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The advantages of halal food for health and well-being

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Abstract

Background: The literal meaning of halal is "permissible" in Arabic, which refers to a mandatory set of dietary guidelines and Islamic law principles. Halal food is made following the Islamic dietary regulations, ensuring specific standards of cleanliness, hygiene, animal welfare, and the prohibition of the inclusion of harmful chemicals. The emphasis on cleanliness, animal welfare, prohibition of harmful substances, nutritional value, and ethical sourcing contributes to a healthier and more sustainable food system.

Methods: An extensive online literature search for articles was performed using various search engines and databases with keywords halal food, food hygiene, and Islamic dietary principles. The reference lists of all the retrieved publications were also explored.

Results: Our search was limited to English articles that seemed relevant to this review, and the draft was prepared.

Conclusion: The health benefits of halal eating extend beyond religious grounds. Halal food consumption provides a safer option and minimizes the potential for food contamination and the associated health risks. By adhering to halal dietary guidelines, individuals can make conscious choices that promote their well-being while fostering a sense of responsibility towards animals, the environment, and the community at large. Halal food offers a holistic approach to nutrition and health, providing safer, balanced, and ethical food choices.

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Highlights

What is current knowledge?

Consumption of halal food has well-established benefits. This article compiles many such benefits in a single draft.

What is new here?

This research also provides some recent evidence about the topic.

Introduction

In Arabic, halal literally means "permissible" and denotes mandatory dietary guidelines and principles of Islamic law (1). halal food is prepared based on Islamic dietary regulations, ensuring specific standards of cleanliness, hygiene, animal welfare, and the prohibition of including harmful chemicals. Halal food consumption has gained popularity not only for religious reasons but also for the potential health benefits it provides. This commentary, backed by relevant references, explores the various health advantages associated with consuming halal food items.

Methods

An extensive online literature search for articles was performed using various search engines and databases with keywords halal food, food hygiene, and Islamic dietary principles. Reference lists of all retrieved publications were also explored, and contents from relevant articles were included in this manuscript.

Results

The consumption of halal foods is not only a religious requirement for Muslims but is also influenced by various cultural, social, and economic factors. Halal foods are consumed by Muslims as a way to follow the Islamic dietary laws. The cultural significance is also deeply rooted in religious beliefs, and consuming halal foods is seen as an act of obedience to God's commandments. It is not just a set of dietary rules but part of the broader cultural fabric, reinforcing a sense of devotion among Muslims.

Global Halal Food Market:

There are a number of food items, including but not limited to meat and poultry, shellfish, eggs, and peanut butter, that have undergone certification and are sold in the halal food market. Asia-Pacific was the largest region of the halal food market in 2022. The global halal food market is on the rise and will expand from $ 1,300.75 billion in 2022 to $ 1,501.5 billion in 2023, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 15.4%. The halal food market is expected to grow at a 14.5% CAGR to $2 583.18 billion by 2027. Technological developments in halal food items are key trends that are gaining traction in the halal food industry (2). halal Product Guarantee (HPG) has been made as halal food certification to trade food items in some countries (3).

Hygienic practices:

Halal food production places a strong emphasis on cleanliness and hygiene throughout the entire process, including sourcing, cleanliness of facilities and equipment, and the handling and distribution of food items. Food hygiene is one of the essential principles of the production and preparation of safe food. Adherence to food hygiene helps minimize the risk of foodborne illnesses caused by contamination by harmful chemicals and microbiological elements, including bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Evidence shows that strict adherence to hygiene practices contributes to the reduction of microbial contamination in halal food production, making it a safer choice for consumers (4,5).

Animal welfare:

Animal welfare is a crucial principle of halal food production, and the humane treatment of animals is one of its core foundations. Halal food production requires slaughtering animals in a specific manner, known as *zabiha*. This method ensures the swift and humane slaughter of animals by cutting the throat and allowing the blood to drain out. This procedure is said to minimize pain and suffering in the animals (6). It has been found in various studies that treating animals well and keeping them stress-free before slaughter results in meat of higher quality, with lower levels of stress hormones and better nutritional value (7,8). Consuming halal meat indirectly supports ethical practices that prioritize animal welfare.

