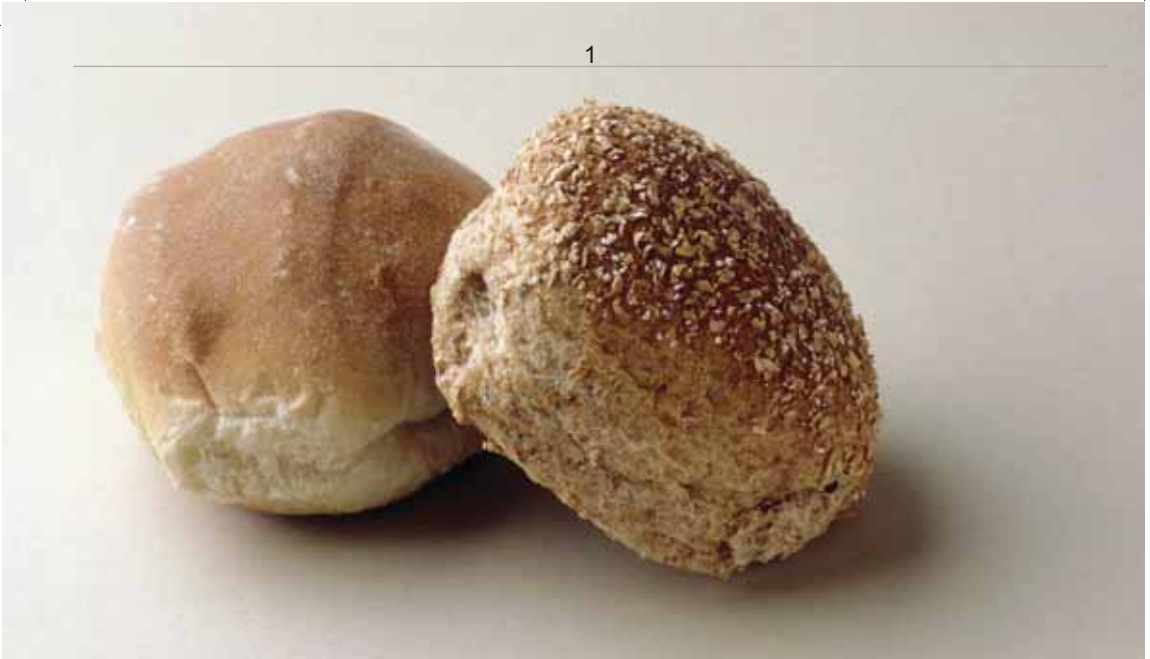


Ramadan Health and Spirituality Guide





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Foreword

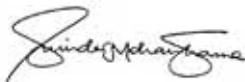
I am very pleased to support the development of the Ramadan Health and Spirituality Guide, which has been independently produced by Communities in Action in order to provide information and advice on maximising health gain during the Muslim fast.

The Department of Health is committed to responding to the needs and preferences of all sections of our diverse population and this guide is one of a range of activities we have supported in order to promote public health amongst all sections of the population.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that large sections within Muslim communities experience significant health inequalities, although this is not uniform across all Muslim communities or all aspects of health. In particular, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities tend to suffer poorer health than the general population. We hope that this guide, alongside the Department's targeted campaigns such as our Asian tobacco helpline, will help to address these inequalities.

As part of our commitment to creating a patient-led NHS, the Department of Health and the NHS will continue to work in partnership with community-based organisations to meet the needs of all communities, including faith communities, and to promote better health for all.

Surinder Sharma
National Director, Equality and Human Rights
Department of Health





Introduction

Health is the key to happiness and what we consume directly affects our health. Islam encourages Muslims to ensure that they are mindful of their health. The blessed Prophet said: “Take advantage of the good health before illnesses afflict you”. He also encouraged Muslims to try their best to take up healthy living lifestyle that includes a balanced diet, regular mental and physical exercise and a balance between material and spiritual needs.

Although health data is not available, the Health Survey of England 2004 has indicated an alarming anomaly in the health state of the Asian community in general and Muslim community in particular. Compared with the 24% of men in the general population who smoked cigarettes, higher levels of cigarette smoking were reported by Bangladeshi (40%). South Asian men and women had the highest rates of diabetes. Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were up to five times as likely as the general population to have diabetes, and Indian men and women were up to three times as likely. Some 33% of Pakistani men and women eat the recommended five or more portions of fruit and vegetables a day, compared with Bangladeshi men and 28% of Bangladeshi women.

The month of Ramadan is a great opportunity to focus on bringing back a balanced and healthy lifestyle in one’s life. Through fasting one begins to learn how to manage one’s eating habits, how to exercise control and discipline. This month requires one to give the stomach a break and by doing so one is able to break down and expel the accumulated toxins from the body.

This booklet is aimed at helping you understand the health issues related to fasting so that you are able to make more informed choices, minimize complications and maximize on the benefit of your fast. The booklet will guide you through physiological changes that occur when one is fasting; give examples of beneficial and harmful food during fasting, discuss potential medical complications and remedies, suggest a diet plan and respond to the most frequently asked questions about fasting in general and medical issues in particular.

The booklet has been put together by medical experts, Islamic scholars and researchers who have stayed within the spirit of Islam while ensuring the medical advice and suggestions are scientific and culturally sensitive.



