

# Fit Health for Ramadan

“O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous.”  
(Surat Al-Baqarah 2:183).



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# Introduction

Praise be to Allah. We thank Him, the Most High, and seek His Help and Forgiveness.

We seek refuge in Allah from the evils within ourselves and that of bad deeds. He whom Allah guides, is truly guided, and whom Allah leaves to stray, none can guide him. We bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muhammad is His final Prophet (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him).

We ask Allah to bless our Prophet Muhammad, his family, his Companions, and all his followers, from the beginning of his call to the Day of Judgment.





As narrated by Abu Huraira, Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessings be Upon Him), the final messenger of God said: *“By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, the smell coming out from the mouth of a fasting person is better in the sight of Allah than the smell of musk. (Allah says about the fasting person), ‘He has left his food, drink and desires for My sake. The fast is for Me. So I will reward (the fasting person) for it and the reward of good deeds is multiplied ten times.”*

Ramadan is the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the Muslim Hijri Lunar calendar. It is during this month that Muslims observe the Fast of Ramadan. Lasting for the entire month, Muslims fast during the daylight hours till sunset. It is not only a good time for worship and contemplation, it’s not only a perfect time to strengthen family and community ties, but it’s also an ideal period to put your health on the right track.

Ramadan can offer well defined health benefits when people monitor their dietary intake and ensure the maintenance of any medication regimens they are on. The holy month is a suitable time to get your body used to diets for the sake of losing weight, being fit, and to adopt healthy habits.

The most commonly consumed foods by Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) 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.



It's not a must to stick to these nutrients solely, since Islam is a religion for all humanity, you can consume similar healthy nutrients which are abundant in your own country and suitable with your own culture and cuisine as long as it's healthy and doesn't contradict with the teachings and regulations of Islam.

Ramadan is the perfect time to ditch your bad habits for good. Vices such as smoking and sugary foods should not be indulged during Ramadan, and as you abstain from them your body will gradually acclimatise to their absence, until your addiction is kicked for good. It's also much easier to quit habits when you do so in a group, which should be easy to find during Ramadan. By not eating throughout the day during Ramadan you'll find that your metabolism becomes more efficient, meaning the amount of nutrients you absorb from food improves.

In order for us to achieve these priceless goals, OnIslam.net produced this book, whose contents are based mainly on articles and features provided by reputed doctors and health specialists, to help both fasting Muslims in preparing their bodies for Ramadan, understand how to deal with their fasting bodies in summer season and what are the health benefits of the system of Islamic fasting, God Willing.

We ask Allah Almighty to guide us all to what is best in this world and in the Hereafter, Ameen.



# Chapter I: Adjusting Your Body for Ramadan



[foodtreatsandmore.blogspot.com](http://foodtreatsandmore.blogspot.com)

[100qjre0arzuqiwore-pjod:ba:com](http://100qjre0arzuqiwore-pjod:ba:com)





## ■ Ramadan and Healthy Eating\*

We have experienced much this year both personally and globally. Someone kicks, but we are unable to see who it is. We can only see the consequences of that kick, and in a dazed state we tend to lose the language to properly express what is actually happening.

Emotions build up and affect our judgement and care for our own selves, and we either tend to try to forget or we become stronger in acknowledgement of the value of what we are already blessed with.

Ramadan offers us an opportunity to care for ourselves and our life's transaction with God. *“Certainly the creation of the heavens and the earth is greater than*



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\* By Hwaa Irfan.



*the creation of the men, but mostly people do not know” (Surat Ghafir 40:57).*

### **Choose What You Eat**

We tend to get into bad eating habits throughout the year, as the momentum of the day becomes a week, a month and finally the year has ended. Some may even shop for convenience foods because it offers less time in the kitchen. So whilst we are improving our economic situation and busy doing everything else, our health deteriorates but not always visibly. What we go through emotionally and psychologically also manifests in our deeds and in the way we eat and what we eat.

Referring to genetically modified foods, Muzammal Hussain argues that it is clear that genetic engineering is a process that we do not understand in a world where everything is interconnected (Hussain p.5). What affects one species affects another for better or for worse.

*“The sun and the moon follow a reckoning. And the herbs and the trees do adore (Him). And the heaven, He raised it high, and He made the balance, that you may not be inordinate in respect of the measure. And keep up the balance with equity and do not make the measure deficient” (Surat Ar-Rahman 55:5-9).*



## **Fasting and Spiritual Equilibrium**

Dr. Omar Hassan Kasule tells us that, “the definition of disease considers several dimensions that may operate singly or in combination: moral/spiritual, biological/pathological, psycho-social, or normative/statistical. Loss of spiritual equilibrium is a disease in itself and soon leads to physical disease. Most diseases involve disturbances in the equilibrium of the normal body physiology. These biological disturbances may be within the range of normal physiological variation or may be clearly pathological. The psycho-social dimension of disease is associated with loss of equilibrium and may precede or follow physical disturbances (Kasule p.3).” Fasting is done with one's complete will, encouraging the entire physiological, psychological and spiritual systems to work together.

As we try to get rid of the emotional build-up gained throughout the year, our bodies will also want to get rid of the toxic waste that it has been unable to eliminate. Fasting allows the digestive tract to take a rest, and mobilizes the detoxification mechanism by facilitating the release of hormones that stimulate the immune system. Fasting also releases the insecticides and man-made chemicals that have become stored in our body fat.

So instead of looking to those finely packaged goods in the supermarket, try frequenting the grocers that sell food more readily ascertained to be as nature intended it to be.



## **The Incorrect Approach**

Food intake should not be excessive rendering the onslaught of sleep soon after consumption therefore preventing us from our duties to ourselves, each other and God.

### **Incorrect eating can cause:-**

Indigestion – caused by excessive eating, fried, fatty and spicy foods as well as carbonated drinks.

Constipation – caused by eating too many processed foods and not enough fiber or water consumption. Fiber rich foods include most cereal grains, fruits and vegetables.

Lethargy – due to low blood pressure which can be caused by a sudden excessive consumption of heavy starchy and fatty foods.

Headache – caused by lack of sleep and being overly physically active.

Muscle cramps – due to an inadequate intake of calcium, magnesium and potassium. Foods rich in calcium include broccoli, kidney beans, okra, parsnips, almonds, raisins, sesame seeds and dairy products. Magnesium rich foods include: bran, brown rice, cornmeal,



cheese, egg yolk, bananas, apples, dates, almonds, carrots, eggplant (aubergines) and cauliflower. Potassium rich foods include: cheese, apples, cantaloupe, apricots, pineapple, chicken, peanuts (groundnuts), cod, beet, cabbage, cucumber and green peppers (Haffejee p.1).

Lack of sleep – Adequate sleep is necessary to ensure balance the next day especially for those who go to work or a place of study. Lack of sleep can express itself in the form of nervousness, bad headaches and digestive problems. Sleeping after a meal also causes problems with digestion. The final meal should be taken at least 1–1½ hours before the night-time sleep.

### **Break Your Fast the Healthy Way**

All the good from fasting can be undone by the sudden intake of food. Not only this, but the body's natural healing mechanisms are deprived of the benefits that fasting delivers. It is noted that healthy Ramadan practices result in the reduction of cholesterol levels and skin conditions are much improved (al- Qalam p.9). At the same time Iftar (the first meal taken to break the fast) is the Ramadan breakfast and as we have always been told, breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

Our body is mostly water and the best source of fluid replacement is pure unadulterated water. The sunnah (prophetic tradition) of dates



and water make a wonderful combination to gently break the fast without placing the body into a state of shock i.e. a sudden drop in blood pressure. Dried dates contain sodium, calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, iron, copper, sulfur, manganese, silicon and chlorine. Potassium, vital to the prevention of dehydration, is also plentiful in dates. Fresh dates in addition contain thiamin, niacin, riboflavin, ascorbic acid and beta carotene.

In some schools of fiqh it is preferable to do the Maghrib prayer (prayer done at sunset) before commencing the main meal. *“O children of Adam! Attend to your embellishments at every time of prayer, and eat and drink and be not extravagant; surely He does not love the extravagant” (Surat Al-‘Araf 7:31)*. This also proves to be functional in terms of giving your body time to digest what it needs from the Sunnah of dates and water before eating some more.

The key word here is fiber, as fiber is slow digesting as opposed to fast burning foods like processed and sugar-based foods. In Yemen a typical iftar (main meal following the fast) includes a soup of boiled oats, milk and sugar followed by shafout (pancakes broken in yoghurt with some spices and herbs) and samboosa (minced meat and herbs in a pastry envelope). A balanced combination of fiber, protein, dairy, cereal, minerals (herbs) and carbohydrates (Shabeebi p. 1).



### **After the Break-Fast**

The time between meals should be spaced out allowing for proper digestion. Ibn Sina (otherwise known as Avicenna to the Western world) warned never to take one meal until the previous meal was digested. Whatever was lacking nutritionally in the previous meal should be compensated for in the next meal. Many recipes exist online that can conjure up ideas.

Be careful with relaxation, for what one does can upset the balance of what has been achieved. A bad habit that has developed in the Middle East is a craving for shisha smoking (water pipe). In Bahrain, 17–21% of Bahraini women indulge in this habit. Some people assume that it is healthier than smoking cigarettes, but in reality it can cause throat and lip cancer as well as cause the build-up of poisonous gases within the stomach. This can lead to heart disease and brain stroke (Bahrain p.1).

Suhoor (the final meal before dawn) is a mercy for those who need that extra meal. It usually consists of a milk-based food which is slow-digesting. Most importantly is fluid intake throughout Ramadan that will ensure proper functioning of the kidneys and adequate digestion. For those with diabetes, a kidney disease or those who suffer from low blood pressure, it is recommended to consult a physician about fasting before the Holy month begins.



## ■ Tips to Cure Your Addictions this Ramadan\*

Ramadan is a time that many Muslims look forward to. However, the prospect of fasting for a month can also be frightening for some – especially those with addictions. For many people, the prospect of lasting an entire



day without food or drink can seem daunting, but possible. However, for people with addictions the thought of going through more than a few hours of the day without being able to feed their craving may seem impossible or even terrifying.

Many people associate the word “addiction” with alcohol and drugs. However, the word “addiction” is simply defined by Webster’s

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\* By Karima Burns.





Dictionary as “being abnormally tolerant to and dependent on something that is psychologically or physically habit-forming.”

Alcohol and drugs are the most common of these substances. However, coffee, tea, sugar, sodas, candies, chocolate, and even food itself can become addicting. In fact, coffee has a long history of being banned in various cultures because of its stimulant and addictive properties.

In 1611 it was banned in Germany and in 1511 by the governor of Mecca. It was also banned in Russia where the Czarist police considered it the cause of insanity. (Talk About Coffee, The Fabulous World of Coffee).

The stress of fasting and overcoming an addiction at the same time can be overwhelming. However, some of the following tips and ideas can help a person get through Ramadan if they are also struggling with an addiction:

### **Consider Ramadan a “Stepping Stone”**

Many people who struggle with addiction often know they are addicted and even know what they need to do to break the pattern. However, it is often that initial first step that prevents people from doing what they know they need to do.



This is why you might often see people trying to break an addiction for the sake of someone they love. Love is a strong motivating factor for people who seek to break their addictions. Fear is also a strong motivating factor. People who have stopped smoking often say they were finally motivated to stop when they met someone whose health had been affected by cigarettes.

During Ramadan a person is confronted with a high degree of love and fear. Ramadan represents a time for many to express their love of Allah and their sisters and brothers in Islam. There is also the fear many people have in Ramadan of what may happen if they do not fast as they are required to. These two emotions can provide a powerful motivation to “kick the habit”.

Additionally, going without one’s addiction for an entire day can also help prevent other blocks to overcoming addiction. By avoiding the addiction for an entire day a person is able to reset the triggers to the addiction (social circumstances, times of day, certain foods or meals) and build up a resistance to the substance by resisting the urges they have for the substance during the day.

## **Herbs**

Herbs can help balance the body and prevent the triggers that lead to addiction. To choose the best herb a person must first identify the



source of their addiction. Are they addicted to coffee because they need to wake up in the morning? If so, then Passionflower or Skullcap might be a good herb for them.

These herbs can help relax them and enable them to sleep more deeply at night so they wake up feeling more refreshed. Is a person smoking because it “relaxes them”? If so then relaxing herbs like chamomile, hops or peppermint might help during the day.

Other traditional herbs used for addictions are valerian, which helps slow brain cell damage that results from excessive alcohol consumption; schisandra which helps the body maintain a physical and emotional balance; calamus root which helps curb the urge to smoke and chaparral herb that helps detoxify the body from impurities, thus eliminating the addictive substance in the body and preventing urges.

There are many additional herbs that can be used to control addiction. The appropriate herb depends on the addiction as well as the person.

### **Natural Therapies**

Natural therapies like reflexology, acupuncture and acupressure have been shown to have great effects on people with addictions. In fact, acupuncture has been shown to have results superior to those of using addiction recovery programs and medications alone.



Acupuncture has been used to heal addictions since 1974 when the first acupuncture clinic for addictions opened at the Lincoln Memorial Hospital in New York City. Today acupuncture is being used to heal everything from drug and alcohol addiction to nicotine and food addiction. (Phillips)

Although highly successful, not everyone has access to an acupuncture clinic. For these people, reflexology at home can be a good solution. In her book, *Feet First*, Laura Norman says, “Breaking a habit can be like breaking a lock. It just needs the right combination.” (Norman)

The stimulation of the right reflexology points can be that right combination. Even without focusing on specific points, reflexology provides many benefits. It is relaxing, balancing and can take the place of an addictive activity.

