

THE UTILIZATION AND BENEFITS OF SALAAH (MUSLIM PRAYER) AS A MEANS OF FUNCTIONAL REHABILITATION AND LOW-INTENSITY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

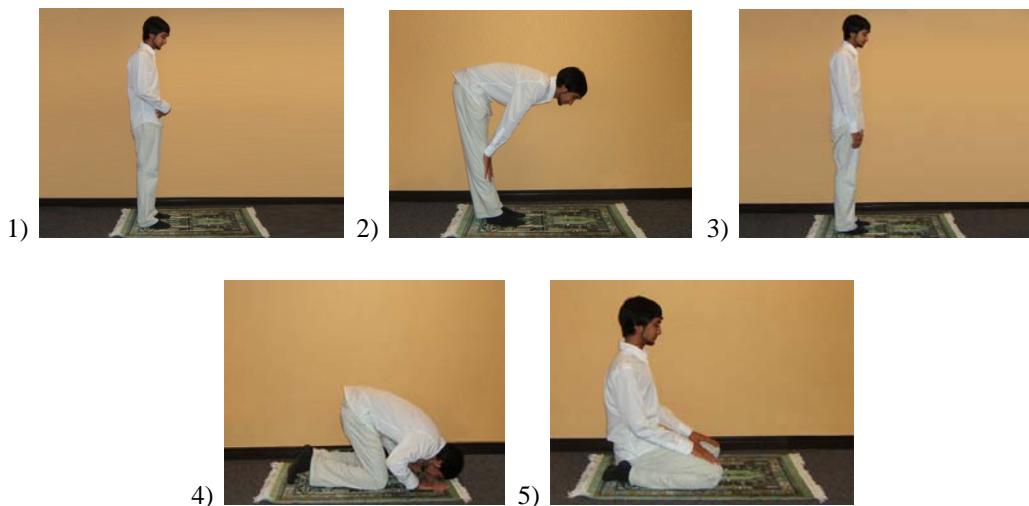
Functional rehabilitation and low-intensity physical activity

Functional rehabilitation is a branch of medicine that aims to enhance and restore functional ability and quality of life in individuals, as well as those with physical impairments or disabilities and serves as an extension of the traditional elements of physical therapy. It also enhances stability and mobility in individuals with the additional aim of improving activities of daily living.

Physical activity refers to any movement produced by skeletal muscles that increase energy expenditure above base level. It can be divided into two main categories: One is 'exercise' that involves structured and repetitive bodily movements. The other is 'non-exercise physical activity', such as standing, participating in household chores or occupational work. Both exercise and non-exercise physical activity can be classified by the level of intensity: low, moderate and high.

Muslim prayer (Salaah) can be classified as a low-intensity physical activity that induces relaxation, minimal stress, effective blood flow and strengthened muscles and joints. Salaah, along with its varied positions and postures, can play a role in improving psychological well-being, self-esteem and self-efficacy, motor behaviour, cerebral blood flow and musculoskeletal fitness. Each of the 5 positions in the prayer sequence will be evaluated with the aim of explaining the use and benefits of Salaah as a means of functional rehabilitation and low-intensity physical activity.

The prayer sequence



The standing position is important in adopting a good postural alignment. Many would slouch or bend their knees in this position. It is integral for Muslims to 'stand up straight' in the starting position as this can place themselves in a functional postural position. While reading Surah Faatiha and another Surah, it is important for Muslims to maintain this postural position (head straight, eyes looking down, back and legs straight). The recitation of the Quraan increases minute ventilation and air expiration while one moves their lips during reading. There is an increase in blood flow in the face, tongue, upper cortex in the brain, mouth sensory and motor areas during recitation.

In addition, Muslims can also incorporate core stabilization into their prayers. Core stabilization is the general term for how the muscles of your trunk keep your spine and body stable and helps you stay balanced when you move. Although the prime focus is to devote oneself to God in deep concentration when praying, but at the same time, core stabilization has a huge benefit in strengthening the pelvic floor muscles, maintaining postural alignment and preventing lower back pain (which is common in Muslims due to poor posture and incorrect Salaah techniques). Therefore one can try their best to incorporate core stabilization throughout their prayers.

The bowing position (Rukuh) can serve as a means of lower back and hamstring flexibility. In this position, it is essential to form a right angle (90 degrees) of the body in order to keep the body aligned and prevent from straining the lower back. Some studies have suggested that it is essential to bend the knees slightly (not more than 10 degrees) as it prevents the locking of the knees as this can place pressure on the lumbo-sacral complex. In addition, the neck and head should also be straight while the eyes are focused towards the prayer mat in order to avoid neck strains and cervical postural abnormalities such as CVA (cranial vertebral angle). In the bent position, hands are placed on the thighs as this can reduce curvatures in the spine and forms support to both the lower back and hamstrings. Rukuh also promotes a greater flow of blood into the upper regions of body – particularly to the head, eyes, ears, nose, brain and lungs. This allows mental toxins to be released. Over time, this improves brain function and is an excellent stance to maintain the proper position of the foetus in pregnant women.

Standing up from Rukuh into the standing position (Qiyaam) should be done cautiously. Coming up from Rukuh can quickly cause one to hyper-extend their backs and be placed in an anterior-pelvic tilted position. One should remove their hands from their thighs slowly and place them on the sides of their legs when going into Qiyaam. Enhancing into the Qiyaam position can strengthen lower and middle trunk musculature as well as assist in modifying postural reflexes.

Prostration (Sajdah) is the most fundamental position in Salaah. Research has shown that there is a more physiological benefit as the blood flow is directed towards the heart while one is in prostration. When one comes up from Sajdah, blood is transported back to the body. Prostrating for the second time, allows blood flow to be transported to the heart again. This is good for any individuals with heart complications or cardiovascular diseases.

While sitting with the knees bent (Jalsah), it's important again to maintain postural alignment. The optimal technique for Jalsah is keeping the back straight and having the right foot dorsiflexed with one's toes facing towards the ground. This creates mobility in the ankle joint and provides isometric strengthening of the intrinsic muscles of the right foot. Although this position may only benefit the right foot, one should pay attention to strengthening the left foot as this is inverted during the seated position (Jalsah). Too much inversion of the left foot can place one in a greater chance of sustaining an ankle strain and therefore caution should be taken in the Jalsah position.

Recommendations

It's important to perfectly perform all of the movements of Salaah, rather than haphazardly rushing through them as this is where one will optimally benefit from low-intensity physical activity.

One who is indisposed should try their best to refrain from doing the seated 'modified' prayer as there are more health and spiritual benefits when doing the usual prayer, unless persons have major injuries or complications.

An individual should pay specific caution to the proper Salaah techniques which were set out 1400 years ago and adhere to them as these have both health and spiritual benefits.

CONCLUSION

Praying five times a day is a good way of maintaining low-intensity physical activity and functional rehabilitation, specifically at improving cerebral blood flow and postural reflexes. Salaah is like a 'free-hand' exercise where no equipment or facilities are needed. It can be performed in groups, individually and virtually anywhere. With the above being said, one should not forget that Salaah is a pillar of Islam and a Muslims duty, even though there are psychological, musculoskeletal, cerebral and spiritual benefits that are aligned with it. It is advised that rehabilitation specialists can adopt Salaah positions in their rehabilitative programmes with their patients. Detailed scientific research on how Salaah benefits various individuals (persons with neuromuscular disorders, heart complications and disabilities) should be implemented in future. The essence of spiritual significance should be ignored when implementing Salaah as a modality of a means of physical activity.

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