Useful Contacts

Asian Quitline

For free and confidential advice on how to stop smoking or chewing tobacco call on
 Bengali 0800 00 22 44
 Urdu 0800 00 22 88
 Punjabi 0800 00 22 77
 Turkish 0800 00 22 99
 Gujarati 0800 00 22 55
 Arabic 0800 169 1300

British Lung Foundation

73-75 Goswell Road
 London
 EC1
 Tel 0207 688 5555
 Fax 0207 688 5556
 Website www.lunguk.org

Diabetes UK Central Office

Macleod House
 10 Parkway
 London
 NW1 7AA
 Tel 020 7424 1000
 Fax 020 7424 1001
 Email info@diabetes.org.uk
 Website www.diabetes.org.uk

Food Standards Agency

125 Kingsway
 London
 WC2
 Tel 0207 276 8829
 Website www.food.gov.uk

Islamic Medical Association

83 Rutter Estate
 Walsall
 WS1
 Tel 01922 428730

Leicestershire Nutrition and Dietetic Service

Units 11 and 12 Warren Park Way
 Enderby
 Leicestershire
 LE19 4SA
 Tel 0116 2727200
 Fax 0116 2727228

Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)

Boardman House
 64 Broadway
 Stratford
 London
 E15
 Tel 0208 432 0586
 Fax 0208 432 0587
 Website www.mcb.org.uk

Muslim Doctors and Dentists Association

2a Bowyer Road
 Birmigham
 B8
 Tel 0121 704 9801
 Website www.mdda.org.uk

Muslim Health Network

65a Grosvenor Road
 London
 W7 1HR
 Tel 020 8799 4475
 Fax 020 8799 4465
 Email info@muslimhealthnetwork.org
 Website www.muslimhealthnetwork.org

Quit (giving up smoking)

Tel 0800 00 22 00
 Email stopsmoking@quit.org.uk

The Physiological Changes that Occur During a Fast

For many people the key question regarding fasting is whether it is good or bad for one's health. The answer to this requires a quick overview of what happens inside the body during fasting: the physiology of fasting.

The changes that occur in the body in response to fasting depend on the length of the continuous fast. Technically, the body enters into a fasting state eight hours or so after the last meal, when the gut finishes absorption of nutrients from the food. In the normal state, body glucose, which is stored in the liver and muscles, is the body's main source of energy. During a fast, this store of glucose is used up first to provide energy.

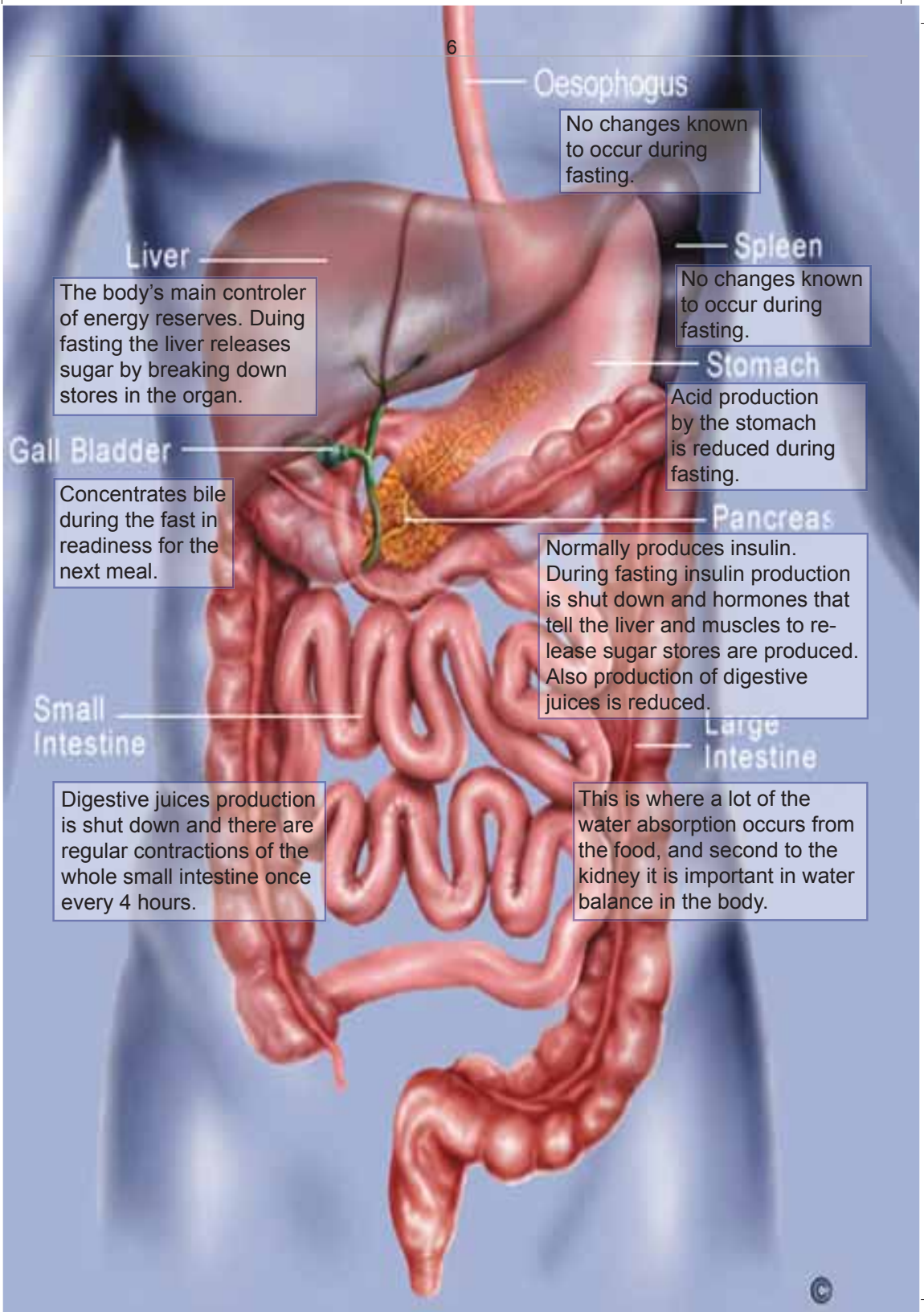
Later in the fast, once the stores of glucose run out, fat becomes the next store source of energy for the body. Small quantities of glucose are also 'manufactured' through other mechanisms in the liver.