To target addictions more specifically one can stimulate the organ points on the foot or hands that have been most affected by the addiction. For smokers a person could stimulate the lungs; for users of alcohol, the liver. One can find reflexology charts online.

### **Make Dietary and Nutritional Changes**



Diet and nutrition have more to do with addiction than people realize. Eating the wrong foods can actually make a person more prone to addiction. A diet that is balancing to a person's temperament and dietary needs can create a sense of calm and peace physically, emotionally and spiritually.

A diet that causes imbalance can leave "needy" holes in a person's physical, emotional and spiritual life that they then try to fill with addictive substances. Each person has their own unique dietary needs. However, one substance that causes imbalance for people of all temperaments is sugar. (Hobbs)

Eating too much sugar causes blood sugar levels in the body to become imbalanced. Consuming sugar makes hunger pangs go away. However, when a person takes in too much sugar, they do not feel the need to eat food that contains more of the important nutrients that the body needs, such as vitamins, iron, calcium and magnesium.

This causes the body to feel imbalanced and needy. When a person eats too much sugar, they go on a sugar high because of the energy boost they get from the sugar consumption. But this sugar high is only temporary; energy levels take a plunge afterwards. This often causes the urge to consume caffeine or other addictive substances to help a person "perk up" again.

Sugary sweets are a big part of Ramadan in many countries. However, a person struggling with an addiction should limit these sweets to one per day and only after a full meal. Sugar “substitutes” will have the same or similar effects on the body so those should also be avoided or limited. Sugar substitutes include glucose, sorbitol, corn syrup, splenda, honey and others.



## ■ Keep Your Cool in Ramadan

Ramadan is a month of serenity and spiritual elevation. But when the body's glucose level decreases too much from fasting, this could lead to irritability and aggression.

Other factors may also contribute to the feeling of irritability, such as refraining from the habitual cigarette. Prophet Mohamed (peace be upon him) advised us to 'keep our cool' while fasting and prevent ourselves from being easily provoked or dragged into a fight. The





practice of self-control is a pertinent part of fasting.

From Prophet Mohamed's (peace be upon him) traditions, "If one of you is fasting, he should avoid sexual relation with his wife and quarreling, and if somebody should fight or quarrel with him, he should say, 'I am fasting'."

The following are a few tips to reduce the level of edginess during Ramadan through obtaining higher levels of self-control:

If you begin to feel angry or irritated say, "I seek refuge with Allah from Satan."

Do not try to resolve issues with anyone when you are fatigued or irritated. Try to always pick the best time to talk to people, preferably when they are not easily infuriated.

Always think of the consequences of your irritability. Will it create unnecessary tensions in your relationships between your boss, colleagues, family or relatives? Be creative and invest your anger in channels other than arguing.

Do not express your anger immediately. Take time to think over the best way to deal with the problem. The next day when you meet the person that has angered you, express your discontent rationally.





To reduce the pressures of the day, allocate a relaxation period. Use this time to pray and concentrate in prayer. As Allah says, [And seek assistance through patience and prayer, and most surely it is a hard thing except for the humble ones] (**Surat Al-Baqarah 2:45**).

Exercise regularly; this relaxes the body and mind. Try to abstain from smoking or any other stimulants which increase the sense of irritability.

[Ablution is a good way](#) to begin relaxing because it stimulates the biological rhythms of the body. Ablution consists of 26 washing movements to be carried out 5 times a day—a total of 130 daily washing movements. This can be performed as a form of reflexotherapy.

Meditation is a good way to control your temper and relieve stress. Know more about how you can relieve stress through prayer: [The “Yoga” of Islamic Prayer](#) and [Islamic Oases From Daily Stress](#).

Immediately when you get angry, try to change your position. If you are sitting, stand, and vice versa. You might also want to let off some steam by drawing, writing, or anything else that relaxes you. Try to express yourself in a way that you will not regret later.

Controlling your anger and refraining from venting that anger, even if you are in the right, is a rewarding quality, literally. Always



remember the Qur'anic verse, [Those who spend (of that which Allah hath given them) in ease and in adversity, those who control their wrath and are forgiving toward mankind; Allah loveth the good;] **(Surat 'Aal `Imran 3: 134).**

Keep a track record of the times you lost your temper. You can then analyze what you did wrong and the common factor between all the incidents, which you can then avoid in the future.

At the end, remember the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) "The strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger." (Al-Bukhari).



## ■ Herbs in Hadith: Ramadan Herbs\*

As Ramadan approaches, we inevitably think about all of the special meals that we will eat during this holy month. After a day of fasting and worship, the Muslim or Muslimah's reward is not only the sense of peace that he or she has gained, but also the special iftar that waits.

In many areas of the world such as the Middle East, India, and African countries, iftar meals are filled with traditional foods that can be traced to the time of the prophet (SAW). In other countries, the food may take on the flavor of the country one is in, such as a pizza iftar in America or a taco iftar in Mexico.



However, there are traditional gifts from nature that we should remember wherever we live, gifts that were used by Prophet

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\* By Karima Burns.



Mohammed (SAW) in his life, and gifts that assist the fasting Muslim during Ramadan. Among these bounties are the hibiscus flower, dates, rosewater essence, and miswak.

### **Hibiscus**

In the Middle East and Africa, hibiscus is readily served to guests, especially during Ramadan. However, for so many Ramadan traditions like the kunafa (a Ramadan sweet) and the musaharati (the man who wakes people for suhur), few look beyond the tradition for its benefit.

Although the sweet richness of kunafa can claim to nourish the spirit of the believer, the hibiscus flower can lay claim to many physical benefits for the fasting body.

Hibiscus is, first of all, a pleasant tasting drink with astringent and, thus, thirst-quenching properties that may be quite useful when consumed during Ramadan. Secondly, a cup of hibiscus tea is 17% citric acid, and contains half as much vitamin C as an orange so it helps to strengthen the immune system.

Hibiscus also has similar uses as cranberry juice in treating urinary tract infections, and is also useful for the heart and blood flow. Other properties in the herb help maintain the blood sugar balance in the body, another challenge one must overcome during fasting.



The traditional way to prepare hibiscus is to make a cold infusion. Take a quarter-cup of the herb and soak it in a pitcher of cold water in the refrigerator overnight. In the morning, strain out the hibiscus flowers and add honey to taste. Many people use sugar to sweeten their hibiscus; however, sugar leeches vitamins B and C from the body, can encourage urinary tract infections and counteracts most of the other benefits of the hibiscus as well.

The best choice of sweeteners is to use about a teaspoon or more of the herb stevia, a green leafy herb from Paraguay that is sweet and lacks calories much like Nutra-sweet, but with none of the synthetic dangers. Stevia also has blood-sugar balancing properties and, thus, is the safest herb for diabetics.

## **Dates**

Dates are another traditional item to ingest during the iftar. Muslims around the world, following the example of the Prophet (SAW), usually break their fast with dates. The reason that they are so beneficial is that their natural sugar travels quickly to the liver, and is converted more quickly than any other nutrient into energy that the fasting body soaks up like a sponge. This is the healthiest way of breaking the fast as it eases the body into digesting.

Dates contain protein, calcium, phosphorus, iron, potassium, vitamin A, and natural sodium. They also contain a high amount of



dietary fiber, which makes them a good digestive aid. Dates are also said to protect the stomach and the intestines from parasites and bacterial infections, so they are an especially good beginning to a meal when traveling or eating at a restaurant.

### **Rosewater**

After the evening meal is finished, Muslims often go straight to make the Tarawih prayers, to which they often like to wear a pure essence of some sort. Perfume is a food for the soul and the spirit, much like dates and hibiscus are foods for the body.

During Ramadan, Muslims need many foods to keep them strong in their religious duties. In one of the best known Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), he was quoted as saying, "There are three things in your world that are made to attract my affection: women, perfume, and then my ultimate fondness is securely fixed on prayers."

Rose essence or rosewater is one of the most popular essences for men and women to wear during this time. Besides the fact that it is one of the most heavenly scents, rose essence has a number of aromatherapy benefits as well. Valerie Worwood, in her book *The Complete Book of Aromatherapy*, notes that rose essence is a



powerful anti-depressant, is uplifting, aids in digestion, and soothes frayed nerves during the stressful days of fasting.

These benefits can all be enjoyed just by sprinkling some of the water or essence on your body, adding a few drops to your bathwater, or burning the scent in an incense burner in your home.

### **Miswak**

Rosewater is also the preferred soak for miswak which, taken from the branches of a miswak tree, is an answer to every Muslim who has asked, "Is it okay to brush my teeth while fasting?"

This question often arises in modern times because of western tooth brushing methods that require a mouthful of water and often involve delicious tasting toothpaste. Miswak, on the other hand, is simply soaked until the brushing end is soft, and then gently stroked over the teeth. Imam Al-Bukhari narrated that Abdullah bin Omar brushed his teeth with a miswak morning and evening while fasting.

A fasting person, in fact, is in more need of tooth brushing than the non-fasting person since vapors from the empty stomach tend to bind to the teeth and gums. Miswak helps to keep the breath fresh and pure.



Among the other benefits of using miswak are that it clears the brain, generates a sense of well-being, remedies the stomach for the next meal, embraces the prophetic tradition, adds to ones merit, pleases Allah, and delights the angels.

During this Ramadan, remember the gifts of nature for they are really gifts from Allah to us to ease us through our fasts. The verse Al-Asharh (**Surat At-Tin 94:5**) that we recite during Tarawih prayers says, "So, verily with every difficulty there is relief."





## ■ Are Digestive Problems Ruining Your Ramadan?\*

Your digestive tract is a self contained unit that does not (when working optimally) allow the food you consume to be absorbed and distributed to the body without first sterilizing, identifying and processing it. Without proper digestion there cannot be health. Not only is the health of the gut important for commonly known reasons, but the digestive tract is also home to a large part of the immune system.



During Ramadan, digestive issues can be put at the forefront due to the types of foods we choose, how fast we eat them, and the lack of sufficient chewing.

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\* By Anisa Abeytia.



There are many steps you can take to ensure that digestive distress does not ruin your Ramadan this year. They are simple and can make a large difference if done consistently:

- Drink water. Water is needed for digestion as well as to make HCl.
- Chew your food well. This will enable the body to do less work.
- Eat in a calm and relaxed manner.
- Do not combine carbohydrates and proteins. People with digestive issues find this combination difficult to digest. The classic example is beans.
- Start with a salad. Salad prepares the digestive tract to work.
- Take a full spectrum enzyme supplement right before your meal (make sure it is vegetarian).
- Do not over stuff yourself. Eat in stages.
- Avoid white rice and white bread. They are inflammatory foods and can cause loose bowel movements and other digestive issues.
- Avoid overcooked food.
- Avoid black tea, coffee and soda as these are diuretics.
- Have a cup of chamomile or mint tea after your meal. This will help ease digestion.

Usually, the symptoms of digestive distress are there before Ramadan begins, but surface with a vengeance during this time. Common signs of digestive problems are:



- Gas
- Bloating
- Nausea
- Constipation
- Diarrhea/loose stool
- Burping
- Food allergies/sensitivities
- Poor appetite
- Fatigue after eating
- Abdominal cramps
- Indigestion up to three hours after a meal
- Mood swings
- Poor memory
- Joint pain
- Hives, skin rashes and eczema
- Chronic nasal congestion
- Headache
- Heart burn
- Sour taste in the mouth

Many of these symptoms are associated with a lack of gastric juice, beneficial gut flora (bacteria), or digestive enzymes. These are symptoms of a larger problem occurring in the body and should not be medicated away. If they are only masked by taking pharmaceuticals, the problem will become worse.



There are many reasons for symptoms associated with digestive problems. Some of the most common are:

- Food allergies/sensitivities
- Leaky gut
- Poor quality of gut flora
- Insufficient digestive enzymes
- Low hydrochloric acid (stomach acid)

### **Food Allergies/Food Sensitivities**

What are commonly called food allergies are really not "true" food allergies, but rather food sensitivities. The reason for this is that eating a food you're allergic to causes a very specific and immediate response, it can also result in a medical emergency.

Food sensitivities are relatively rare. They are not usually life threatening and many people develop them over time. The most common food sensitivities are to soy, corn, dairy and wheat, although one can have sensitivity to any food. There are lab tests that can determine if you have specific food sensitivity and which foods are causing it.

However many people have an idea that they may be sensitive to a food already. If this is the case, simply remove that food/foods from



your diet and see if your symptoms resolve (see list of symptoms above).

### **Leaky Gut**

Intestinal permeability or leaky gut is a condition in which the lining of the intestines has become damaged allowing the contents passing through them to "leak" out into the blood stream. The most common cause of leaky gut is food sensitivities.

Over time foods that are irritating to the digestive tract cause "openings" to appear in the lining of the gut. As this occurs, large food molecules enter the blood stream and trigger an immune response (causing inflammation).

Every time the offending food such as wheat, milk or corn is ingested, the body becomes conditioned to recognize it as a harmful substance and flu like symptoms occur.

Leaky gut can cause many complications such as malabsorption of nutrients and food allergies. It can also trigger an immune response and cause auto immune disorders.

Removing food sensitivities can ease the symptoms, but it does not resolve the problem or stop the consequences. In order to improve



your condition and start the healing process you will need to seek out a competent nutritionist.

### **Gut Flora**

Our gut harbors many "non-native" organisms that can be beneficial, benign or harmful. The beneficial flora such as lactobacillus, which can be found in yogurt, help prevent opportunistic organisms, like yeast, from occupying the lining of the large intestine and causing an over growth, or pathogens from anchoring in the large intestine.

