

Wudu (Ablution): An Effective Preventive Measure against Many Infectious Diseases

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Abstract

Wudu (Ablution) is an Arabic word which means the specific action of washing certain body parts. In these body parts, hands, mouth, nostrils, face, arms, and feet included. In religion Islam, wudu has great importance. Muslims are required to perform wudu before offering the prayer five times a day. As we all know pathogens can enter in our body through mouth, nose and eyes directly or indirectly from our contaminated hands. So wudu can significantly reduce the chances of different infections e.g. oral cavity infections, intestinal infections, certain contact infections like skin and eyes, respiratory infections including present pandemic Covid-19 etc. A major aspect of communicable disease control relates to "breaking the chain of transmission" or interruption of transmission. Personal hygiene (especially hand washing) is one of the important practices in breaking the chain; that is why it is being emphasized by epidemiologists and clinicians. However, in Islam it has been ordered in Quran and Hadith 1450 years ago. Wudu five or more times a day (for offering prayers) can also provide us good hygiene and helps to prevent the spread of many infections. Many infections including present pandemic Covid-19 posing a great threat to public health and unfortunately for Covid-19 we still do not have any specific treatment or vaccine. We can only protect people from such infections through preventive measures like boosting of immunity, good personal hygiene, physical distancing etc. Hence it is high time to educate people about the importance and basic steps of wudu for good personal hygiene.

Keywords: Wudu, Ablution, Personal hygiene, Infectious diseases, Covid-19, Prevention

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INTRODUCTION

In day to day life we are surrounded by pathogens, pollutants and other harmful substances. These pathogens and harmful substances can enter in our body through mouth, nose and eyes directly or indirectly from our contaminated hands. A major aspect of communicable disease control relates to "breaking the chain of transmission" or interruption of transmission [1]. Personal hygiene is an important practice in breaking the chain of transmission. Lack of personal hygiene coupled with poor sanitation favour person-to-person transmission of infection, an example is the 1984 dysentery epidemic in India [2].

Cleanliness is an essential part of Islamic life. Islam has given so much importance to

cleanliness that it is considered to be a part of faith. Cleanliness and purification are one of the great exemptions of Islam. Islam places great stress on cleanliness, whether it is in physical or spiritual terms. While people generally consider cleanliness or purification a desirable aspect, Islam insists on it, making hygiene an essential part of faith [3]. Islamic hygienically jurisprudence includes a number of regulations involving cleanliness during *salat* (obligatory prayer) through *wudu* (partial ablution) and *ghusl* (full ablution) [4].

Wudu, five or more times a day (for offering prayers) can also provide us good personal hygiene and can significantly reduce the chances of different infections e.g. oral cavity infections, intestinal infections, certain contact infections like skin and eyes, respiratory

infections including present pandemic Covid-19 etc., as scientifically it is proved that wudu is the most appropriate practice to cleanse the exposed parts of human body [5].

WUDU

What is Wudu?

Wudu (ablution) is an Arabic word which means the specific action of washing certain body parts including hands, mouth, nostrils, face, arms and feet with pure and clean water. In Islam it is necessary for all the Muslims before offering prayers, five times a day [6].

Steps of Performing Wudu [7] and Underlying Disinfecting Mechanisms

1. Wash the right hand up to the wrist (and between the fingers) three times, then similarly for the left hand. In any infectious epidemics, soap can be used. Hands are the most common medium by which pathogenic agents are transferred to food from the skin, nose, bowel, etc. as well as from other foods. The transmission takes place both directly (hand-to-mouth) and indirectly. Unclean hands and fingers imply lack of personal hygiene [2]. Hand washing is the single most effective way to prevent the spread of infections [8]. A review by Curtis and Cairncross suggests that hand washing with soap, particularly after contact with faeces (post-defecation and after handling a child's stool), can reduce diarrheal incidence by 42–47%, while work by Rabie *et al.* suggests a 16% reduction in respiratory infections is possible through hand washing [9]. For the prevention of Covid-19 there is a lot of emphasis on washing hands. In fact it is an important measure to limit the spread of virus.
2. Next, rinse the mouth and spit out the water three times and rub the teeth with a *miswak*. Islam has given an elevated status to the *miswak*, and its importance has been stressed in many Prophetic narratives by Muslim commentators. The Prophet Mohammad (Peace Be upon Him) strongly recommended the use of *miswak* and was himself a fervent supporter of its use [10]. If a *miswak* is not available then one should use the finger.