Only with a prolonged fast of many days to weeks, does the body eventually turn to protein for energy. This is the technical description of what is commonly known as 'starvation', and it is clearly unhealthy. It involves protein being released from the breakdown of muscle which is why people who starve look emaciated and become very weak.

As the fast only extends from dawn till dusk, there is ample opportunity to replenish energy stores at pre-dawn and dusk meals. This provides a progressive gentle transition from using glucose to fat as the main source of energy, and prevents the breakdown of muscle for protein.

The use of fat for energy aids weight loss, preserving the muscles, and in the long run reduces one's cholesterol levels. In addition, weight loss results in better control of diabetes and reduces blood pressure. A detoxification process also seems to occur, as any toxins stored in the body's fat are dissolved and removed from the body. After a few days of the fast, higher levels of certain hormones appear in the blood (endorphins), resulting in a better level of alertness and an overall feeling of general mental well-being.

Balanced food and fluid intake is important between fasts. The kidney is very efficient at maintaining the body's water and salts, such as sodium and potassium. However, these can be lost through sweating. To prevent muscle break down, meals must contain adequate levels of 'energy food' such as carbohydrates and some fat. Hence, a balanced diet with adequate quantities of nutrients, salts and water is vital.



6

Oesophogus

No changes known to occur during fasting.

Liver

The body's main controler of energy reserves. Duing fasting the liver releases sugar by breaking down stores in the organ.

Spleen

No changes known to occur during fasting.

Stomach

Acid production by the stomach is reduced during fasting.

Gall Bladder

Concentrates bile during the fast in readiness for the next meal.

Pancreas

Normally produces insulin. During fasting insulin production is shut down and hormones that tell the liver and muscles to re-lease sugar stores are produced. Also production of digestive juices is reduced.

Small Intestine

Digestive juices production is shut down and there are regular contractions of the whole small intestine once every 4 hours.

Large Intestine

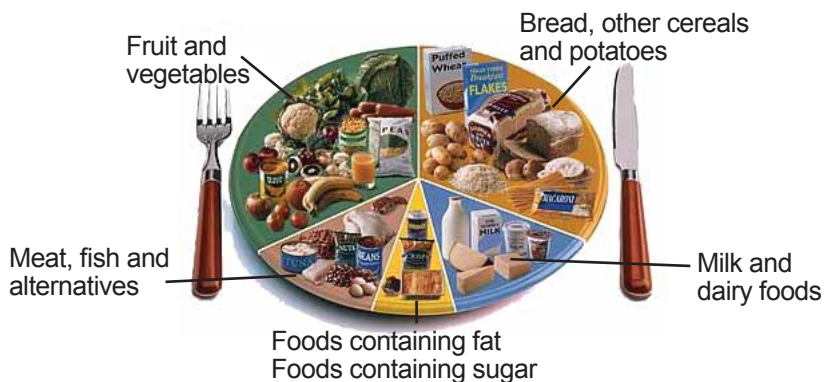
This is where a lot of the water absorption occurs from the food, and second to the kidney it is important in water balance in the body.





Foods that Harm and Foods that Benefit

The fasts of Ramadan can improve a person's health but they can just as easily worsen it! The deciding factor is not the fast itself, but rather what is consumed in the non-fasting hours. To fully benefit from fasting a person should spare a great deal of thought to the type and quantity of food they will indulge in through the blessed month. As mentioned in the section on spirituality, overeating can, not only harm the body, but it is thought to also interfere with a person's spiritual growth during the month. A diet that has less than a normal amount of food but is sufficiently balanced will keep a person healthy and active during the month of Ramadan. The diet should be simple and not differ too much from one's normal everyday diet. It should contain foods from all the major food groups as shown in the model.



Ramadan Health and Spirituality Guide

Complex Carbohydrates are foods that will help release energy slowly during the long hours of fasting. Complex carbohydrates are found in grains and seeds, like barley, wheat, oats, millet, semolina, beans, lentils, wholemeal flour, basmati rice, etc.



Fibre-rich foods are also digested slowly and include bran, cereals, whole wheat, grains and seeds, potatoes with the skin, vegetables such as green beans and almost all fruit including apricots, prunes, figs, etc.



Foods to avoid are the heavily-processed, fast-burning foods that contain refined carbohydrates in the form of sugar, white flour, etc. as well as of course, too much fatty foods (e.g. cakes, biscuits, chocolates and sweets, such as Indian Mithai).