When this happens, these pathogens can compete with the host (you) for nutrients, causing a vitamin or mineral deficiency. The metabolic wastes of these pathogens can also overwhelm the body's detoxification system and cause a toxic buildup in the body that can cause health issues.

There are many available probiotic supplements that will help restore the beneficial bacteria. You can also eat fermented foods like yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut and olives. However, you will first need to find a holistic practitioner to work with in order to remove the harmful bacteria.

### **Low Hydrochloric Acid**



Low stomach acid allows pathogens to enter the digestive tract. Hydrochloric acid (HCl) sterilizes the contents of the stomach and eliminates any harmful substances prior to entering the rest of the digestive tract. Many people that are diagnosed with acid reflux are surprisingly actually acid deficient, and often fall prey to chronic infections, like *Helicobacter pylori*, a bacterium that can cause peptic ulcers.

A quick home test to check if you have sufficient stomach acid is to drink a carbonated beverage and if within a minute you belch, you have enough stomach acid. You can also have a doctor check your levels of HCl.

### **Insufficient Digestive Enzymes**

There are many types of enzymes in the body, but here we are concerned with the digestive enzymes that are made in the pancreas. These enzymes help us digest fats, proteins and carbohydrates.

Raw and fermented foods contain the greatest amount of enzymes. When food is overcooked, the enzymes are destroyed and the food becomes more challenging to digest. In order for digestion to take place much energy is needed, when we supply the body with enzymes, it frees up the body's energy to carry out other functions.

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During Ramadan we are given a wonderful opportunity to allow the body to heal and carry out functions that it was not able to carry out due to excessive eating and digestion. Adding in a digestive enzyme (if you need to) will add to the physical benefits of fasting.





## ■ This Ramadan Begin Your Path to Health\*



"In America, one person in three dies of cancer, one in three suffers from allergies, one in ten will have ulcers and one in five is mentally ill. One out of five pregnancies ends in miscarriage and a quarter of a million infants are born with a birth defect each year.

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\* By Anisa Abeytia.



Americans spend one dollar out of every fourteen for medical services. We have almost forgotten that our natural state is one of balance, wholeness and vitality." Fallon, 2001.

Autism, autoimmune disorders, adult onset diabetes in children, Alzheimer's and chronic fatigue syndrome are all new diseases in our vernacular. Never before have we been plagued with so many non-communicable diseases.

This rise in degenerative diseases, especially the rise of Autism has lead Dr. Mary Meagson to assert that we have altered the human genome. These changes greatly have to do with the foods we eat and do not eat. The work of Weston A. Price greatly highlights this connection.

Harvard medical school professor, Dr. John Abramson in his book *Overdosed America*, stated that the rates of cancer and heart disease were both reduced with simple lifestyle changes, like diet, rather than by medical intervention. Yet, most people look for a pill to solve their ills instead of looking at their food choices. It is easier to pop a pill than to change your diet.

Most of the food choices people make are the types of diet mistakes that are causing our epidemic of lifestyle diseases. They are



diet fads that change more according to the commercial food industry than due to science.

Recall when we were all advised to consume margarine instead of butter and it turned out that we were all better off consuming butter because margarine can cause heart disease, diabetes and cancer?

Saturated fat is not bad for us; it is the man-made hydrogenated oils that are causing the rise in degenerative disease. Most of the studies that conclude that saturated fats are bad used hydrogenated oils and not butter, lard or coconut oil.

One animal study that did attempt to discredit the use of coconut oil had one group of rats consume coconut oil while the control group did not (they followed a low fat diet). The researchers went a step farther and injected the rats with high levels of cholesterol, as if that would happen in nature, and at the end of the study the control group was still fatter.

Both Dr. Abramson and the former New England Journal of Medicine editor Dr. Marcia Angel assert that "much of the scientific data today is manipulated." The Framingham Study that is most often cited as a reason for lowered cholesterol and fat actually showed that the higher the intake of cholesterol, the healthier the person was.



The intake of calories is not the issue in weight loss or gain, the issue is that people are consuming too many calories that are not nutritious and not consuming enough of the right kinds of calories.

Caloric restriction is not the "gold standard" of any healthful program. It is the food choices that we make that will determine our health or degeneration. It is more important to eat an abundance of healthy calories than it is to be a human calculator.

This Ramadan begin your path back to health by making a few simple changes to your diet to attain the principles of healthy eating as determined by various researchers, doctors and nutritionists. Apply these to your favorite Ramadan dishes:

1. Replace "unhealthy" cooking oils, like canola, corn and other vegetable oils with healthy oils such as coconut oil and butter. Here I am talking about cooking oils, you cannot heat olive oil. Not only do these oils cause inflammation, they also cause oxidation, all clinical markers for autoimmune disorders, type 2 diabetes and cancer.

2. Replace unhealthy cooking methods with healthy methods. Overcooking meat and vegetables make them very difficult to digest because all of the enzymes are "cooked" out. Most of the nutrients are cooked out as well.



3. White is out, brown is in. Avoid white rice, sugar and flour. Replace white rice and pasta with brown rice and brown rice pasta. White pasta and rice are also inflammatory and it is important to reduce them in conditions like auto immune disorders, which are the fourth largest cause of death after cancer, heart disease and strokes. White rice is also a substance high on the glycolic index and should be avoided by people suffering from hypoglycemia, syndrome X and both types of diabetes.

4. Add in sea salt, sea weeds and astragalus to cooking water to make them extra nutritious. I have included them in many of [these recipes](#).

5. Cut out soda, black tea and coffee, they are all diuretics.

Ramadan is not about eating, contrary to popular practices, and serves to remind us what it feels like to be hungry and it gives the body a break from continually digesting food. Don't spend all your time in the kitchen. If I am not pregnant, I do not even cook meat the entire month; I wait until Eid. Say bismillah, do dhikr/tasbih or dua as you prepare your food and fortify your food with the blessings of Allah.



## ■ Getting Ready for Your First Ramadan?\*



Ramadan is just round the corner and, if you're a new Muslim and haven't experienced it yet, you've probably got a million-and-one

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\* By Amal Stapley.



questions going round your head about it and you're possibly wondering how on earth you'll manage.

You may be wondering: How will I adjust to those long summer days without food?

How will I manage to do all the things I usually have to do on a daily basis when I'm not eating and drinking?

As a new Muslim, you're probably keen to please God as much as you can and you want to get your fasting right. But how will you cope if you've never done it before?

God guided you to Islam and He knows what you can bear and He never tests you with something you can't cope with. And fasting is the only thing He asks you to do for Him:

"Allah said: 'Every deed of the son of Adam is for him except fasting; it is for Me and I shall reward for it...'" (Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

So how will you manage?

Like anything new, the best thing to do, to make it as easy as possible, is to prepare for it. Below are some ideas that may help you that others have tried in the past.

## Preparing Yourself Psychologically

The thought of fasting will probably seem quite strange to you at the moment, unless you have had contact with other people fasting previously, so you might feel a bit nervous and apprehensive about it. You can reduce these feelings by finding out more about fasting and what it entails. Some of the ways you can do this are:

**Talk to Muslims who have fasted before:** It will be particularly helpful if you can meet up with or talk to other new Muslims to find out about their experiences.

**Read introductory information about Ramadan:** Reading information such as [A Beginner's Guide to Ramadan](#) and other information will help to dispel a lot of worries.

**Listen to talks about Ramadan:** There are lots of talks that you can access on the internet now. This would be a good starting point: <http://www.halaltube.com/topic/ramadan>. You may also find that there will be talks at your local mosque or university Islamic society that will help to prepare you.





**Start getting rid of bad habits now:** If you are someone who is prone to swearing, lying, backbiting or any other bad habits, become more aware of what you're doing and try to curb the habit before Ramadan. And, if you typically waste many hours in front of the television, start gradually replacing this with more beneficial activities.

**Free-up your diary for Ramadan:** Try to clear your diary as much as possible during Ramadan, so you can spend more time concentrating on spiritual matters. Reschedule non-urgent activities before or after Ramadan.

### **Preparing Yourself Physically**

Physically, the major change during Ramadan is the change of routine, you'll be eating at different times and probably waking much earlier than you're used to. So rather than wait until Ramadan arrives and suddenly expect your body to cope with the changes, if you start getting into training now, it will be much easier when you actually have to do it.

Here are some suggestions:

**Consult your doctor if you're taking regular medication or have health issues:** It's always wise to have a chat with your doctor before you start to fast, to make sure that it won't harm you. The scholars have said that if you are sick, it's disliked to fast if it will be very



difficult for you, and it is forbidden to fast if it will harm you. So if a trustworthy doctor says that you can fast, you should do your best to do so.

**Start adjusting your sleeping pattern now:** This will make it easier for you to wake up on time to eat *Sahoor* (the pre-dawn meal) before the *Fajr* Prayer time when Ramadan arrives. So now, instead of leaving it to the latest time to pray *Fajr*, start praying towards the beginning of the time. You could even try getting up and doing a few units of Night prayer before *Fajr* to get your body used to getting up early. (You can always go back to sleep after you've prayed!)

**Start having an early breakfast:** Some people say that one of the most difficult things for them is to have a good breakfast at the start of the fasting day, as they aren't used to eating a lot in the morning. Practice having a nourishing breakfast as early as you can before Ramadan comes to get your stomach used to it. If you're not sure what to eat, click [here](#) to get a good guide to healthy eating while fasting:

**Reduce your caffeine intake:** If you habitually drink a lot of tea or coffee, it's a good idea to start reducing the amount you drink before Ramadan, so you'll avoid having headaches when you're fasting. Maybe even substitute decaf versions in increasing amounts.



**Get rid of bad habits in advance:** If you're still smoking, work out a plan so you can stop before Ramadan. Likewise, if you regularly chew gum, take this opportunity to stop before Ramadan arrives.

**Practice Fasting:** The first three days of fasting are usually challenging for most Muslims until their body adjusts to the routine, but as you have probably never fasted for a full day, let alone for 18 hours, it will help if you do some practice fasts beforehand.

How about trying a half day fast without food and drink at the weekend and then gradually increase the time as you get nearer to Ramadan?

Or maybe try to fast on Mondays and Thursdays like the Prophet (peace be upon him) did. Some people find it easier to fast when they are at work where they are busy rather than at the weekends when they are home and tempted by food in the kitchen!

### **Preparing Yourself Spiritually**

Ramadan is not only a month to control your physical desires; it's also a month to focus on spiritual matters too. If you can start preparing from now, it will give you a head start when the blessed month finally arrives.

So what steps will you be taking to prepare yourself for Ramadan?

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## ■ Women Taking Pills to Stop Menses during Ramadan\*

**Mariam:** Is it permissible for a woman to use contraceptives and other forms of medication during Ramadan to stop her period in order to be able to fast the whole month of Ramadan? I know that women are allowed to use such kind of medication during Hajj, but I wonder does the same ruling applies here? Jazakum Allahu Khayran.



In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.

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\* By Sheikh Sayyed Mutawalli Ad-Darsh & Sheikh Rif`at Fawzi `Abd Al-Muttalib.



Dear sister in Islam, thank you very much for having confidence in us and may Almighty Allah guide you to that which pleases Him and to reward you for your sincere intention and keenness in performing the acts of worship, Amen.

The Muslim woman is allowed to take pills to stop menses during Ramadan. If she does so to continue observing fasting, then her intention is a good one and Allah will reward her for such a good intention.

In an attempt to furnish you with an answer to your question, we would like to cite for you the following fatwa issued by the late Sheikh Sayyed Mutawalli Ad-Darsh, former head of the UK Shari`ah council, in which he states the following:

The majority of Muslim scholars, as far as I know, do not consider such an act as being tantamount to tampering with nature. Rather, it is considered an act of regulation with the aim of allowing women who'd rather avoid their periods in order to participate with people in fasting Ramadan and performing Hajj at ease. There is nothing wrong with women using pills or available resources to block menstruations and have chance to perform their acts of worship during such times.

Moreover, Dr. Rif`at Fawzi, former professor of Shari`ah at Cairo University, adds:



There is nothing wrong, as far as Islam is concerned, if a woman takes such pills during Ramadan in order to be able to continue fasting the whole blessed month without interruption.

However, we have to keep in mind that a woman is allowed to do so while being guided by the following conditions:

1. Taking such pills must not result in putting her life and health at risk.
2. It is better, before taking such medication, to seek the advice of a reliable physician.

Allah Almighty knows best.



## ■ The Health Benefits of Yogurt for Ramadan\*

Yogurt is a popular food for Ramadan as well as Eid. However, much controversy has surrounded the consumption of cow's milk and milk products for some time.

Fortunately, though, this controversy only pertains to commercially produced cow milk and milk products. As one of the oldest foods known to man, yogurt is a product of pure milk. "...We give you to drink of what is in their bellies ... pure milk, easy and agreeable to swallow for those who drink" (**Surat An-Nahl 16:66**).

It is said that Rasulullah, the Prophet Mohammad (saw), fed

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\* By Hwaa Irfan.







his followers with yogurt when they became ill (Eltean, p.2.). Now yogurt has become one of the essential foods used to break the Ramadan fast and is also a traditional addition to the "First Day of Eid" breakfast.

For centuries, yogurt has been popular for traditional reasons. But recently, science is finding out that this tradition has many health benefits as well. The main benefits of yogurt are in the digestive tract, where the friendly bacteria found in live yogurt can aid in digestion as well as help to clean the intestines and digestive tract.

In the Balkans, they testify as to the medicinal effects of yogurt, believing it to have therapeutic qualities as well as providing a strong constitution (Roden, p.21). During the early 1900's, Dr. Ilya Metchnikoff proposed the widespread use of acidified (fermented) milk, similar to yogurt, and proposed that the beneficial bacteria be used in producing fermented milk.

