as the teeth grind the food and mix it with saliva. Therefore, one should not swallow any food without chewing it first.²¹ There are no mixing bowls in the stomach, so the stomach's job is much easier if one were to chew his food properly before swallowing it. Since chewing is so important, one should refrain from talking. Aside from the danger of choking, this also prevents proper chewing. Reading also distracts one from chewing. One should not place food on his fork while he is chewing, as he will swallow his food faster if he sees food ready on his fork to be eaten.²²

In order to help the digestion, one should drink a little while eating.²³ The beginning of the digestion process takes about two hours, as the stomach produces certain enzymes that help break down the food. Too much fluid dilutes the enzymes, which makes digestion harder.²⁴

17. 32:3.

18. Chicken is easier to digest than meat (*Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 32:8).

19. Rambam Hilchos De'os 4:7, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 32:12.

20. *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 32:3.

21. *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 32:13. Refer to Chaim Briyim K'halacha pages 100.

22. Chaim Briyim K'halacha pages 101-102.

23. *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 32:17.

24. Chaim Briyim K'halacha pages 108-110.

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One should be in a happy mood and not full of anger, fear and worry while eating.²⁵

Overeating

There is no need to quote studies on overeating. The fact is that many people are overweight because they overeat. The *Rambam*²⁶ says that most sicknesses come either because one does not eat the right foods or because one eats too much even if he eats good foods. Obesity is harmful to the body: it makes it lethargic, disturbs its functions, and hampers its movements.²⁷

The negative effect of overeating can be understood with the following: If a washing machine has too much clothing in it the clothing will not be cleaned properly. So too, when one eats too much his stomach is too full and cannot properly break down the food.²⁸

*Rabbeinu Yonah*²⁹ says that overeating causes harm.

One should eat until his stomach is a quarter full.³⁰ The *Mishnah Berurah*³¹ says that one should eat good food which he needs for well-being, and not for pleasure. One should eat only to strengthen himself to serve *Hashem*.³²

One is not allowed to eat like an animal and fill his stomach, and one may not recite an *al hamichya* after such eating.³³

25. Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 32:22.

26. Hilchos De'os 4:15. See Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 32:3

27. The Life Transforming Diet page 53.

28. Chaim Briyim K'halacha pages 116-117.

29. Meseches Avos 2:12.

30. Rambam Hilchos De'os 4:2. Refer to Kaf Hachaim Y.D. 116:69, Shemiras Haguf V'hanefesh 26:footnote 1.

31. 170:45.

32. Refer to Jewish Observer Tishrei 5769 pages 23-25.

33. Elya Rabbah 170:23, see Pri Megadim M.Z. 170:10, Kaf Hachaim 72. This applies to Shabbos

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Exercising

There are many studies about the benefits of exercise. It is very hard for a person who learns in Yeshiva all day, or for an office worker with a desk job, to walk around and do exercise. However, many doctors have said that the primary tool to prevent sickness is exercise.

Yaakov, who sat and learned *Torah* all day,³⁴ was still able to wrestle with an angel and win.³⁵ In addition, he was able to remove a large stone from the mouth of the well.³⁶ The youth of *klal Yisroel* served in the army at the age of twenty.³⁷ Some people were experts in slinging stones.³⁸ There are other sources in *Tanach* which discuss certain exercises and their value (see footnote).³⁹

Running

Running was valued as an important military asset.⁴⁰ A man from the *shevet of Binyomin* ran the long distance from *Afek* to *Shiloh* in one day to notify the *Kohen* about a certain matter.⁴¹ Running was viewed as a form of exercise during the times of the *Gemorah* as well as for mundane purposes. Running as a form of exercise on *Shabbos* is not permitted.⁴² However, running for non-exercise purposes is permitted.⁴³

and Yom Tov as well (Refer to *Shemiras Haguf V'hanefesh* 26:footnote 3).

34. Bereishis 25:27.

35. Bereishis 32:36.

36. Bereishis 29:10.

37. Bamidbar 1:4.

38. Shoftim 20:16.

39. Refer to *Zecharya* 12:3, *Keholes* 5:11, *Tehillim* 24:8, *Shmuel* 2:1:18, *Shmuel* 2:2:15, see *Meseches Shabbos* 92a, *Nedarim* 38a, *Kesubos* 111a.

40. Refer to *Shmuel* 1:22:17, *Divrei Hayomim* 2:12:11, *Melachim* 2:11:13.

41. *Shmuel* 1:1:12. There are other instances as well where running was done in *Tanach* (Refer to *Shmuel* 2:18:14, 18:19, *Melachim* 1:1:5, 1:14:27, 14:28).