It may also be worth avoiding the caffeine content in drinks such as tea, coffee and Cola. (Caffeine is a diuretic and stimulates faster water loss through urination).



Foods to avoid	Healthy/ Alternative foods
Deep fried foods e.g. Pakoras, Samosas, fried dumplings	Whole grains e.g. chick peas plain, or with potato in yogurt with different Indian spices, samosas baked instead of fried and boiled dumplings
High sugar / high fat foods e.g. Indian sweets such as Ghulab Jamun, Rasgullay, Balushahi, Baklava etc	Milk-based sweets and puddings such as Rasmalai, Barfee etc
High fat cooked foods such as parhattas, oily curries, greasy pastries	Alternate with chapattis made without oil, baked or grilled meat and chicken, try to make pastry at home and use single layer
Cooking methods to avoid	Alternative cooking methods
Deep frying	Shallow frying, usually there is very little difference in taste
Frying	Grilling or baking is healthier and helps retain the taste and original flavour of the food, especially chicken and fish

Suhoor, the pre-dawn meal should be a wholesome, moderate meal that is filling and provides enough energy for many hours. It is therefore particularly important to include slowly-digesting foods in the *suhoor*.

Iftar is the meal which breaks the day's fast. This meal could include dates, following the Prophetic traditions. Dates will provide a refreshing burst of much-needed energy. Fruit juices will also have a similar, revitalising effect. The meal should remain a meal and not become a feast! Try to minimise the rich, special dishes that traditionally celebrate the fast and keep to the advice included in the table above.

Many of the foods which are mentioned and encouraged are in the **Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah** also correspond to modern guidelines on a healthy diet and will help to maintain balanced, healthy meals in Ramadan.

The most commonly consumed foods by Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) were: milk, dates, lamb/mutton and oats. Healthy foods mentioned in the Holy Qur'an are fruit and vegetables such as olives, onions, cucumber, figs, dates, grapes as well as pulses such as lentils. The encouragement of fish can be seen in the fact that Islamic Law spares fish from any specific slaughter requirements, making it easy to incorporate fish in a meal.





Spirituality and Food

Food has a great significance in Islam. It is associated with one's relationship with God. Chapter 20 verse 89 of the Qur'an states "eat of the good and wholesome things that We have provided for your sustenance, but indulge in no excess therein". The physical body is a gift from God; it is given to humans as an amanah (trust) to take care of for a fixed period. How much food is consumed and the choice of food has a direct impact on the physical and spiritual well-being of the person. The food that one consumes affects one's behaviour and personality. Wholesome, natural and healthy food assists the development of a good personality.

Over-eating has long been frowned upon in Islam as it is thought to increase worldly appetites and cause sluggishness, thereby 'dulling' the soul, hampering spiritual growth and increase physical ailments.

The blessed Prophet said: "The children of Adam fill no vessel worse than their stomach. Sufficient for him is a few morsels to keep his back straight. If he must eat more, then a third should be for his food, a third for his drink, and a third left for air". (Sunan al-Tirmidhî)

continued on page 16



Diet Plan

A diet plan to ensure a varied and balanced diet including foods from the major five different food groups.

The fast is broken (Iftar) with dates, followed with dinner. Dates and fluids (water and juices) should be added to each Suhoor and Iftar

- Suhoor:** 1 bowl of porridge with milk,
1 slice of toast + handful of nuts (unsalted)
- Iftar/Dinner:** pita bread with chicken, salad and humus + 1-2 middle eastern sweet baklava
- Suhoor:** 2 wheat based cereal with milk + plain scone or crumpet + 1 apple or banana
- Iftar/Dinner:** chicken with boiled rice, vegetable curry and mixed salad + fruit salad with single cream
- Suhoor:** 2 shredded wheat or a bowl of muesli + a pear or an orange
- Iftar/Dinner:** fish baked with roasted vegetables or fish curry with rice + sweet vermicelli or 1 jalebi (Indian sweet)
- Suhoor:** cheese + 1 teaspoon of jam with crackers or toast + handful of dried fruits
- Iftar/Dinner:** pasta cooked with vegetables and chicken/fish + a slice of plain cake with custard
- Suhoor:** a bowl of vegetables or chicken soup with some bread + a piece of fruit



Ramadan 1427 | 2006

RAMADAN TIME

The times below refer to London. Please see notes for adjustments to your locality