She stated that the bacteria, still present in the yogurt, upon entering the intestinal tract would prevent other bacteria in the intestines from forming harmful toxins. Further investigation revealed that undigested and unabsorbed carbohydrates in the small intestines produced three effects:

Carbon dioxide, hydrogen and methane gas as well as alcohol. Microbial by-products like lactic acid.



Energy for microbial growth which leads to damage of the small intestines resulting in carbohydrate malabsorption, bacterial overgrowth, water drawn into the intestines increased metabolic by-products and chronic diarrhea (Gotschall, p.15 -18).

One of the first digestive enzymes to suffer damage is lactase. It has been found that most African-Americans, Latinos, Asians and Southern Europeans lack the ability to digest lactose, a milk sugar (Rangwani, p.1).

Deficiencies in the enzyme lactase includes celiac disease, malnutrition, cholera, gastroenteritis, infant diarrhea, irritable colon, soy protein and cows milk intolerance, parasitic infection of the intestines, cystic fibrosis, Crohn's Disease and ulcerative colitis.

Former Chairman of Pediatrics at John Hopkins University Frank Osko blames a multitude of other health problems on hormone-riddled commercial milk containing lactase (Rangwani, p.1).

Unfortunately, lactase can be found in most milk products such as liquid milk, dried milk, commercial yogurt, fermented homemade yogurt, processed cheese, cream cheese, ice cream, some sour creams, whey and even in some vitamins (Gotschall, p.25). Lactase, however, is not present in fully fermented live yogurt. The standards set by the Food and Agricultural Organization for yogurt state that it



must have undergone lactic acid fermentation through the action of the friendly bacteria *Lactobacillus bulgaricus*, and *Streptococcus thermophilus*, which comes from milk.

The real yogurt culture, *Lactobacillus* and *Streptococcus*, should ferment the real 'live' yogurt, which must be alive at the time of consumption (Eltean, p.1).

Researchers at the Pediatric and Adolescent Gastroenterology of the Women's and Children Hospital in Adelaide, Australia have found that yogurts and other fermented drinks contain more than one type of bacteria from the *Lactobacillus* family, which promote digestion. This is very important in the breaking of a fast -either during Ramadan or during any breakfast throughout the year.

Additionally, researchers have found that fermented milk plays a large role in the prevention and management of serious gastrointestinal conditions including inflammatory bowel disease. A urine test was used to check the permeability of the intestines and a breath test to measure the metabolic activity of bacteria in the intestines.

Healthy adults were given yogurt for two days using the urine test. They found that the intestines had become less permeable. Diarrhea is a result of excess permeability (Reuters p.1, 2).



Microbiologists at the University of Ontario found that a strain of lactobacillus not identical to that in live yogurt and checked the spread of the dangerous bacterium, staphylococcus aureus. The laboratory research involved rats.

All were given staphylococcus aureus through implantation under the skin. Half were given lactobacillus. Those that didn't receive lactobacillus developed sores filled with pus whilst those that did had clean healthy wounds.

It is still unknown as to why this occurs, but it has shown that friendly bacteria in yogurt can slow down staphylococcus instead of destroying it with antibiotics, which causes the strain to become resistant to treatment like those found in British general hospitals.

This would benefit patients with weakened immune systems due to illness or surgery whereby antibiotic treatment would endanger their lives (BBC, 1,2).

These friendly bacteria become an intrinsic part of real live yogurt, when homemade and fermented for no less than 24 hours. The bacteria contain a non-complex single-sugar (monosaccharides), which requires no further splitting to be transported from the intestines to the bloodstream (Gotschall, p.3, 27, 44). As a custom, many Middle Eastern countries have enjoyed homemade live yogurt as a



condiment, often adding salt, mint and garlic. It is enjoyed with a variety of vegetables and meat.

Naturally sweet yogurt (curd) is more nutritious than ghee or milk, so the wisest decision if one has a limited choice of alternatives to commercially produced yogurts is to cherish the benefits of making yogurt at home.



## ■ Preparing Your Body for Ramadan\*

{O ye who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint.}  
**(Surah Al-Baqarah 2:183).**

The Islamic world is about to welcome a very dear guest, the holy month of Ramadan, the month of auspicious blessings



Having awareness of how to prepare our bodies physiologically and our daily diets for the month of fasting is highly essential for enhancement of functions of our organs and their internal processes.

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\* By Amira Ayad.



Do you feel shell-shocked for having Ramadan around the corner? Looking for tips to get your health in order before Ramadan? Having bad sleeping habits and want this fixed before Ramadan?

To tackle this important topic, Dr. Amira Ayad, a pharmacist, nutrition specialist and natural health consultant provides answers to all these questions.

Read below all the questions and Dr. Amira's kind replies:

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***Oqut:*** *I want to fast in some few scattered days before Ramadan. Could this cause fatigue to me before Ramadan or it will help me to get used to fasting?*

On the contrary, fasting few days before Ramadan, beside being Sunnah of the Prophet PBUH who used to fast a lot during the month of Sha'aban, will help your body get used to the process and your physiology to adapt to the changing in eating pattern.

***Moxamet:*** *I suffer from Type II Diabetes , how can I prepare myself for Ramadan fasting?*

The most important factor in type II Diabetes in controlling blood sugar level (BSL).



I am not sure about the dosage and timing of your medication, but, I guess like most of type II diabetes patient, you take your medication once or twice a day. In this case, it would be no problem to gradually shift the time of the medication to be at the time of suhoor and Iftar.

In most countries the difference is about 10 hours so this should be fine. If you take your medicine more than twice a day or you suffer from any other complications please consult your physician first before undergoing any changes. Second, you should concentrate your carbohydrate intake on what we call low glycemic index foods. These are the carbohydrates that slowly release glucose in the blood like whole wheat, barley, brown rice, beans and legumes. Avoid simple sugars and refined carbohydrates like white flour, syrups... which cause rapid rise in BSL and pauses stress on your pancreas.

Eat lots of fresh green vegetables, berries and add cinnamon to your desserts, 1-2 teaspoons of cinnamon a day is proven to help balance BSL. Consume adequate amount of protein with each meal (20-30%) of your diet. Alternate between vegetable sources (like legumes, nuts, and beans), meat poultry and fish. Make sure your diet contains lots of fiber as they are known to stabilize and balance your BSL.





Other foods that help stabilize BSL include berries, brewer's yeast (great source of B vitamins), dairy especially cheese, egg yolk, fish, garlic, kelp, beans and vegetables (not root or starchy vegetables).

Finally, always keep something sweet handy and if at any time of the day you feel any sign of hypoglycemia (low blood sugar level) like dizziness, headache, fainting, nausea... don't hesitate to break your fast as your body is sending you a warning signal.

***Muhammad:*** *Shall we decrease the number of our practices and activities during Ramadan summer daytime to avoid dehydration?*

This is a purely individual concept. Many people withstand hard work and labor with no signs of thirst or dehydration, while others could not. The most important thing is to listen to your body signals and trust them.

Of course avoid over exertion and too much sun and heat exposure, but, in general, most healthy individuals do not require any special consideration during fasting. Just ensure getting enough water, juices and herbal teas during iftar and suhoor and avoid dehydrating drinks like coffee and tea.

***Nevine:*** *Do I have to decrease the food quantities I eat before Ramadan in order not to feel hungry during fasting?*



I am not sure how much and how frequently you eat now. What I advice is moderation. Eat at regular timing, avoid snacking in between meals and shift to healthy whole food alternatives. This simple change in habits is advisable throughout the year, so it is good to start a practice and try to keep it up.

The most important thing, though, is to focus on quality of food to make sure you get all the required nutrients from your diet. You should not starve yourself, feel hungry or deprived, if this is the case, this means your body is not getting its full nutritional needs.

***Shaima:*** *How can I avoid feeling thirsty in these summer days of fasting?*

Ensure good hydration during Iftar and suhoor. Drink at least 8 cups of water during your non-fasting hours in addition to any other fluids like juices and herbal teas. Avoid drinks that cause dehydration like coffee and tea and sweetened soft beverages like cola or at least minimize your intake to a maximum of 1 or 2 cups.

Avoid the intake of too much sweet foods, simple carbohydrates and sugars. Ensure good intake of fiber-rich food like fresh vegetables, beans, legumes...And, in general avoid over exertion and too much sun and heat exposure.



**Hushiar:** *Would it be effective to consume more meals before Ramadan?*

Not at all. Our body processes its food on a daily or even hourly basis, the extra intake is stored as fats. So any extra calories you consume before Ramadan won't delay or avoid hunger.

**Ruya:** *What are the diets I'd better avoid before Ramadan?*

The diets to avoid before Ramadan is the diet to avoid in general: junk food, refined sugars, simple carbohydrates, empty calories (food with only calories but no nutritional values) and synthetic chemicals. These foods mess up with your blood sugar level and hormones including the hormones that help you control stress level, regulate mood and adjust appetite and metabolism.

In addition, synthetic chemicals like flavor enhancers and sweeteners over-stimulate your taste buds causing you to feel hungry more frequently and delay satiety.

**Nazim:** *Is it beneficial or useless to drink big quantity of water in Suhur to help me cope with the hot daytime while fasting?*

It is actually essential to drink a lot of water during suhoor, but as our golden Islamic rule always applies: moderation and balance is the



key. Please refer to the question above for more tips to help you avoid thirst and dehydration.

It is useful to also know here that your body's ability to tolerate thirst and hunger greatly increases during Ramadan fasting. As a result of your sincere intention to fast, your mind gives the order to your body for affecting a total shift in metabolic rate and physiology making you less susceptible to fatigue and more able to withstand the absence of water than you would on a regular day.

***Nesmah:*** *Are there specific goods and foods that I shall avoid in order not to get thirsty?*

Yes, diuretic drinks like tea and coffee; sweetened soft beverages like cola; too much simple sugars and sweets; too salty foods and pickles, food containing synthetic chemicals and flavor enhancers.

***Zenica:*** *I prepare noodles like "Indomie" for my children, they adore it in Iftar, but I heard a few days ago that it causes cancer! Is that true?*

The flavoring packet that comes with the noodles is loaded with synthetic chemicals and flavorings that pose serious health risks. As an alternative you can prepare the noodles (read the label to choose a brand that adds no additives to the noodles themselves; they usually have a separate list of ingredients for the noodles and the flavoring



packet) and replace the flavoring packet with a cube of organic vegetarian stock (there are lots of different types and flavors to choose from). It will give almost the same taste but avoid all the health hazards.

Tip: don't tell your kids about the shift until they actually try the noodle, you may just mention that you are trying a different flavor.

***Axmot:*** *Do I need to stop any habits before Ramadan which might cause any problem for my body while fasting?*

Shifting to a healthy lifestyle in general is advisable. Concerning your dietary habits, avoid snacking and in between meals, shift to whole foods and avoid refined carbohydrates and simple sugars, reduce your intake of coffee, tea or soft drinks.

It is also advisable to synchronize our sleeping and resting pattern with the day and night cycle, waking up for Fajr prayer and avoiding too much TV time at night.

Concerning life habits, it is good to gradually prepare our mind along with our body to welcome this holy month through adjusted intention, daily Divine remembrances (Dhikr Allah), charity, connecting family ties, instilling social belonging, investing in our will power (controlling our temper is a good practice to start with), patience (during traffic jam is a good exercise).



# Chapter II: Fasting in Difficult Conditions





## ■ Braving Summer Ramadan with Proper Diet\*

It is yet another holy month of fasting for Ahmed Abdi, a Kenyan Muslim who is bracing for fasting Ramadan during a hot, dry summer.

But having fasted Ramadan for many years, Abdi, 30, believes he has mastered the art of overcoming thirst and hunger in preparation for this dry season. Over the years his formula of survival has been overreliance on food and drinks.



“Over all those years of fasting, I made sure that I eat, eat and eat during non-fasting hours, because I want to have the energy to continue fasting for all the 30 days,” he told Onislam.net.

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\* By Abdullahi Jamaa.



“I think it will be the same formula for me this time around when there is a crippling dry season in this part of Africa.”

Oblivious to the impending health implications of overeating, Abdi is among many around the world who are yet to understand the jigsaw puzzle to maintain a healthy body during the holy month.

Abdi assumes large quantities of food can be beneficial to stimulate energy and maintain the required body metabolic rate.

“I am not the only one who does that. I am certain many other Muslims out there eat large amounts of food to survive the long hours of fasting” he says.

But if his experience is anything to go by, eating large quantities of food comes with little, if no extra benefit to the fasting body.

“What I have realized is that, when I eat less food at dinner and *Suhur* I become active and lighter than when I eat more food. But it is my perception that I must eat a lot.”

Although many like him are hesitant to change their dietary adaptation, Abdi’s experience with overeating underlines the importance of a proper diet during the holy month of Ramadan, where an improper diet can become counterproductive.





### **Just Like Any Other Day**

Achieving and maintaining a healthy diet can be challenging. A person must sustain a careful balance between calories consumed and energy expended for efficiency.

This year when Ramadan falls in the summer, we will have very long and hot days to contend with. Most health troubles are likely to result from unsuitable diet or as a consequence of over-eating.

From Islam's perspective, overeating contradicts the principal aims and spirit of Ramadan where a Muslim shares the feeling of hunger with the poor. From a medical standpoint, the habit of overeating is also prohibited for its adverse effects on the mechanisms that regulate the body's metabolic rate.