42. *Tosefta Meseches Shabbos* 17:16. In addition see *Meseches Niddah* 24b.

43. *Shulchan Aruch* 301:2.

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Walking

Walking as an exercise has been practiced by Jews from time immemorial. An average man was able to walk ten *parsangs* (about forty *mil*) in one day.⁴⁴ Walking on *Shabbos* is permitted because it is enjoyable.⁴⁵

On *Shabbos*

Exercising on *Shabbos* (if it causes sweating) is not permitted.⁴⁶

As mentioned above, the *Rambam*⁴⁷ says that if one exercises (and does not fill his stomach) he will not become sick and his strength will improve even if he eats bad foods. One who sits around and does not exercise, (or one who does not go to the facilities when he has to, or is constipated) will be sick all his life even if he eats good foods. The *Rambam* defines exercising as physical movement that alters respiration, resulting in deeper breathing and at a faster pace than usual.⁴⁸

It would be wonderful if each *Yeshiva* had a room where the boys could exercise, be it either on a treadmill or a gym where they can play ball. This will not only help them be healthier, but it will help their learning as well.

Exercising Before Eating

The best thing to do before eating is to exercise a little,⁴⁹ as the *pasuk* says *b'zeyas apeicha* and then *tochal lechem*.⁵⁰

44. Meseches Pesachim 93b, Yerushalmi Berochos 1:1.

45. Tosefta Peah 4:10, Tosefta Shabbos 16:17, Rama O.C. 301:2.

46. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 328:42. See Mishnah Berurah 42.

47. Rambam Hilchos De'os 4:14-15.

48. See The Life Transforming Diet page 103.

49. Rambam Hilchos De'os 4:2, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 32:6.

50. Bereishis 3:19.

First one sweats and then he eats his bread. However, this is not always practical.

Eating Before Exercising

One should not eat and then exercise,⁵¹ because the food will not properly digest. One should wait at least two hours before exercising. The same rule applies to sleeping after eating.⁵² The *Rambam*⁵³ says one should walk a little before a meal in order to warm up the body.

Conclusion

We have presented many *halachic* sources on staying healthy. One should not take this issue lightly. One has an obligation to do what he can in order to live a long and healthy life on this world. Although many of us sit at desk all day or learn in a seat all day, one must still find time to exercise.

51. Rambam Hilchos De'os 4:3.

52. Rambam Hilchos De'os 4:5, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 32:6. Refer to Chaim Briyim K'halacha pages 107-108 why this is so.

53. Hilchos De'os 4:2, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 32:6.

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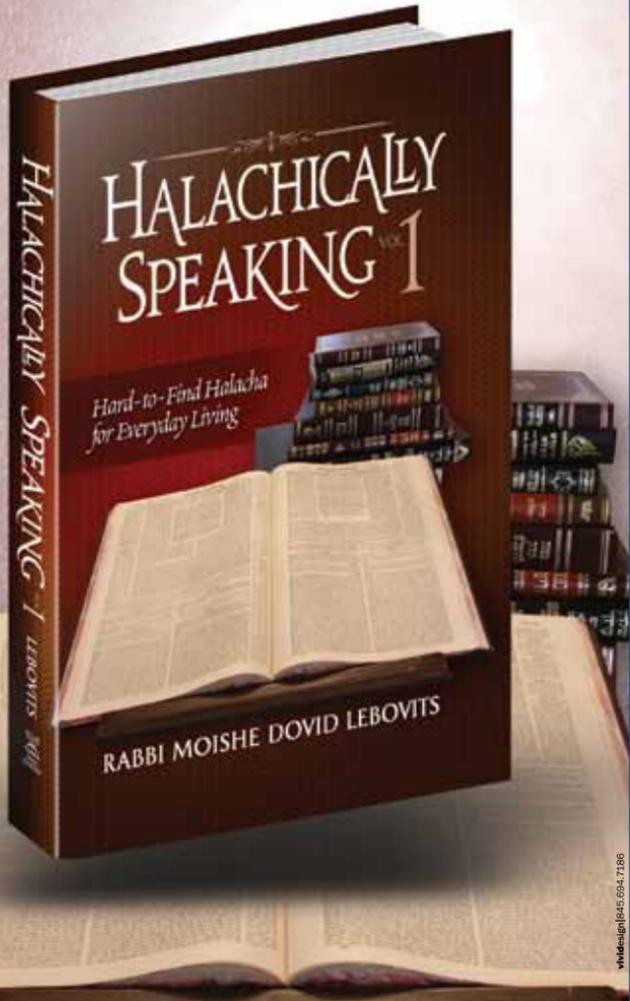
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