	day	day	Fajr begins	Fajr sunrise	Zuhr begins	Asr begins	Maghrib begins
1	Sun	24 Sept	5:12	6:45	12:59	4:59	6:58
2	Mon	25 Sept	5:14	6:46	12:58	4:57	6:56
3	Tue	26 Sept	5:16	6:48	12:58	4:55	6:54
4	Wed	27 Sept	5:17	6:50	12:57	4:53	6:51
5	Thur	28 Sept	5:19	6:51	12:57	4:51	6:49
6	Fri	29 Sept	5:21	6:53	12:57	4:50	6:47
7	Sat	30 Sept	5:23	6:54	12:56	4:48	6:45
8	Sun	1 Oct	5:24	6:56	12:56	4:46	6:42
9	Mon	2 Oct	5:26	6:57	12:56	4:44	6:40
10	Tue	3 Oct	5:28	6:59	12:56	4:42	6:38
11	Wed	4 Oct	5:29	7:01	12:55	4:40	6:36
12	Thu	5 Oct	5:31	7:03	12:55	4:38	6:33
13	Fri	6 Oct	5:33	7:04	12:55	4:36	6:31
14	Sat	7 Oct	5:35	7:06	12:54	4:34	6:29
15	Sun	8 Oct	5:36	7:08	12:54	4:32	6:27
16	Mon	9 Oct	5:38	7:09	12:54	4:30	6:24
17	Tue	10 Oct	5:40	7:11	12:53	4:28	6:22
18	Wed	11 Oct	5:41	7:13	12:53	4:26	6:20
19	Thu	12 Oct	5:43	7:14	12:53	4:24	6:18
20	Fri	13 Oct	5:45	7:16	12:53	4:22	6:16
21	Sat	14 Oct	5:46	7:18	12:52	4:20	6:14
22	Sun	15 Oct	5:48	7:19	12:52	4:18	6:11
23	Mon	16 Oct	5:49	7:21	12:52	4:16	6:08
24	Tue	17 Oct	5:51	7:23	12:52	4:14	6:07
25	Wed	18 Oct	5:53	7:24	12:52	4:12	6:05
26	Thu	19 Oct	5:54	7:26	12:51	4:10	6:03
27	Fri	20 Oct	5:56	7:28	12:51	4:08	6:01
28	Sat	21 Oct	5:58	7:30	12:51	4:06	5:59
29	Sun	22 Oct	5:59	7:31	12:51	4:05	5:57
30	Mon	23 Oct	6:01	7:33	12:51	4:03	5:55

*Birmingham: Fajr +8, Maghrib +6 Manchester Fajr +10, Maghrib +7
Bradford Fajr +9, Maghrib -8.*

ETABLE



Fasting is a great opportunity for a spiritual uplift as well as cleansing of mind and body. By being aware of the physical and spiritual benefits of fasting, a person can make long lasting changes in their lifestyle. The human body is a trust from God that must be take care of. If you would like to get a Ramadan health check please consult your GP.

ghrib Isha
ins begins

8:18 الصيام فرصة عظيمة للإرتقاء بالروح وصفاء الذهن ونقاء الجسد وبكونك على
8:16 وعي بالفوائد الروحية والجسدية للصيام فإن ذلك يمكنك من القيام بتغييرات مفيدة في
8:13 أسلوب حياتك على المدى البعيد.
8:11 جسمك وصحتك نعمة من ربك وأمانة بين يديك لا من رعايتها.
8:09 إذا أردت أن تفحص حالتك الصحية في رمضان فاستشر طبيبك المعالج مجاناً.
8:06
8:04

روزہ (صيام) دین و جسم کی صفائی کے ساتھ ساتھ روح کی صفائی و سکوناتی کا بہترین موقع فراہم کرتا ہے۔ روزے کے جسمانی و روحانی فوائد سے لگائی سے ہم اپنے روزمرہ کے معاملات میں اتنی ہی نور وین اثرات وصول کر سکتے ہیں جتنی کہ ہم اپنے جسم اور اس کے صحت و نشوونما سے ایک نکتہ سے اور ہمیں اس کی حفاظت کرنا چاہیے۔ رمضان کے حوالے سے اپنی صحت کے بارے میں اپنے جی پی سے مشورہ کیجئے!

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Oruç tutmak manevi hayatımızı kuvvetlendirmek, ayrıca akıl ve beden sağlığımız için çok iyi bir fırsat. Eğer oruç tutmanın beden ve ruh sağlığı üzerindeki yararlarından haberdarsanız, yaşam biçiminiz üzerinde uzun vadeli değişiklikler yapabilirsiniz. İnsan bedeni Tanrı'nın bize olan bir lütfu ve iyi korunması gerekiyor. Eğer Ramazan için sağlık kontrolünden geçmek istiyorsanız, lütfen GP'nize danışın.

রোজা রুহানী উন্নয়ন এবং দৈহিক ও মানসিক পরিশুদ্ধির এক বিরতি সুযোগ। রোজার দৈহিক ও রুহানী ফায়দা সম্পর্কে সচেতনতার মাধ্যমে একজন ব্যক্তি তার জীবন যাত্রায় দীর্ঘস্থায়ী পরিবর্তন সাধন করতে পারে। মানুষের শরীর আদ্বাহ প্রদত্ত একটি অমানত। এর অবশ্যই যত্ন নিতে হবে। আপনি রামজান হেলথ-চেক করতে ইচ্ছুক হলে দয়া করে আপনার জিপি'র সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন।

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Soonku waa bil khayr iyo cibaado, daahirisana jidhka iyo maskaxdaba. Waxaana lama huraa ah in qofku barto faa'iidooyinka badan ee Soonku jidhkeena u leeyahay iyo isbedellada waqtiga dheer ina anfacaa ee uu nolosheena ku sameeyo. Jidhkeenu waa deeq Eebeheen ina siiyey ilaalintiisuna wajib ay inagu tahey. Hadaba haddaad jecshahey in lagu sameeyo baadhitaan caafimaad la xidhiidh Dhakhtarkaaga (GP).