Nutrition experts and dieticians say that overeating is an issue that will only add to the escalation of one's poor body performance when fasting. A proper diet that has a smaller amount of food but is satisfactorily balanced will keep the fasting Muslim healthy and active during the holy month of Ramadan.

According to Mahat Mohamed, a Kenyan nutritionist, the best policy is to take in normal quantities of food groups just like any other day of the year.



“To remain healthy during Ramadan, normal quantities of food from the major food groups: bread and cereal, milk and dairy product, fish, meat and poultry, beans, vegetable and fruit should be consumed,” noted Mohamed.

“One must ensure that these food groups are adequately and well balanced as per the food pyramid.”

According to a recent Ramadan Guide prepared by Communities in Action Enterprises, a not-for-profit organization based in the United Kingdom, fasting can advance the health of an individual if a proper nutritional plan is adhered to.

“The fasts of Ramadan can improve a person’s health but if the correct diet is not followed – can possibly worsen it! The deciding factor is not the fast itself, but rather what is consumed in the non-fasting hours,” reads part of the guide.

The organization’s researchers say that, in order 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 throughout the blessed month.

“Overeating cannot only harm the body but it is thought to also interfere with a person’s spiritual growth during the month.”



Health experts say that the metabolism (the rate of chemical reactions in living beings needed to maintain life) of a body determines which substances it will find nutritious and which it will find poisonous.

Food consumed during *Iftar*, dinner, or *Suhur* (the pre-dawn meal) can lead to some unintentional excesses or dangers. Therefore, to maintain the right metabolic reactions, the fasting person needs to watch over what he or she is taking in during non-fasting hours.

### **Energy Counts**

Medical practitioners also say that the ability to remain active or lazy during the fasting day depends on the kind and quantity of food one consumes.

In dealing with every day activities efficiently and tirelessly during daytime fasting without losing much of the body's energy, dieticians recommend an assortment of dietary plan.

“To overcome inactivity and laziness one needs to take light/high energy foods when breaking fast,” says Mohamed.

For enhancing body performance, dieticians advise energy-dense foods particular during *Iftar* and dinner. These foods may include



dates, enriched porridge, fruit juice, also cereals like rice, pasta, oats, fruits and proteins like milk, all this in a balanced diet.

Due to the longevity of fasting hours in some parts of the world, "complex carbohydrates", or slow digesting foods, should be consumed at *Suhur* so that the food lasts longer (about eight hours) resulting in less hunger during the day.

Most experts recommend a light *Suhur* that may include complex carbohydrates that are found in foods that contain grains and seeds like barley, wheat, oats, millet, semolina, beans, lentils, whole meal flour and unpolished rice.

Doctors say that, during fasting, dehydration is another common feature that can significantly reduce performance and activity of a fasting body. Dehydration may be worse during this summer Ramadan where the sun is biting harshly.

According to nutritionists, dehydration will also depend on how much you had to drink before your fast, physical activity, and the efficiency of body organs such as kidney.

"Drink sufficient water and juices between *Iftar* and bedtime to avoid dehydration and for detoxification of the digestive system," advises Mohamed.



“You also need to avoid strenuous exercise, keep away from eating refined carbohydrates, and energy consuming stressful events [like having] arguments, while having resting minutes in between heavy duties.”

According to Mohamed, a fasting person should keep away from heavy gas forming foods like taking lots of beans late at night, high-fat diet, highly refined foods, junk foods like crisps, dehydrating juices like sodas, sugars, fried foods and very spicy foods.



## ■ **Traveling in Ramadan; Should I Shorten Prayer and Break Fast?\***

**Mustafa:** Dear scholars, As-Salamu `alaykum. Is it allowable for a traveler whose work requires constant travels to shorten his Prayer and break fast in Ramadan? Jazakum Allah khayran.



Wa `alaykum As-Salamu wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh. In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.

Dear questioner, it is a pleasure to receive your question, which reflects your eagerness to have a clearer understanding of the Islamic message. We hope our efforts, exerted purely for Allah's sake, come up to your expectations.

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\* By `Atiyah Saqr.



Generally speaking, shortening the Prayer and breaking the fast of Ramadan while traveling are two legal concessions that portray Islam's tolerance and simplicity in matters of worship. The Prophet used to shorten his Prayer whenever he was on a journey. He (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Allah likes His servants to undertake the legal concessions given to them in the same way as He likes them to observe their obligations."

Answering your question, Sheikh `Atiyah Saqr, former head of Al-Azhar Fatwa Committee, states:

It is well known that shortening Prayer is a legal concession given to a traveler, as Allah Almighty says: (And when ye go forth in the land, it is no sin for you to curtail (your) worship if ye fear that those who disbelieve may attack you.) (An-Nisaa': 101) Breaking the fast of Ramadan is another concession for the traveler; Allah Almighty says: (...And whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, (let him fast the same) number of other days.) (Al-Baqarah: 185).

Moreover, Abu Dawud reported the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as saying: "Allah has relieved a traveler from (the obligatory) fasting (in Ramadan) and half of the Prayers." These concessions apply on fulfilling all the conditions that make a Muslim worthy of such concessions, as agreed by Muslim jurists.



Travel may be temporary or permanent. Permanent travel is one of two cases. The first case is that of a person who accompanies his family and all his needs in his travel [such as a nomad], and the second is a person who doesn't accompany his family, but his work requires him to constantly travel, such as the train engineers, pilots, and sailors.

A person whose travel is temporary has a legal concession to shorten Prayer and break the fast of Ramadan. But the one who travels along with his family and their requirements [such as a nomad] is considered a resident of the place he travels to and, thus, he is not allowed neither to shorten Prayer nor break the fast of Ramadan, unless fasting really endangers his health. If it is so, he can break his fast. Breaking the fast of Ramadan may sometimes be obligatory if fasting leads one to his ruin.

It is recorded in Al-Mughni by Ibn Qudamah, in the section on Hanbali fiqh: Al-Athram said: I heard Abu `Abdullah Ahmad ibn Hanbal being asked whether a sailor is allowed to shorten Prayer and break the fast of Ramadan when he is on board the ship. He answered: "If the ship is his home, then he is to perform all the Rak`ahs of Prayer without shortening and fast in Ramadan." He was asked: "How can the ship be his home?" He answered: "That he has no other residence, and he and his family live on it." `Ata' also has the same opinion.





In Sharh Ash-Sharqawi `ala At-Tahrir, in the section on Shafi`i fiqh: It is not permissible for a person who travels constantly to break the fast of Ramadan, for this means abandoning the obligatory fasting of Ramadan completely, unless he intends to make up for the broken fast days on other days during his travel. But a person who travels a lot alone due to his job requirements is permitted to shorten Prayer and break the fast of Ramadan. This is because such a man necessarily spends some days at home. Hence he can make up for the broken fast days of Ramadan.

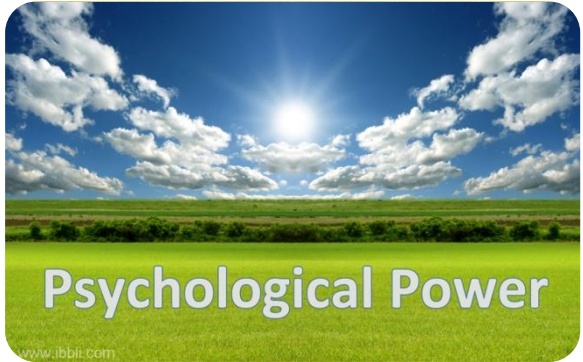
The Hanafi scholars of fiqh maintain that shortening Prayer in this case is the original rule, and whoever performs Prayers fully has no right to combine them. (Fatawa Sheikh Gadul-Haqq)

Allah Almighty knows best.



## ■ Does Fasting Kill Your Productivity?\*

I know that you expect me to say no, absolutely not. But truth is, yes it does. We cannot deny that if by fasting you mean only refraining from eating or drinking, your production and achievement rate will decrease in every aspect of your



life. You will probably try to do as little as you have to, sleep as long as you can and keep your mind off from food by any means – even if this consists of playing games, listening to music or entertaining yourself with idle talk.

***'How many of those who fast get nothing from it but hunger and thirst?!'***

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\* By Productiveramadan.com.



This saying should be taken as a warning. Many Muslims are fasting without any benefit to themselves, neither experiencing any spiritual elevation nor being able to leave sin and draw closer to Allah, The Exalted. Fasting becomes a matter of merely skipping meals, and at iftar the missed food is 'made up for' in the form of a feast.

**However, if you are practicing a truly Islamic fasting then it is a completely different experience. Ramadan is the month in which the rewards for good actions have no limits, the month in which we discipline ourselves and thus increase our productivity!**

### **Understanding Productivity Boosters and Productivity Drainers**

#### ***1. What are your productivity boosters?***

Sincere intentions, clear plans, a sense of purpose and responsibility, sustained focus, high motivation and a positive attitude help you achieve your goals.

#### ***2. What are your productivity drainers?***

Productivity drainers include procrastination, emails and spam management, tedious office tasks, negativity, unclear aims, and interruptions.



If you analyze these elements you'll realize that they have nothing to do with food intake or physical energy levels!

The purpose of this article, in part, is to enlist in detail the numerous health benefits of fasting, but we do want to emphasize that such a correlation between fasting and productivity exists.

**Fasting may just be the perfect solution to overcome your productivity drainers.**

### **5 Major Factors on How Fasting Enhances Your Productivity:**

***1. You become more conscious of your behavior and thought patterns.***

In the first three days in particular, you will realize how our minds are put on "automatic", most of the time we don't actually pay attention to everything we do. Reminding ourselves that we are fasting makes us more conscious of Allah, and aware of our actions and thoughts. This 'consciousness' we experience whilst fasting enables us to eliminate any unproductive behavior you may want to engage in.

***2. Breaking habits is facilitated.***



Many Muslims give up smoking during this month, for example. Unproductive habits are nothing but actions done so often that they become part of our lives. When we refrain from such a basic and innate need such as eating and drinking, we realize we also have the ability to stop those nasty habits which we thought we 'needed'. **We truly witness the strength of the mind and heart during Ramadan and are reminded that we are capable and obligated to be doing better and less bad. Which habits are you willing to take up and which do you decide to let go?**

***3. Fasting reduces common time wasters such as coffee, cigarettes or snack breaks.***

If you think about it, we do spend a lot of time preparing snacks/meals, and then eating, and then washing up, so on and so forth. **The simple fact that you are not interrupting your work will help you stay on track and finish sooner and give you more free time.** On average it takes us 15 to 30 minutes to recapture the same level of concentration we had before the interruption and sometimes we feel we have just missed the necessary 'mood' to complete the activity.

***4. Fasting improves concentration and focus.***

One of the most beautiful effects that fasting has is the channeling of your energies into productive projects. We learn to say "No" to our impulses thus improving the control of the mind over the body. When



we discipline ourselves, for a determined period, we are in fact reinstating control over our limbs. We start breaking the mental barriers that held us off in the past.

***5. Fasting allows your body to start the healing and regenerating process.***

If you suffer from health problems, fasting is often required to put your body in the right environment to start healing. When you think back to a time when you were ill, you will also remember your lack of appetite. This is necessary so that your body takes advantage of every bit of energy for the curative process. Also, you will likely feel younger and healthier (yet another great productivity booster).

If you are not convinced yet that fasting actually increases your productivity, or want to discover more ways in which fasting can benefit your efficiency and productivity we invite you to read part two. In the meanwhile, tell us how Ramadan can increase your productivity.



## ■ When Patients Don't Fast in Ramadan\*

Muslim: As-Salamu `alaykum! What is the legal ruling concerning a patient not fasting in Ramadan?

Wa `alaykum As-Salamu wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh. In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.



Dear questioner, we are very pleased for the great confidence you repose in us and we really commend your apparent interest in having a better understanding of the teachings of Islam and the rulings of this great religion in all matters. In fact, Islam is a religion that encompasses all aspects of life and secures guidance and light for all mankind. It is the religion of easiness and whenever there is a necessary illness that requires one to break his fast, the law is relaxed.

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\* By Yusuf Al-Qaradawi.



In his response to your question, the eminent Muslim scholar, Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, states:

Scholars have unanimously agreed that a patient is allowed not to fast, as Allah, Exalted be He, says: (Whosoever of you is sick or on a journey, (let him fast the same) number of other days. Allah desireth for you ease; He desireth not hardship for you.) **(Surat Al-Baqarah 2: 185)**.

Based on both the Glorious Qur'an and the unanimity of Muslim scholars, a patient is allowed not to fast in Ramadan. But, the question now is 'which kind of illness permits a Muslim to abstain from fasting'.

The answer to this question is that any malady that fasting may aggravate or delay the cure of, permits a Muslim to break the fast. Similarly, when fasting causes the patient to go through tremendous pain so that he would be unable to perform his job and earn his living, he is allowed not to fast. Imam Ahmad was asked: When is a patient allowed not to fast? He answered: If he is not able to fast. He was again asked: Is a man afflicted with fever unable to? He replied: What malady could be more serious than fever?

As a matter of fact, types of illness differ in nature; some are not affected by fasting, such as a toothache, a finger wound, a small abscess and the like. Fasting could cure many diseases like stomach





diseases such as indigestion, diarrhea, etc. These are diseases that do not permit one to refrain from fasting, as it is in the patient's best interest in such cases to fast.

A Muslim is allowed to abstain from fasting when fasting is feared to bring about harm. Should a healthy person fear to fall ill because of fasting, he is permitted not to fast. This could be determined through two ways: either via personal experience or on account of the advice of a reliable Muslim physician whose knowledge and honesty is trusted. So should a trustworthy Muslim physician warn him that fasting would harm him, a patient is allowed not to fast. Besides, if a Muslim is permitted to abstain from fasting but he still insists on fasting, he has committed a blameworthy act since he has harmed himself and refused to accept Allah's dispensation (*rukhsah*). So even if a Muslim fasts and abides by rules of fasting, he has thus committed an unlawful act, should he end up harming himself.