This act removes food particles, strengthens teeth and gums and prevents oral infections.

Miswak is a traditional chewing stick prepared from the roots, twigs, and stem of *Salvadorapersica* and has been used as a natural method for tooth cleaning in many parts of the world for thousands of years. A number of scientific studies have demonstrated that the *miswak* (*Salvadorapersica*) possesses antibacterial, anti-fungal, anti-viral, anti-cariogenic, and anti-plaque properties [10].

3. Some water should be taken in the right hand and sniffed into the nostrils thrice and then blown out. The left hand small finger should be used for cleaning the nose. Nasal rinsing has many effects. First, it washes out antigens and pathogens that may occupy the nasal cavity; second, it dilutes nasal secretions, thus making it easier for mucociliary movement to clear up the thick mucus; and third, hypertonic solution improves mucociliary motility, thus improving mucociliary clearance. Nasal rinsing is a proven adjunctive technique in treating allergic rhinitis and rhinosinusitis [11].
4. Wash the face (from the hairline on the forehead to where facial hair begins and ear to ear). This is to be performed three times. According to CDC, many diseases and conditions can be prevented or controlled through appropriate personal hygiene and by frequently washing parts of the face with soap and clean, running water (if available) [12]. A common benefit of facial cleansing is the removal of dirt, oil, and other unwanted debris from the face and eyes. Throughout the day the skin on our face is continually covered with bacteria, pollutants, viruses, dirt, and old (dead) skin cells [13]. This act may protect us from different water washed diseases of eyes like trachoma, conjunctivitis etc. [14].
5. Wash the entire right hand and forearm, including the elbow three times; then the left hand and forearm three times. Pass

fingers of one hand between the fingers of the other hand. If wearing a ring it should be moved freely to allow water to pass under it.

Again, hand washing is important in breaking the chain of transmission. Washing entire hand may protect us from water washed disease like scabies of hands [14].

6. Then perform *masah*. Wet hands should be passed all over the head; then the first finger of the right and left hand should be moved in the right and left ears respectively and in the same operation, thumbs should be passed around the ears posteriorly; then pass the backs of the hands over the hind part of the neck only. This is done only once. This wipes off pathogens and dirt particles from the head, removes extra wax from the ears and prevents wax buildups and ear infections [15].
7. Starting with the right foot, wash both feet from the toes up to and including the ankles thrice. The little finger of the left hand should be passed between the toes of both the feet beginning from the little toe of the right foot and ending with the little toe of the left foot. Thorough washing of feet and washing between the toes is the basic and important part of foot hygiene [16]. This act protects us from different foot infections, fungal or bacterial. Also, frequent feet washing may prevent the chances of hookworm infection as its larva enters the body through the skin, most commonly through the feet [2].

CONCLUSION

It may be concluded that Wudu is no-cost, easy, better method of personal hygiene to prevent from community spread of infection as it has a better sanitation protocol and requires only clean water possible for everyone. Apart from performing Wudu before prayers, it is also recommended and appreciated before taking food, while visiting patients, before leaving home for a journey and before sleeping. These all indications will provide better hygiene and helpful in prevention. Since fighting against COVID-19 requires a social support, and involvement of religious leaders

is also a part of prevention awareness, emphasis on Wudu too may help Muslim community adopt preventive measures more easily. Beneficial effects of each step of Wudu along with use of *meswak* is scientifically supported but needs further research in this direction. Conducting clinical studies in particular group for assessment of Wudu as a preventive measure may help explore the better data to analyse its efficacy and future planning of strategies fighting against infection, especially COVID-19.

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