- Iftar/Dinner:** boiled dumplings with fish/meat or vegetables (one pot meal) and beans and a scoop of ice cream
- Suhoor:** boiled egg + 1-2 slices of wholemeal bread with margarine + some fruit
- Iftar/Dinner:** Dahl or vegetable curry with chapattis, side salad and yogurt + one small barfee or rasmalai
- Suhoor:** a bowl of vermicelli with milk and honey + some fruit
- Iftar/Dinner:** rice and lamb curry or Haleem, cooked with oats, lentils, herbs and little oil + rice pudding

Choose from these post-Taraweeh snacks

- cottage cheese with 2-3 crackers, or baked potato with beans or tuna fish
- pain biscuits (such as rich tea biscuits) x 2
- flavoured yogurt pot (125g)
- couple of slices of wholemeal bread with low fat margarine or marmite
- handful of nuts (different varieties)
- fruit (banana, apple, orange, melon) or a bowl of mixed fruit salad
- a packet of low fat crisps
- two chocolate fingers or two chocolate biscuits
- fig roll or Jaffa cake x2 (avoid having too many)
- a small bowl of halva (Indian sweet).

Notes:

- root vegetables such as yams, sweet potatoes and cassava can be cooked with vegetables or other meat. Other healthy vegetables include okra, pakchoi, aubergines and courgette.
- fruits can include all varieties available.
- examples of beans and lentils can include chick peas, gungo peas, cow peas and red kidney beans.
- choose all types of fish, including mackerel, kippers, salmon and tuna.
- avoid adding too much cream to your food. Starchy fruits such as plantain can be used to make soups and stews, but avoid frying the plantain. You can cut them into thin slices and bake or grill them for crunchiness.
- choose to have fried foods not more than once a week.



Islam sees health and 'well-being' as much more than just bodily health: well-being or tranquility requires a strong relationship with one's spirituality, good physical health, mental happiness, a sense of purpose and good character and relationships. Islam makes a strong connection between food and worship and teaches that all forms of worship have a deeper purpose and impact and contribute in some way to individual and social well-being.



In chapter 7 verse 31 Qur'an is categorical "Eat and drink freely: But waste not by excess, for He does not like the wasters." Islam thus creates a sense of responsibility in people to take a healthy living lifestyle as normal and through fasting in the month of Ramadan teaches one to learn to manage and practice spirituality and not to eat excessively. Essential part of spirituality in food is that one is grateful and thankful for the food one gets.

The blessed Prophet once said: "God has a right over you; your body has a right over you..." To strike a balance between the needs of the physical body and one's spiritual needs, one must on the one hand consume the right type and amount of food and on the other hand develop excellent inter-personal skills. The blessed Prophet Muhammad said: "I have only been sent for the perfection of character". Fasting in the month of Ramadan is an opportunity to make significant changes in one's lifestyle and develop resolve to make healthy living choices.





What Could You Gain From Fasting?

Fasting is not only a physical but also a spiritual exercise that has many lasting benefits.

1. Heightened Consciousness of God

Fasting helps one to become less preoccupied with bodily appetites, and enables the heart and mind to become free to reflect over deeper spiritual matters, such as one's relationship with God and with fellow human beings. It enables a person to develop sustained consciousness of God – "Taqwa".

2. Healthy living lifestyle

A fasting person learns to restrain and only responds to hunger and thirst in the heightened level of consciousness and discipline. Through fasting a person begins to appreciate the value of food. In the Qur'an "healthy and wholesome food" is described as the best of provisions. Thus fasting helps a person choose a healthier lifestyle by making small yet lasting changes to one's daily diet.

3. Compassion and Charity

When fasting, one should think of those in need who may be fasting but have no food at the start or the end of their fast, those whose tiny children are also having to go hungry, out of poverty. The Prophet Muhammad described Ramadan as “the month of Mercy”. His companions observed: “The Prophet (Muhammad) was the most generous of people, but he would be his most generous during Ramadan ...”. (Sahih al-Bukhari)



4. Community Spirit

During Ramadan the one who fasts has heightened concerns for the well-being of the community, both rich and poor, intellectuals and labourers. Community spirit is promoted as people start fasting at the same time and break their fast at the same time, they reflect together through longer prayer and deeper devotions. It is greatly encouraged that families invite each other to break their fast together.



5. Fasting without the spirit is empty of blessing

Abstention for long hours can be very hard physically and spiritually. However, by the end of the long month one should feel cleansed and with a renewed spirit. Ramadan is an ideal time to break bad habits, to reflect on personality and to improve one's character.

Those who fast but make no change to their lives except delaying a meal cannot really expect to become any different in their behaviour during or after Ramadan. In many ways, this is a wasted fast, as stressed in a number of sayings of the blessed Prophet: “Fasting is not merely abstention from eating and drinking, but also from vain speech and foul language”. (Sahih al-Bukhari)

Fasting is, therefore, about much more than just giving up food and drink and hoping to lose a couple of pounds. By fasting a person reflects, acts and betters his or her character.



Potential Health Complications and Possible Remedies

Heartburn (Indigestion)

The stomach is an acidic environment, designed to digest food and kill bacteria. The stomach and oesophagus (gullet) are normally protected from this acid, by the body's own special juices, and "valves" between these two organs. If the body is out of balance and too acidic or is affected by "faulty valves", one may experience heartburn.

Fasting usually reduces the amount of acid produced, but thoughts of food or the smell of it makes the brain order the stomach to produce more acid. Hence if there is a net increase in acid, heartburn could be a problem during the fast.

Those who are on regular medication for indigestion, such as antacids, e.g. Gaviscon, antihistamines, e.g. Zantac or proton pump inhibitors, e.g. Losec, Zoton, Nexium are advised to continue taking them, at the pre-dawn meal for instance.