Furthermore, is a patient allowed to pay charity in return for the fast-days he missed on account of his malady? An illness is of two kinds:

1. A temporary illness, of which a patient expects to be cured. In this case, a Muslim is not to pay a charity or a ransom but must make up for the fast-day he missed, as Allah, Exalted be He, says: ((Let him fast the same) number of other days.) So, if he were unable to fast for a month, he is to fast for a month later. If he were unable to fast for a



certain number of days, he is to make up for the exact number of fast-days he missed later when Allah grants him health.

2. The second type of illness is the chronic illness, of which a patient does not expect to be cured. This can be determined either by personal experience or through the physician's advice. Thus the Islamic legal ruling of an elderly man or woman similarly applies to a patient suffering from a chronic disease. A patient in that case has to pay a ransom: to feed a poor person. According to some jurists, such as Abu Hanifah, he may pay the worth of a meal to the poor, the weak or the needy.

As regards a pregnant woman or a suckling mother, if she is worried lest fasting should harm her, the majority of jurists are of the view that she is allowed not to fast, provided that she makes up for the fast-days she missed. A woman in either of those cases is similar to a patient.

Though jurists have unanimously agreed that a pregnant or a suckling woman who apprehends harms to her embryo or her newborn child is allowed to abstain from fasting, they have disagreed as to whether she must make up for the fast days she missed later, or feed one poor person for each day she missed or both. Ibn `Umar and Ibn `Abbas maintain that she is to feed poor people equal in number to



the fast days she missed. The majority of scholars are of the view that she must make up for the fast days she missed.

Others yet hold that she is to do both. It seems to me that only feeding the poor is enough on its own for a woman who is constantly either pregnant or suckling, so that she has not got an opportunity to make up for the fast days she missed. So it may be the case that a woman is pregnant this year and a suckling mother the next and pregnant again the following year, and so on. She is therefore unable to make up for the fast days on which she refrained from fasting. So if she is commanded to make up for those days, she will have to fast for several years incessantly, which is definitely going to be difficult, and Allah does not want His servants to suffer hardships.

Allah Almighty knows best.



## ■ Exams and Fasting in Ramadan\*

**Ijaz:** I have an exam in Ramadan for two days. Am I allowed to not fast during those two days when I have my exam, and to fast two days after Ramadan?



In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.

Dear questioner, thanks for your question, and we implore Allah to fill your heart with faith, and may He Almighty grant you success in your postgraduate studies.

As a Muslim living in Canada, you ought to respect the tenets of your faith and strive hard to apply the teachings of Islam in theory as well

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\* By Muhammad Saleh Al-Munajjid.



as in practice.

In this regard, we would like to cite for you the following fatwa issued by Sheikh M. S. Al-Munajjid, a prominent Saudi Muslim lecturer and author, in which he states the following:

It is not permissible to break the fast for the reason you mentioned, rather it is haram, because it is not included in the reasons for which one is allowed to not fast in Ramadan.

Moreover, it should be noted that fasting in Ramadan is an obligation upon every accountable Muslim, and no one is excused from fasting at the time of fasting except for those who have valid excuses, who are granted the concession of being allowed to not fast, such as the sick, travelers, pregnant and breastfeeding women, the very old, and those who are forced to break their fast.

The above quotation is excerpted with some modifications from [www.islam-qa.com](http://www.islam-qa.com)

Based on the above fatwa, we can conclude that you are obliged to observe fasting during the month of Ramadan, and be sure that you will have a matchless reward if you continue fasting while doing your exams. Here, we would like to mention that there are hundreds of millions of Muslims who may face a similar situation to the one you are facing and who do observe fasting in Ramadan diligently. Just



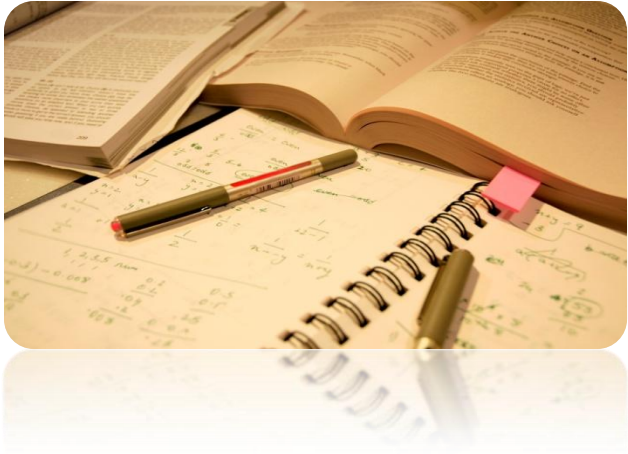
implore Allah to grant you health and concentration, and for sure you will notice the difference!



## ■ Exams vs. Ramadan\*

### *Lama:*

Ramadan is approaching and I am busy trying to prepare my kids for this holy month. I listed the challenges I may face during Ramadan with my kids.



One of the major challenges is their non-Muslim school environment, as they are in a public school. I will be sending you my list one by one. Here is the first challenge I may face.

My child is not yet at the age when fasting is obligatory, but is training. However sometimes I feel really confused what to do if there is an exam at school, a swimming class, or the child just feels too hungry.

As-salamu `alaykum.

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\* By Manal Soliman.



A child is not required to fast before reaching puberty, so give up any idea of forcing a pre-pubescent child to fast.

As for exams, the answer will also depend on the school system. Is this an end of term or year-end exam? Or is it just a weekly spelling test or a test at the end of a chapter or unit? How much of the child's grade depends on this exam? Is there just one test or a series of tests over a week or more? Also, will the test be in the morning when the child is likely to be fresh, or in the afternoon when the child will be more tired?

A young child (7 to 10 years) should not be expected to fast every day. (However, if the child strongly wants to do so, I would encourage it.) So, it would not be wrong to have the child not fast on a day when there is a test or exam. However, you should talk with the teacher to find out how important the test is and what time of day it is. If it is one of many tests for the final grade (and thus not a lot of weight is placed on it) and it will be held in the morning, I see no reason why a child should not be allowed to fast that day if the child wants to do so.

Another option is to let a young child eat breakfast at the usual time and then fast the rest of the day. This way the child doesn't have broken sleep from waking up for sahur and is fasting a few hours less than the adults.





An older child (10 and up) should be expected to fast every day as training, even if it is not yet obligatory. Again, if the test is one of many that will determine the final grade and is held in the morning, there should be no problem. If it is a heavier test or is held later in the day (or both), an older pre-pubescent child can take the option of not fasting on that day without incurring any sin.

However, I would discourage such an action because of the need to train the child. It is better to take a positive attitude and help the child deal with the challenge. Make sure the child gets enough sleep the night before and eats a high-protein sahur (pre-dawn meal).

If there is a series of exams, such as at the end of term, the greatest problem might not be the fasting per se, but a lack of sufficient sleep. The child might want to stay up late studying and having to get up for sahur then breaks the sleep. If you do allow an older child to stay up very late to study, encourage him or her to take a nap in the afternoon.

Prepare a nutritious sahur that the child can eat before sleeping, then allow him or her to sleep until near the end of the Fajr (dawn) Prayer. I think that such a situation would be most likely to occur for a teenager in secondary school, and most likely that child would be required to fast. Let the child take responsibility to adjust the schedule of eating, studying, and sleeping to fit his or her own body rhythm.



As regards physical education (PE) class, again, the young child doesn't have to fast, so you might want the child to skip fasting on days when PE is scheduled. I would definitely advise you to talk to all of your child's teachers before Ramadan and inform them that your child might be fasting. Ask the PE teacher, in particular, to give your child lighter tasks for this month. If the weather is not very hot, your child might do better than you think. Remind the child that it is OK to wash the face and neck to cool off after PE class (or any other time) but not to drink the water if he or she is fasting.

As for the child feeling hungry, that's part of the reason for fasting, isn't it? We learn to empathize with the less fortunate by feeling their pains. When the child complains of being hungry, try to distract him or her. Remind the child that the worst hunger pains only last for a few minutes and after 10 or 15 minutes the child will not feel so hungry. Encourage the child to wait a while and not to eat at the first feelings of hunger.

But if the child is showing signs of tiredness, have the child sleep for a while. Most likely a child would not reach this stage until late in the day, after school. If for some reason that is not possible and you really think the child might pass out, offer the child some juice or milk. If the child insists on continuing the fast, you will have to decide whether there is any real danger from hypoglycemia. If there is, you may have to order the young child to eat or drink something. Do it in

an encouraging way, praising the child for what he or she has accomplished, and reminding the child that there is a reason why Allah did not make fasting obligatory for small children.

Many people who were raised Muslim tell me that they fasted as early as 7 years old with little difficulty. I think that parents who have converted to Islam and thus have never experienced fasting as a child worry more. Have a positive and encouraging attitude at all times.



# Chapter III: Benefits of Fasting





## ■ Can Ramadan Beat Bad Habits?\*

Can habits be changed simply by abstaining from food?

Do you have any bad habits that you wish you could change but just don't have the stimulus or will power to do it?

Ramadan can be part of the solution to your problem by providing the motivation, the self-control, and the opportunity for you to implement better habits.

Imagine, if fasting can teach

us to control our cravings for things that are good for us (food and water), then it certainly can train us to stop doing things that are destructive to our health and lives.




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\* By Saffia Meek.



## **Our Daily Addictions**

According to Dr. Mohammad Zafar A. Nomani, professor of nutrition at West Virginia University, US, fasting tends to cause a burning or heavy feeling in the stomach and sour mouth for some people because of the increase in gastric acids in the stomach.

Consume a light meal and take a break from the doughnuts and coffee and eat foods high in protein, fiber, and nutrients. Whole-wheat bread, vegetables, humus, beans, and fruits are all good sources of fiber, which help in reducing gastric acidity and excess bile acids.

Smokers benefit from fasting, being forced to abstain during the day. According to Lehigh Valley Hospital and Health Network, smoking one pack of cigarettes a day for one year adds two cups of tar to a smoker's lungs. However, the body is able to eliminate the tar if you stop smoking. By the end of a month of not smoking, the senses of smell and taste return, shortness of breath subsides, and energy increases.

According to a study done by the American Psychosomatic Society, caffeine and nicotine use increase the occurrence of irritability during fasting, but by the end of Ramadan, the smokers' irritability had dropped to a level lower than before the month of fasting began.



Even our choices at the grocery store are impacted by our increased Allah-consciousness. With the enhanced awareness of food during Ramadan, we are motivated to eat more fruit and drink more water than in our usual diet. More dates are eaten during Ramadan than any other time of year.

By the end of the day, you have managed to abstain from not-very healthy things like snacks foods, cigarettes, caffeine, sugar. You will probably realize then that you cannot only survive without them, but actually feel better without them.

Once you have detoxified your system from the caffeine, sugar, and nicotine withdrawals, the headaches disappear and you are left with more energy than when you were drinking coffee all morning.

### **Breaking Out of Isolation**

It is not unusual for people to get in a daily rut isolating themselves from those outside of their everyday routine. We get in the habit of going from home to work and back home for dinner each night with our families. Even weekends are so full of family-oriented chores and activities that we tend to put off praying at the mosque or visiting friends, which could end up leading to depression.

It seems that the TV and the computer get more of our attention each day than our faith does. According to the Sourcebook for



Teaching Science, the average American home watches TV for 6 hours and 47 minutes each day. This time does not include the time spent on the computer.

The Sourcebook goes on to say that millions of Americans are so hooked on television that they fit the criteria for substance abuse as defined in the official psychiatric manual, according to Rutgers University psychologist Robert Kubey.

Ramadan gives Muslims a great opportunity to escape this cycle of isolation and depression. Ramadan traditions promote spending time together with family and friends, getting to know one another better, and meeting other Muslims that we might otherwise have not get acquainted with.

Iftars (meals to break the fast) and Tarawih Prayers (optional night prayers) provide a chance to break from our familiar patterns and relax with others who share our faith, thus increasing our connections as human beings and as believers. This socialization improves the sense of brotherhood or sisterhood within ourselves and the Muslim community.

According to Dr. Nomani, an added bonus of praying the nightly Tarawih is that it counts as mild exercise, burning up to 200 calories and helping to digest the food we ate at iftar.





Changing our normal routine during Ramadan allows us a chance to modify our lives and break free of bad habits. Fasting grounds us in reality, making us conscious of our behaviors and choices. Moreover, in being more mindful for one month, perhaps we will be strong enough to maintain better habits beyond Ramadan.

### **Quick Tips for a Healthier Fast**

- Reduce the amount of caffeine intake a week or two prior to Ramadan in order to decrease the likelihood of "caffeine headaches."
- Avoid caffeine during Ramadan. Drink water rather than coffee or tea.
- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables, and avoid sugary foods.
- Break your fast with dates and water, then eat a meal after the Maghrib (Sunset) Prayer.
- Try to get enough sleep at night or take a nap during the day.
- Use the spiritual and social uplifting to keep you excited and motivated beyond Ramadan.



## ■ Looking Back: A Ramadan Recipe for World Health\*

The unbridled pursuit of wealth is increasing the gap between the rich and the poor, pushing the planet towards a state of disease. In Ramadan, the month of developing consciousness, we find a recipe for this insidious illness of consumption.



The specter of rising consumption and the “unprecedented consumer appetite is undermining the natural systems we all depend on, making it even harder for the world’s poor to meet their basic needs,” according to Christopher Flavin, Worldwatch Institute (WWI) President.