Prohibition of harmful substances:

Halal dietary guidelines forbid the consumption of substances deemed harmful to human health, such as alcohol and pork. The avoidance of alcohol corresponds to the known negative effects of alcohol, such as liver damage, addiction, and poor judgment. Furthermore, excluding pork from the halal diet avoids the risk of certain health conditions linked with pig intakes, such as trichinosis and some other parasitic infestations. Studies such as Cook MA et al. have highlighted the risks associated with the consumption of pork and emphasize the importance of food safety regulations in preventing such infestations (9).

Nutritional value:

Halal foods, especially those sourced from permissible and natural sources, have a high nutritional value. Islamic dietary regulations promote the eating of fresh fruits and vegetables, cereals, lean meats, and dairy products in a balanced amount. This emphasis on a balanced diet encourages the consumption of important nutrients, vitamins, and minerals required for optimum health. A study

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by Ibrahim SM et al. found that halal meat, obtained from animals raised following halal standards, yielded higher levels of certain essential amino acids compared to non-halal meat (10). This shows that halal meat has greater nutritional value. Following these guidelines ensures a nutritious diet that contributes to overall well-being, reduces the risk of chronic diseases among halal food consumers, and potentially maintains a well-rounded health status.

Ethical sourcing and sustainability:

Halal food production encourages ethical sourcing and sustainability practices, such as organic agricultural methods, pesticide reduction, and support for fair-trade practices. These practices contribute to a more sustainable and environmentally friendly food ecosystem. Halal food production has a good environmental impact, including lower carbon emissions and natural resource conservation (11). Consuming food produced ethically decreases exposure to dangerous chemicals, supports local communities, and aids in the preservation of biodiversity, helping support equilibrium between environment and health (12).

Criticism and clarification of halal food consumption:

While halal foods adhere to Islamic dietary laws and hold significance for many, there have been criticisms and concerns. The lack of standardized halal certification processes globally has led to inconsistencies and varying standards, making it challenging for consumers to trust the authenticity of halal products. Efforts are being made to establish international standards for halal certification (13). Moreover, local and regional certification bodies often work to ensure compliance with halal requirements, providing consumers with assurance at a more localized level. Non-Muslims and even some Muslims may have a limited understanding of halal, leading to misconceptions about its principles and practices. Education and awareness campaigns can help address misconceptions. Providing information about the significance of halal, its principles, and its alignment with hygiene and cleanliness standards can foster a better understanding (14). In some cases, there are concerns about economic exploitation within the halal industry, with accusations of fraudulent practices and the misuse of the halal label for economic gain. However, increased regulatory oversight, transparent certification processes, and legal measures can help combat fraudulent practices and ensure the integrity of the halal label (15). Some critics argue that the demand for halal meat contributes to environmental issues, such as deforestation and increased greenhouse gas emissions. Sustainable and environment-friendly practices incorporated into halal food production may reduce carbon footprints (16). Additionally, environmental concerns are not exclusive to the halal industry and apply to the food industry as a whole. Critics also argue that a focus on halal options in public spaces may lead to exclusion and a lack of inclusivity for individuals with diverse dietary preferences and restrictions. The goal of halal food is often to provide options for those who require or prefer halal food, not to exclude others. In multicultural societies, efforts can be made to offer diverse food choices that cater to various dietary needs.

Conclusion

The health benefits associated with halal food items extend beyond religious considerations. Evidence suggests that halal food items provide consumers with a safe and wholesome option. They also minimize the chances of food contamination and the associated health risks. Halal food culture stresses cleanliness and animal welfare, as well as the prohibition of including harmful substances. It also ensures high nutritional value and ethical sourcing, contributing to a healthier and more sustainable food system. By adhering to halal dietary guidelines, individuals can make conscious choices that promote their overall health and well-being. It also develops a sense of responsibility towards animals, the environment, and the community at large, supporting the equilibrium between the environment and health. As supported by various studies and research, halal food offers a holistic approach to nutrition, providing consumers with safer, nutritious, and ethically produced food choices. Therefore, the consumption of halal foods is influenced by a complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors. These factors contribute to the significance of halal foods not only as a dietary choice but also as a reflection of religious identity, social connections, and economic opportunities.

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Ethical statement

Not required, as it is a compilation of previously published research.

Conflicts of interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

Author contributions

IAK did the literature search and wrote the final draft.

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