The control of heartburn or belching can be aided by eating in moderation, avoiding oily, deep fried or very spicy food. Reducing one's caffeine intake and/or stopping smoking can also be of benefit, if relevant. Preparations such as peppermint oil may help reduce belching or colic. Sleeping with one's head raised on a few pillows and long term weight loss may also help prevent heartburn.



Poor Control of Diabetes

Those injecting insulin are advised not to fast, as the potential risk to health, both in the short and long term, of not taking insulin is too great.

People, who have their diabetes under control using tablets, should ensure that they visit their GP prior to Ramadan, in order to discuss any possible changes to their drug regime which would facilitate a safe fast. If not, such patients are at risk of poor control of their diabetes during and outside the fasting times.

Regular self-monitoring of one's blood glucose is strongly advised. Low blood sugar levels (a hypo) is dangerous, and if untreated may lead to faint or fits, and hence must be strictly avoided. Feeling dizzy, sweaty and disorientated may all suggest "a hypo". If suspected, one should have a sugary drink, or place sugar or a sugar-rich sweet below the tongue, immediately.

Long acting tablets, such as glibenclamide, increase the risk of having "a hypo", and should be changed to a shorter acting variety before embarking on a fast.

Diabetics with further complications, such as angina or heart failure, stroke, retinopathy (eye disease), nephropathy (kidney disease) and neuropathy (nerve disease of feet/hands with numbness/loss of feeling) should seek careful advice from their doctor before starting a fast.

Headache

This is a common problem and has many causes. Headaches during a fast could commonly be due to dehydration or hunger, inadequate rest, or due to the absence of addictive substances such as caffeine or nicotine.

A moderate and balanced diet, especially not missing the pre-dawn meal, consuming adequate quantities of fluid and if necessary taking a dose of painkillers such as paracetamol, may all go a long way towards either preventing, or reducing the risk of developing a disabling headache. Headaches can be prevented by sensible





measures, such as not exposing oneself to direct sunlight, wearing a hat when out, using sunglasses to reduce the effect of glare from the sun or relieving any tense muscles by a short gentle massage.

Those with a history of frequent and/or disabling migraines should aim to gain adequate control with lifestyle and/or medical treatment if required, prior to starting a fast.

Despite the above measures, if one has a persistent disabling headache, one should see a doctor.

Dehydration

Dehydration is a common occurrence during a fast. The body continues to lose water and salts through breathing, sweat and urine; the quantity of water loss will vary depending on the weather, how much one had to drink before one's fast, the degree of physical exertion and the ability of the kidney to retain water and salts.

Prevention is always better than cure. However, if one does not adequately re-hydrate oneself before a fast, one's risk of dehydration is increased. This risk is higher in the elderly, and in those taking tablets such as diuretics. Depending on the severity of the dehydration, one may experience a general feeling of being unwell, lethargy, muscle cramps, dizziness, disorientation and even collapse or faint.

If one is unable to stand-up due to dizziness, or is disorientated, one should urgently re-hydrate with regular moderate quantities of water, ideally with sugar and salt, such as Dioralyte or Lucozade.

If one faints due to dehydration, one's legs should be raised above the head by others, and when awake, urgently re-hydrated as outlined above.

Complications to any Common Chronic Diseases

Diabetes has been discussed above.

Other common diseases such as high blood pressure and asthma are controlled using medications that need to be taken regularly every day of the year. This is necessary in order to avoid possible complications from inadequate control of disease, such as a stroke or "an asthma attack". A consultation with your doctor should provide an

opportunity to discuss any potential options of completing a fast safely, whilst continuing to control your disease.

Constipation

Constipation could be a very irritating problem for the person undertaking a fast. Maintaining good hydration outside the fast, eating healthily, with lots of fruit and vegetables in one's diet, increasing the fibre content using bran and being active, all help to keep one's bowel motions as regular as would otherwise be expected.

If the problem persists, a short course of bulk laxatives may help.



Stress

Lack of food and water, changes of routine and shorter periods of sleep can all collude to increase stress levels. Hence it is important to address any potential sources of stress in order to minimise harmful effects. This can be helped by not taking on more than one can reasonably handle, not playing sports in the hot sun, controlling one's anger in advance and abstaining from smoking.

Obesity

Strange, but true!

For the unwary, or those lacking in caution, food consumed during the pre-dawn and dusk meals may lead to some unintended indulgence.

Obesity is an epidemic in the making, and has numerous complications in its own right. It is ironic that one is able to become overweight or obese whilst intending to fast. But if one does not approach the fast with discipline and will, the opportunity to lose weight and become healthier is wasted.





Frequently Asked Questions

A general point about illness and fasting

Verse no. 184 of Chapter 2 of The Qur'an makes it explicitly clear that people who have an illness, or medical condition of any kind, that makes fasting injurious to their health, are exempt from fasting. To compensate for the missed fasts, they must fast later when they are healthy; if this is not possible due to long-term illness, they must feed the poor. The latter form of compensation is known as fidyah*.

Q1 Should a person with diabetes fast?

People who have their diabetes under control, either by diet or using tablets, may fast. However, their GP may require them to make changes to their medications in order to aid taking tablets outside the times of fasting. However, those who need insulin to control their diabetes are advised not to fast.