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\* By Najma Mohamed.



The Institute released its State of the World 2004 Report highlighting the consequences of rampant consumption on the health of people and the planet.

### **Consumption Takes Its Toll**

Since 1960, private consumption expenditures have risen fourfold, reaching US\$20 trillion in 2000. One quarter of the world population, 1.7 billion, now fall within the consumer class - close to a half of the world's consumers are located in the developing world.

While it will require an estimated US\$19 billion to eliminate hunger and malnutrition, Europeans and Americans spend a staggering US\$17 billion on pet food. Two out of every five people in the world, 2.4 billion people worldwide, do not have basic sanitation. Annual expenditure on ocean cruises is US\$14 billion.

A collective amount of US\$22 billion is spent on perfume and make-up every year – 2.8 billion people live on less than \$2 a day. World consumers spend US\$35 billion a year on bottled water; 1.1 billion people did not have access to safe drinking water in 2000.

These gross disparities are symptoms of the disease that is eating away at human and environmental health. According to the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF), people are consuming 20 per cent more natural resources than the earth can produce.



While the impact of consumers in the developing world on the environment is certainly growing, the Living Planet Report produced by the WWF shows that the “ecological footprint” of the average North American is seven times that of the average Asian or African. The ecological footprint, the pressure placed by humans on hundreds of species of birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and fish, and caused by our consumption of renewable natural resources, is a measure of environmental sustainability.

Dr. Claude Martin, WWF Director General said, “We are spending nature’s capital faster than it can regenerate...running up an ecological debt which we won’t be able to pay off unless governments restore the balance between our consumption of natural resources and the Earth’s ability to renew them.”

The Living Planet Report also indicates a 35 per cent decline in the Earth’s ecological health since 1970. Among the by-products of production and consumption are widespread water and air pollution, land degradation and habitat destruction. From 1970 to 2000 populations of terrestrial (land) and marine (sea) species have plummeted by 30 per cent. In this period, freshwater populations plunged by a dramatic 50 per cent.

The toll on human health is equally alarming. The costs of consumption – the scramble to work harder, earn more and purchase



more – has led to an array of social and health costs that are plaguing consumers across the globe.

The WWI Report indicates that while Americans are richer and fatter, they are not much happier. The personal costs associated with wealth and consumption, such as “financial debt, the time and stress associated with working to support high consumption...and the ways in which consumption replaces time with family and friends” all indicate that more and bigger is not always better.

### **The Ramadan Recipe**

The three key health costs associated with rising consumption are smoking, obesity and time pressures. Medical expenses related to smoking cost the United States more than US\$150 billion in 1999 – close to 1.5 times the revenue of the five largest tobacco companies. Every year, smoking contributes to around 5 million deaths across the world.

In light of the medical research that has conclusively proven the health risks of smoking, several Muslim scholars are coming to the fore in declaring smoking to be haram (unlawful). Unfortunately, many Muslims are still smoking. Ramadan is an ideal time to kick the habit, as smokers abstain from sunrise to sunset – an ideal way to detox! Ramadan therefore provides not only spiritual rewards, but also the added benefit of physical cleansing.



A second cost tied to rising consumption is obesity. An estimated 65 per cent of adults are overweight or obese in the United States. Obesity is not confined to the USA, but is now a phenomenon associated with aggressive consumption and sedentary lifestyles across the world.

Traditionally, Muslims around the world cook special dishes, not always healthy, during the month of Ramadan. There is certainly a trend among South African Muslims, with growing awareness of health issues, towards cooking healthier in Ramadan. A resurgence of interest in natural health and healthy cooking has also led to the rediscovery of the wisdom and benefit in the Ramadan diet of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), who ended his fast with water and dates. Fasting thus brings with it the benefits of eating less, eating healthier, drinking water and sharing.

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said:

Narrated Abu Hurairah (may Allah be pleased with him): Allah's messenger (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "The food for two persons is sufficient for three, and the food for three persons is sufficient for four persons." (Bukhari, 7:304).

The third cost is the time pressures of modern living. While consumers have to work harder and longer to afford an extra car, a



DVD player, a holiday house or to spend more on accumulating objects with little use, time spent with family and friends is decreasing. For many Muslim families, one of the best gifts of Ramadan is the time spent together as a family.

The pre-dawn meal suhoor and even moreso the sunset meal iftar allow families to enjoy this time together. Granted that most family members are usually in a semi-comatosed stage at the pre-dawn meal, the evening meal, evening prayers and even shopping expeditions provide quality family time not always utilized during the year.

Ramadan proves that with more effort, one can stop smoking, eat less and spend more time with one's family. Furthermore, it is reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) was the most charitable during this month, thereby setting an example for Muslims to give not only the special charity of zakat al-fitr, paid by every Muslim at the end of the month of fasting, but also to spend on the poor and the needy. What happens after Ramadan?

### **Putting the Recipe to Test**

The unchecked pursuit of wealth that has continued unabated for centuries, albeit in different disguises, has caused untold misery and hardship for a large number of people across the world.



It is inconceivable that money be poured into sport and entertainment on a monumental scale while people are dying of hunger and thirst. It is unjust that millions of people should face starvation, when their countries are exporting cash crops such as coffee, cocoa, pineapples and timber to satisfy consumer appetites. The world is in desperate need of a solution that can tackle the destructive social, physical, moral and health costs of consumption.

Ramadan has offered Muslims the opportunity to build their consciousness, to learn to control their appetites, to share with the needy and the poor and to spend time with their families. Moreover, it cleanses the body both spiritually and physically, leaving Muslims with a renewed faith and commitment to continue upon this path.

WWI President Christopher Flavin calls for self-control in checking the consumption juggernaut: "In the long run, meeting basic needs, improving human health, and supporting a natural world that can sustain us will require that we control consumption, rather than allow consumption to control us."

One of the key aims of Ramadan is to build consciousness and self-control. It is time this recipe be put to the test in individual lifestyles as well as the broader society. Ramadan's recipe teaches Muslims that they do not live to eat, but that they eat to live and to worship the Creator of the universe.





## ■ Fasting & Improving the Health\*

### A. Raysuni:

Scholars of Islam, As-Salamu `alaykum. I read a story about "Skipping meals protects from diabetes" on the BBC web site. The story says that scientists who carried out studies on mice say that fasting every other day actually appears to improve the health.



The study was carried out by the National Institute on Aging (NIA) in the US. The scientists used three groups of mice, one of which was allowed to eat normally, one given 30% fewer calories in their diets, and one allowed to eat as much they wanted but only on every other day. They found that the "meal-skipping" mice had lower blood glucose and insulin levels compared with the other groups.

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\* By Sheikh Sano Koutoub Moustapha & Sheikh Ahmad Kutty.



This quality offers some suggestion that these mice might be less likely to develop diabetes, although the longer-term consequences of such a diet were not investigated. Based on the above story, could we say that the above discovery is in tune with the Prophet's instructions regarding fasting, particularly optional fasting? I remember the hadith that indicates that the best form of optional fasting is that of Prophet Dawud, who used to fast a day and breakfast the following day, and so on. Please comment on this subject.

Wa`alaykum As-Salamu wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh. In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. All praise and thanks are due to Allah, and peace and blessings be upon His Messenger.

Brother, first of all, we'd like to say that we are impressed by your question, which emanates from a thoughtful heart. May Allah Almighty help us all adhere to the principles of this true religion, Islam, and enable us to be among the dwellers of Paradise in the Hereafter. Ameen.

Such studies as you point out, and others, point to the fact that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is a true Prophet of Allah who delivered the Divine message for the prosperity of mankind.



In his response to your question, Dr. Sano Koutoub Moustapha, professor of Fiqhand Its Principles, International Islamic University, Malaysia, states:

It is so great to hear this scientific conclusion about the effect of fasting on the health. It proves that the Prophet of Islam (peace and blessings be upon him) is a real Messenger of Allah, and he delivered the message of Allah to mankind. However, the rightness of the prophetic statement has been proven long time ago and this scientific conclusion is an additional confirmation to his statement.

Let us strengthen our commitment to this true religion by following its teachings which were meant for the interest of mankind. Thank you for sharing this wonderful information. May Allah bless you.

Sheikh Ahmad Kutty, a senior lecturer and an Islamic scholar at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, adds:

If these studies prove that fasting may contribute to better health than simply leading a lifestyle of gluttony, it is simply a truth that humanity has learnt from divine inspiration as well as from their own traditional practices of prevention and health. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said: "Fast frequently in order to gain better health." He is also reported to have said: "The stomach is the warehouse of diseases." Therefore, he ordered the faithful to eat only sparingly: "It is sufficient for human beings to



partake a few morsels of food everyday that would maintain his posture. If he must indulge, let him divide his stomach into three parts: one third for his food, one third for water, and the remaining one third for the air passage."

These are wonderful truths that have been tested and proven to be perfect recipes for health, and they undoubtedly confirm the veracity of the Divine Message of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). The Qur'an says:(He (the Prophet) does not speak out of his own whims; rather he is inspired by Allah.)

Allah Almighty konws best.



## ■ Fasting and Your Biological Rhythms\*

Allah (all glory be to Him) tells us in the Holy Quran about Ramadan that, “(He wants you) to complete the prescribed period (of fasting), and to glorify Him in that He has guided you; and perchance ye shall be grateful.” (Surat Al-Baqarah: 2:185).

Many benefits, in addition to the spiritual, result from completing this prescribed period of fasting. This article

attempts to explain those related to our biological rhythms.



### The Stages of Sleep

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\* By Ebrahim Kazim.



The background activity of the brain is called the electroencephalogram (EEG) and can be recorded by the use of scalp electrodes. The dominant frequency and amplitude characteristic of the surface EEG varies with states of arousal. A person goes through five stages while going to sleep.

Calm wakefulness is accompanied by alpha waves 8-12 Hz (cycles per second) and low voltage fast activity of mixed frequency. This is called stage one. Alpha waves disappear when we open our eyes.

As sleep deepens into stage two, bursts of 12-14 Hz (sleep spindles) and high amplitude slow waves appear.

The deep sleep of stages three and four is featured by an increasing proportion of high voltage slow activity. Breathing is regular in slow-wave sleep or non-REM (Rapid Eye Movements) sleep.

Delta activity (very slow waves, 0.5-4 Hz, high amplitude) is unusual in a normal record and accompanies deep sleep i.e. stages three and four sleep.

After about 70 minutes or so mostly spent in stages three and four, the first REM period occurs, usually heralded by an increase in body movements, and a shift in the EEG pattern from stage four to stage two. These rapid low-voltage irregular waves resemble those seen in



alert humans; sleep, however, is not interrupted. This is called stage 5 or REM sleep, when the EEG activity gets desynchronised. There is marked muscle atonia despite the rapid eye movements in REM sleep, and the breathing is irregular.

Theta activity with a pattern of large regular waves occurs in normal children and is briefly seen in stage one sleep and also in REM sleep.

Non-REM (NREM) sleep passes through stages one and two, and spends 60-70 minutes in stages three and four. Sleep then lightens and a REM period follows. This cycle is repeated three or four times per night, at intervals of about 90 minutes throughout the night, depending on the length of sleep. REM sleep occupies 25% of total sleeping time.

When the eyes are opened, the alpha rhythm is replaced by fast irregular low voltage activity with no dominant frequency, called the alpha block. Any form of sensory stimulation or mental concentration such as solving arithmetic problems could produce this break-up of the alpha rhythm. This replacement of the regular alpha rhythm with irregular low voltage activity is called “desynchronisation”.

### **Fasting Positively Affects Sleep**



During the first few hours of an Islamic fast, the EEG is normal. However, the frequency of the alpha rhythm is decreased by a low blood glucose level. This may happen at the end of the fasting day towards evening when the blood sugar is low.

Fasting improves the quality and intensifies the depth of sleep, a matter of particular importance to the aged who have much less stage three and four sleep (deep sleep). The processes of repair of the body and of the brain take place during sleep. Two hours of sleep during the month of Ramadan are more satisfying and refreshing than more hours of sleep otherwise!

REM sleep and dreaming are closely associated. Dreaming may be necessary to maintain health, but prolonged REM deprivation has no adverse psychological effects. Dreaming sleep occupies 50% of the sleep cycle in infants and decreases with age. Brain synthetic processes occur in deep sleep; brain protein molecules are synthesized in the brain during deep sleep or used in REM sleep in restoring cerebral function. Fasting significantly increases deep sleep and leads to a fall in REM sleeping time or dreaming time, and also accelerates synthesis of memory molecules.

### **Fasting and the Circadian Rhythm**





The period of the circadian pace-maker in humans is 24 hours 11 minutes. Hormonal secretion is frequently characterised by rhythmic fluctuations which may be regular or irregular in periodicity. The period of regular oscillation may be as short as a few minutes or as long as a year.

The body timing system that drives circadian rhythms is exposed to external factors ranging from the imposed activity-rest cycle, the natural light-dark cycle, and social activities outside the workplace.

There are biological pacemakers or oscillators within the body with time-keeping capacity which synchronise with the external environmental cycles such as light. Environmental cues that synchronize biological pacemakers are called “zeitgebers” (from the German “time-givers”), and the process of re-setting the pacemaker is called re-synchronization.

The light/dark cycle is a potent zeitgeber for circadian rhythm but daily cycles in temperature, food availability, social interaction (such as congregational prayers) and even electro-magnetic field strength synchronize circadian rhythm in certain species. Because of recurring cycles of light, temperature and food availability, organisms evolved endogenous rhythms of metabolism and behavior providing response to specific environmental cycles. Many biological rhythms reflect the period of one of four environmental cycles: cycles of the tide, of day and night, of moon phase and of seasons.



