



Letter to the Editor

Lifestyle Modification During the Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)

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Dear Editor,

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) emerged in Wuhan (China) in December 2019 and rapidly spread to more than 200 countries around the world. Although several months have passed since the discovery of the vaccine and the onset of vaccination, the world is still involved with various effects and consequences of this disease in social, medical, educational, economic, and political domains. In such conditions, lifestyle modification is inevitable. This modification includes making changes in sleeping patterns, physical activity, smoking, alcohol use, feelings, emotions, social relationships, behaviors, attitudes, customs, eating habits, and even domestic violence.

Sleeping disorder is one of the most common consequences of the pandemic that has an essential role in regulating emotions and can have direct impact on people's emotional functioning (1). According to studies, the amount and quality of sleep have been affected by the epidemic (2). Changes in sleep and wakefulness at night can increase the risk of chronic diseases and exacerbate mental health problems as well (3). Diet also affects one's quality of sleep. People who sleep well are more likely to eat a Mediterranean diet and have a lower body mass index (4). Exercise improves sleep at any age as well (1).

The World Health Organization (WHO) has emphasized the significance of a balanced diet to maintain a stronger immune system and reduce the risk of chronic and infectious diseases. Recommendations for servings during the coronavirus pandemic are higher than the usual WHO dietary recommendations. It is recommended that 2 cups of fruits (4 servings), 2.5 cups of vegetables (5 servings), 180 g of whole grains, and 160 g of meat and beans should be consumed daily (5,6). Poor dietary habits along with inactivity and a sedentary lifestyle bring about a range of chronic diseases such as hyperlipidemia and stroke (3).

Various studies indicate positive outcomes of physical activity in the fields of mental health and well-being (1-3). Sleep disorders also seem to affect physical activity. In many people, quarantine has significantly reduced physical activity (2,3). However, many people maintained, or even increased, their physical activity (4). The existing research indicates that increasing social isolation and loneliness lead to sedentary behaviors (3).

Alcohol is mainly the most common substance abused in many countries. In fact, alcohol consumption has increased in many countries since the start of the Corona pandemic. Alcohol may be routinely used by a significant number of people at the time of confusion, inactivity, and loneliness as a means of coping with anxiety, stress, or sleep deprivation as a result of measures taken to reduce the spread of the disease. Increased alcohol consumption may become normal during this period and may lead vulnerable individuals to dangerous patterns of alcohol consumption (3). Given that there is a significant relationship between COVID-19 infection and air pollution and considering that if smokers are infected with this virus, they are more likely to show severe symptoms, it is necessary to change their smoking habits. Research has shown that the daily smoking rate has reduced during the lockdown, and people's motivation for quitting smoking has increased (4).

One of the immediate and unpleasant consequences of home quarantine is an increase in the occurrence of domestic violence. Research has shown that 25%-50% of domestic violence perpetrators have been drinking alcohol at the time of the attack. However, in some studies, this figure is as high as 70%. Some countries have already seen significant increases in indicators such as calls to report abuse. For example, in Lebanon, the number of such calls has doubled in March 2020, and France has experienced a 32% increase in such calls (3).



In the psychological domain, pandemics lead to the spread of stressors in this critical period which include fear of illness, death, decreased social relations, insufficient information, conflicting recommendations, being locked up at home, loneliness, anxiety, worry, not being happy, and low self-confidence (1). Factors such as sanctions and inflation can also lead to great vulnerability and reduced resilience in dealing with mental health problems and disorders (7). Harmful consequences were observed in the personal, social, educational, and economic dimensions, and most of the interviewees in the study endangered their financial, psychological, and social security (8). Alcohol use, smoking, and body mass index were found to be associated with mental illnesses (3). However, research has recommended physical activity, social interactions, and online stress management to prevent and improve people's mental health (3,7). The results of a study conducted in Iran showed that health staff who changed their lifestyle were at a desirable level of efficiency and threat (86.06%). In addition, the findings highlighted the impact of using gloves, masks, avoiding contact with others, and washing hands regularly with soap and water. To improve their knowledge, attitude, and practice, measures such as continuous monitoring as well as adequate and appropriate training are recommended (9).

A study conducted in the Netherlands found that almost 20% of Dutch people have changed their lifestyle to a healthier lifestyle, largely due to proper nutrition and higher physical activity. About one-third of the participants believed that lifestyle changes affected the rate of coronavirus infection and also believed that this modification could affect the course of the disease. The use of traditional medicine was also a predictor of lifestyle modification. Regardless of the time and circumstances in which a person decides to make a lifestyle change, it is difficult to develop a new lifestyle and even more difficult to make it a part of life (10).

Therefore, different components of lifestyle are closely related to one another; in other words, by improving one or more components, one can see the desired effects in lifestyle. Therefore, it seems to be necessary to conduct comprehensive studies on lifestyle change in communities and its impact on the physical and mental health of individuals. National and global health policies are also essential to increase awareness and teach life skills and self-care at home. These trainings can include strengthening

resilience, having an active and constructive role, improving sleep hygiene, maintaining proper nutrition, doing sports and exercises, receiving information from credible sources, expressing emotions and feelings, having a positive attitude towards life, giving meaning to life, developing interpersonal communications, coping with stress, and strengthening the feeling of happiness and cheerfulness.

Conflict of Interests

Authors declare that they have no conflict of interests.

Ethical Permissions

Not applicable.

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