Q2 I get severe migraines when I skip meals and it gets worse when I fast. Should I fast at all?

Those with uncontrolled migraines are advised not to fast. However, adequate control of migraines is possible for most people with medications and alterations to lifestyle, and hence such avenues should be exhausted prior to deciding not to fast. Please see your GP for further advice on better control of your migraines.

Q3 Should a person with high or low blood pressure fast?

Those with well controlled high blood pressure with lifestyle alterations and/or medications may fast. Their GP may require a change to their medications in order to aid taking tablets outside the times of fasting.

A person with so-called 'low blood pressure', but who is otherwise is well and healthy may fast. An adequate intake of fluid and salts in the diet is advised.

Q4 Is fasting harmful when a woman is expecting a baby? Is it compulsory to fast while pregnant?

It is not compulsory to fast while pregnant, but the woman will need to either make up those fasts later or if unable to, should do fidyah*. There is some medical evidence to show that fasting in pregnancy is not advisable. If a pregnant woman feels strong and healthy enough to fast, especially during the early part of the pregnancy, she may do so. If she does not feel well enough to fast, Islamic law gives her clear permission to not fast, and to make up the missed fasts later.



Q5 Is Ramadan a good time to quit smoking?

Yes. Smoking is wasteful and seriously injurious to health. Allah has entrusted us with a healthy body, and it is a violation to knowingly and willingly harm it. Ramadan provides a great opportunity to amend many bad habits and smoking is very definitely one of them.

Q6 From what age can children fast safely?

Children are required to fast from the age of puberty, and this not harmful. Fasting prior to this age is tolerated differently depending on the children's general health, nutrition and attitude. Fasting prior to the age of 7 or 8 years is not advisable, although it is a good idea to make young children aware of the practice of fasting in the community around them, and to give them a "taste" of fasting, e.g. for a few hours at a time. It is narrated that the companions would distract young children with toys if they were hungry near the time of iftar, so that they would become accustomed to joining the rest of the community in eating at sunset, rather than eating just before sunset during Ramadan. (Sahih al-Bukhari).

Q7 Can I use an asthma puffer during Ramadan?

Muslim jurists differ on this issue. Some leading jurists argue that using an asthma inhaler is not classified as eating or drinking, and is therefore permissible during fasting. Others argue that because the inhaler provides small amounts of liquid medicine to the lungs, it breaks the fast. Perhaps the former view is stronger, since the inhaler assists with breathing and helps the person to fast, which is to abstain from food, drink and sexual intercourse.

According to the first view, asthmatics may fast and use their inhalers whenever required during fasting.

According to the second view, poorly controlled asthmatics are advised not to fast until good control is achieved. Others may alter their inhalers to those of a longer acting variety such that fasting may be feasible. Please see your GP for further advice.



Q8 Can I swim during fasting?

Yes, but do not drink the water. Having a bath, shower or swimming has no effect on the fast. Clearly, no water should be swallowed during any of these activities, for that would break the fast.

Q9 Can a person fast if he is getting a blood transfusion in hospital?

No. A person receiving a blood transfusion is advised not to fast, on medical grounds. They may fast on the days when no transfusions are required.

Q10 I am on regular medication. Can I still fast?

If such medication needs to be taken during the time of fasting, you should not fast. If this medication is required as treatment for a short illness, such fasts can be compensated for by fasting other days when well.

If medication is required on a long term basis as part of an ongoing illness or condition such as high blood pressure or diabetes, then you may discuss with your GP whether to change your medications to long or short acting variety as appropriate, to enable you to take them outside the time of the fast.

If your disease is unstable or poorly controlled, it is advised not to fast.

Those who are unable to compensate later for missed fasts, due to the long term use of medications, are advised to do fidhya*.

Q11 Does a breastfeeding woman have to fast?

No. Islamic law exempts a breastfeeding mother from fasting. Missed fasts will need to be compensated for by fasting or fidyah* once breastfeeding has ceased.

Q12 Can a Muslim patient take tablets, injections, inhalers or patches, whilst fasting?

Taking tablets invalidates the fast. However, injections, inhalers, patches, ear and eye drops, etc that are not comparable to food and drink do not break the fast, although it is advisable to avoid these if possible due to the difference of opinion amongst Muslim jurists on these issues.

Islamic law exempts the sick from fasting. Please see answer to Question 10 for further details.

Q13 Could dehydration become so severe that one has to break the fast?

Yes. Harmful levels of water loss could occur if the person was poorly hydrated before commencing the fast, and/or made worse by activities during the day and weather conditions. If one produces very little or no urine, feels disorientated and confused, or faints due to dehydration, the fast should be broken in order to re-hydrate oneself.

Islam does not require that one harms him or herself in fulfilling the fast. If a fast is broken, it will need to be compensated for by fasting at a later date.

Q14 Can I fast whilst I have dialysis?

Peritoneal dialysis requires the daily usage of fluid bags in the abdomen, and such patients are advised not to fast (please refer to fidyah* below). Haemodialysis is performed about 3 times a week, and results in significant shifts of fluids and salts within the body. Such patients are also advised not to fast (please refer to fidyah* below).

*Fidyah: is a method of compensation in Islam for a missed act of worship that must be otherwise fulfilled. If one is unable to fulfill a missed fast, for example due to an ongoing illness should feed a hungry person (two meals per day) if he or she is able to. Please consult an Islamic scholar for further details.

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