

Chapter 25: Health and Hygiene

The dress of the child should be so designed that it suits the weather and the climate of the environment in which it is living. The dress should be such that the child should neither sweat during warm weather nor should it shiver during winter. Soft and simple cottons are ideal for the child.

The clothes should not be tight fitting which obstruct the movements of the child. Changing tight fitting garments is inconvenient for the child and the mother finds it difficult putting them on or removing them. It is a practice among people that they pack the child in tight clothes that its limbs do not move. Definitely, this is not a good practice and is harmful for the child. Doing this the freedom of the tiny baby is badly curbed. Such practice does hamper the normal growth of the child.

One author from the West writes:

“No sooner the child is delivered from the mother’s womb, it wants to move its limbs and enjoy its freedom. This is when many mothers confine them to tight clothes. They first stretch the limbs of the babies on the ground, wrap them with many cloths and tie a belt around them that they are unable to move. Thus the growth of the children, which has to be dynamic at this stage, slows down very much and they are stunted.

The countries where this uncivilized practice is not prevalent, the children have their normal growth and the people are generally robust, healthy and strong. To the contrary the areas where babies are tied up after birth there come about many deformities like lameness, dwarfing etc. Can one imagine the impact of such upbringing on the mind and soul of the children?

The first thought the child gets is of being a captive because it is not able to move freely. The condition of the child will be worse than that of a prisoner. Such children become irate and start crying and shouting. Imagine, if your limbs too are tied up, would you not cry and shout!"

The child too is a human being. It will have feelings and sensations. It also wishes to have freedom and comfort. When its freedom is curbed by tying it up tightly it will naturally feel the pain. But it cannot defend itself and the only reaction it can show is that it starts crying. This creates pressure in the child’s

mind and in stages makes him excitable, peevish and short tempered.

The child's dress should always be kept clean. Whenever it wets the clothes, they must be immediately changed. The child's feet must be washed at intervals and the body given massage with olive oil so that it doesn't develop a dry skin. After a few wettings, the child should be given a bath. This way the child can be prevented from many ailments. Such a child will also appear clean, tidy and attractive to the eyes of the beholders.

The Prophet of Islam has said:

"Islam is the faith of purity. You must try to be pure and clean because only the clean can enter the Heaven."¹

"Clean the children from oily dirt because the Satan smells them and they get scary dreams and the Angels get agitated."²

Circumcision of the male child is a mandatory Islamic custom. This is very important for the health and hygiene of the child. This operation will prevent the child against the possible infection of the male genital organ. The circumcision can be postponed till the child grows up, but it is better to perform it within the first few days of the birth. Islam prescribes that the circumcision should be done on the seventh day of the birth of a male child.

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq says:

"Do the circumcision of your child on the seventh day of his birth. This is best for him. It is also beneficial for his proper growth and upbringing. Certainly, the earth abhors the urine of the person who has not been circumcised"³

The Holy Prophet says:

"The new born must be circumcised on the seventh day of its birth that he gets healthy growth and upbringing."⁴

Tonsuring the baby on the seventh day is prescribed in Islam. An equivalent of the weight of the tonsured hair in gold or silver has to be given in charity. On the same day as *aqiqa* a fat tailed ram (*dumba*) is butchered and the meat distributed to the poor and needy. They can also be invited to partake of it in a feast. The *aqiqa* is a good charity and will avert any evil in store for the child.

The new-born is very delicate. It needs all the care and attention of the parents. The foundation of health and happiness, or otherwise, will be laid in early childhood. The responsibility for this is on the shoulders of the parents. The parents, who are the cause of the child coming to the world, bear the responsibility to strive and bring it up as a robust, healthy human being. If the parents neglect this duty, they will be answerable for the consequences.

The child is always surrounded with the possibility of several illnesses. It can be prevented from them with good care. The ailments, which can affect the children, are infantile paralysis, boils on the body, measles, diphtheria, convulsions, kalazar etc. Preventive vaccinations against such ailments are given to the babies.

Generally paediatric hospitals have facilities of giving free preventive vaccinations to children against these diseases. The parents have no excuse to neglect their duty of getting timely preventive care for the children. If any disease afflicts the child because of their carelessness, they will be answerable to Allah and their conscience too will ever curse them. It must be understood that it is the responsibility of the parents that they take good care of the health and well being of their children that they grow into fit humans.

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1. Majma al-zawaid, v5, p. 132
 2. Bihar al-anwar, v104, p.95
 3. Wasail al-shiah, v15, p. 171
 4. Wasail al-shiah, v15, p. 175

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