Muslims who have been fasting regularly since childhood, have been exposed to different sleep/wake and light/darkness cycles on a daily basis in one annual lunar month. Hence, it may be easier for such persons to synchronize their circadian, circalunar and circannual biological rhythms under difficult conditions.

### **Fasting, Jet Lag and Shift Work**

International travel across time zones produces symptoms of jet lag such as sleep disturbances, gastro-intestinal disorders, decreased alertness, fatigue and lack of concentration and motivation.

Factors contributing to symptoms of jet lag are (1) external desynchronisation due to immediate differences between body time and local time at the end of the flight. (2) internal desynchronisation due to the fact that different circadian rhythms in the body re-synchronise at different rates, and during the re-synchronisation period, these rhythms will be out of phase with one another.

General symptoms arising from desynchronisation include tiredness during the day and disturbed sleep and reaction time. The severity of these adverse effects and therefore the time required for re-synchronisation depends on the ability to pre-set the bodily rhythms prior to flying, the number of time zones crossed, the direction of flight, age, social interaction and activity. NASA estimates



that it takes one day for every time zone crossed to regain normal rhythm and energy levels. A 6-hour time-difference thus needs 6 days to get back to normal.

Rapid adaptation to a new zone can be facilitated by maximising exposure to zeitgebers for the new cycle e.g. changing to meal times and sleep times appropriate to the new time zone. Maximising social contact and exposure to natural lighting will result in faster resynchronisation than staying at home in a hotel and eating and sleeping without regard to local time. There are widespread individual variations in the rapidity of resynchronisation.

Muslims who fast regularly and who have experienced disturbed wakefulness/sleep cycles on a daily lunar annual basis, can adapt themselves much faster to different time zones during international travel and do not suffer from the ill effects of jet lag. Moreover, the social contact during the Tarawih congregational prayer and the other social-cum-spiritual activities act as zeitgebers which regulate any desynchronised biological rhythm.

Shift workers also experience similar symptoms as jet lag, especially gastro-intestinal, cardiovascular, and sleep disorders and also reproductive dysfunctions in women. The inverted schedule of sleeping and waking also results in diminished alertness and performance during night-time work with attendant increase in the number of fatigue-related accidents during night time shift



hours. Normally, a period of three weeks is required for re-synchronisation among shift workers, and as the fasting Muslim attunes himself to resynchronization processes during the space of just over four weeks in Ramadan, his health problems as a shift worker would be negligible, as his synchronization processes would be more rapid, whether during Ramadan or at any other time.

It is also a common observation that as soon as Ramadan is over, normal circadian rhythms are established in the fasted Muslims with such great rapidity as to be at par with pre-Ramadan levels on the first day of Shawwal, i.e. Eid-ul-Fitr.

### **Fasting and Enkephalins**

During fasting, certain endogenous, narcotic-like substances known as opioids (or endorphins) are released into the body. They have a tranquilizing effect as well as an elating effect on the mind. These are also probably responsible for prevention of psychosomatic diseases. The opioids have several effects, including slowing down metabolism to conserve energy. Another effect of opioids may be that, although they produce elation as well as intense hunger, they do not drive the person to eat with sheer gluttony.

Muslims in Ramadan experience an ability to intensely focus their minds on meditation, Quranic recitation and prayers. This spiritual



gain during the Holy Month is despite the fact that normal sleep/waking cycles are somewhat disturbed and despite a long day of fasting. Perhaps now we have a closer idea as to the science of this miraculous process.



## ■ Fasting in Ramadan: Unhealthy?\*

**Christopher:** Dear All, I wanted to ask about the health benefits of fasting in Ramadan. I have non-Muslim colleagues who think that this practice is unhealthy and not good. They do not of course take into account any religious dimensions. I want to explain to them at least the health benefits. Please provide me with more information on that topic. Thank you.



Salam, Christopher. Thank you very much for your question.

### The Benefits of Fasting

The original meaning sawm is to be at rest. We give rest to

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\* By Ebrahim Kazim.



the gastro-intestinal tract, the sexual organs, the tongue, the eyes and ears, etc. The transit time for a bolus of food from the mouth to the end of the large intestine, called colon, is about 14 hours. This is the period - of 14 hours - during which we fast and withhold any stimulus, reaching the stomach and the digestive system.

In fact, fasting is an additional safety device for the regenerative processes of the body. The repair processes of the body and the brain, including the memory molecules take place when the body is at rest, especially during the stage of deep sleep. Sleeping during Ramadan is much deeper than in other times. Two hours of sleep during Ramadan are more satisfying and refreshing than more hours of sleep otherwise.

Fasting significantly increases deep sleep and reduces the dreaming time, which takes place during the Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep. Therefore, it is more beneficial for the elderly to fast because their normal hours of deep sleep in the non-fasted state are much less.

Fasting is a divine prescription, because Allah Himself prescribed it in the Qur'an. Because the Islamic fast does not exceed 14 hours or so, the normal steady state of the body is maintained as a result of coordinated physiological mechanisms. Hence, nearly all the biochemical results in the laboratory are normal.



During fasting, serum magnesium is increased and... Magnesium has cardio-protective effects and it is being used in prevention and treatment of heart attacks. It has anti-platelet properties and prevents extension of the clot. It is a membrane stabilizer acting on the sodium/potassium/calcium flux at the membrane level. Hence, it prevents cardiac and cerebral dysrhythmias.

Fasting, through the beneficial effects of magnesium, prevents the formation of atheroma as well as dissolves atheromatous plaques which are responsible for heart attacks and strokes. Hence, fasting takes an active part in the rejuvenating processes of the body through many channels.

It increases the fibrinolytic activity of the blood, which leads to prevention and also dissolution of any recent clot.

Ramadan puts a healthy mind into a healthy body. During fasting, there is increased secretion of the growth hormone by the pituitary gland. It is an anabolic hormone for synthesis of proteins and collagen, which produces a positive nitrogen balance. It also stimulates erythropoiesis, as well as collagen synthesis.

During the exercise of fasting, prayers and different spiritual experiences of Ramadan, certain endogenous substances are released





by the brain and spinal cord into the body called opioids, which include enkephalins and endorphins. These are responsible for euphoria, tranquility and serenity during such periods.

Endorphins and enkephalins are natural painkillers. Endorphins may be responsible for the "feel nice" effects, experienced by many people after rigorous exercise. Endorphins and enkephalins are derived from beta-lipotropin. On release, it is cleaved to form three major active products: called met-enkephalin, gamma-endorphin, and beta-endorphin.

Beta-endorphin is most active, and is about 20 times as potent as morphine. In addition to their painkilling properties, the narcotic analgesics cause a profound feeling of well-being (euphoria). It is this feeling that is in part responsible for the psychological drive of certain persons who are fasting. Other mechanisms reduce pain sensation by blocking the transmission of pain message to the brain.

To alter the pain sensation, the brain and spinal cord release specialized neurotransmitters called endorphins and enkephalins. These chemicals interfere with pain impulse transmission by occupying the nerve cell receptors, required to send the impulse across the synapse. By making the pain impulse travel less efficiently, endorphins and enkephalins can significantly lessen the perception of pain. In extreme circumstances, they can even make severe injuries nearly painless.



If an athlete is injured during the height of competition, or a soldier injured during a fight, or persons who are fasting, they may not realize they have been hurt, until after the stressful situation has ended! This happens because the brain produces abnormally high levels of endorphins or enkephalins, in periods of intense stress, excitement or fasting.

### **Fasting and Bio-rhythm**

Muslims who have been fasting regularly since childhood have been exposed to different sleep/wake and light/darkness cycles on a daily basis in one annual lunar month. Hence, it may be easier for such persons to synchronize at a faster rate their circadian, circa-lunar and circa-annual bio-rhythms, under difficult conditions.

Therefore, it is expected that Muslims who fast regularly would least suffer from jet lag while traveling in a plane from West to East and that health problems in Muslim shift-workers would be minimal. In fact, the central circadian biological clock is located in the suprachiasmatic nucleus of the hypothalamus. It is a cluster of about 10,000 neurons on either side of the mid line, above the optic chiasma about 3 cm behind the eye.

Re-setting proceeds at the rate of 1-2 hours/day to adapt to a



reversed shift pattern. There are widespread individual variations in the rapidity of resynchronization. Muslims who fast regularly and who have had disturbed wakefulness/sleep cycles on a daily lunar annual basis, can adapt themselves much faster to different conditions during international travel. This is while crossing time zones and do not suffer from the ill effects of jet lag.

It is also a common observation that as soon as Ramadan is over, normal circadian rhythms are established within the fasted Muslim, with such great rapidity on the first day of the following month of Shawal. This means that `Eid-al-Fitr (Minor Feast) is to be at par with pre-Ramadan levels.

Normally, a period of three weeks is required for resynchronization, among shift workers. As the fasting Muslim attunes himself to resynchronization processes, during the space of just over four weeks in Ramadan, his health problems - as a shift worker - would be negligible. His synchronization processes would be more rapid, whether during Ramadan or any other time.

### **The Benefits of Long Night Prayers**

Moreover, the social contact during tarawih or qiyam (long night prayers) and other social spiritual activities should act as a zeitgeber (from German 'time-giver'). This is what regulates any desynchronized biological rhythm.



Throughout the year, the average Muslim performs his 5-time daily obligatory prayers, as well as the optional ones. This amounts to gentle physical exercise, involving each and every muscle in the body. During the month of fasting, additional prayers of 8-20rak`as (physical unit of prayer) are also performed at nights. Approximately, 200 kcals. are utilized during qiyam for the 20 rak`as.

Such additional exercise utilizes any extra calories, ingested at iftar (meal for breaking the fast) approximately 1-2 hours earlier. Simultaneously, the blood glucose is steadily rising in the blood from the ingested nutrients; the circulating glucose is oxidized to CO<sub>2</sub> and H<sub>2</sub>O during the prayers.

The physical movements during qiyam prayers improve flexibility, co-ordination and relaxation response. It also reduces stress-related autonomic responses in normal persons and relieves anxiety and depression. Adrenaline and noradrenalin are secreted during the physical exercise of qiyam. They are responsible for the consequent dynamism, which now combines with the tranquility and the serenity, due to the secretion of enkephalins, endorphins, dynorphins and others.

This makes the night prayers unique in the sense that dynamism is combined in the same individual with serenity, euphoria



and dignity. The effects of adrenaline and noradrenaline are apparent, even after long night prayers is over, as evidenced by the continuing activity. In fact, even the thought or intention of performing qiyam prayers is sufficient to activate the sympathetic nervous system. Persons who fast and perform qiyam report feeling much better and healthier.

Repeated and regular movements of the body during prayers improve muscle tone and power, tendon strength, joint flexibility and the cardio-vascular reserve. The body movements help to prevent osteoporosis in the osteoporotic bones of elderly men and post-menopausal women.

The strain put on the forearm, during prostration in lifting the body from the ground, increases the bone mineral content of the forearm. The varying load during the different postures causes a lubricating effect and a protective flow of synovial fluid into the joint cavity. The reinforcement of the calf muscle pump by active ankle movements prevents deep vein thrombosis, which is a common cause of chronic ulcers of the legs in the elderly.

Exercise prevents coronary heart disease, improves carbohydrate tolerance and ameliorates late-onset type 2 diabetes. Growth hormone secretion elevated by fasting is further elevated by exercise of long night prayers. As this hormone is necessary for collagen formation, this may be an important factor in the long delay of the



wrinkling of skin for the fasting Muslim who performs qiyam prayers.

Exercise of qiyam improves mood, thought and behavior. Memory for short-term events deteriorates with old age. Prayers improve memory in the elderly, for short-term events, by keeping the memory pathways in the brain open and communicating with each other, especially with constant repetition of the verses from the holy Qur'an and other supplications of Allah's glory. This also helps to screen the mind from other incoming thoughts.

The repetition of a prayer, supplications of glorification, dhikr (words glorifying Allah) or muscular activity, coupled with passive disregard of intrusive thoughts, causes a relaxation response, leading to lowering of B.P. and decrease in oxygen consumption, as well as a reduction in the heart and respiratory rates.

All these are combined in qiyam prayers, which is an ideal situation for relaxation response, as it combines repeated muscular activity with repetition of words of glorification of Allah and supplications. Thus qiyam puts the mind at ease. Islamic prayers are unique in that tension builds up in the muscles, during the physical movements of prayers, with accompanying adrenaline and noradrenalin. Simultaneously, tension is relieved in the mind due to the spiritual component, assisted by the secretion of enkephalins,

endorphins, dynorphins and others.

All those persons who perform qiyam prayers feel more alert and active, even after the age of retirement. They can meet with unexpected challenges of life much better, such as running for a bus! This improves their stamina, self-esteem and self-confidence in being independent. I hope this answer is sufficient. Please keep in touch. Salam.



### ■ Fasting: Any Health Benefits?\*

**Sayed:** Assalamu 'alaikum. I have a friend who is interested in studying Islam. His current religion is Catholic. He asked me about the fast in Islam, how it effects the human health. I really want to give him a scientific explanation, but I don't know how to explain it.



Can you explain to me about the benefits of fasting on our health? And do you have materials about Islam in the Sri Lankan language? If you have some, could you please send them to me? My friend is a Sri Lankan, and his English is not so good, so I want him to understand about Islam easily and clearly. Can you help me?

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\* By Lamaan Ball.





Salam, dear questioner. Thank you for your question. Thank you also for your concern about your friend. Firstly, I have to apologize for not being able to provide you with references to Islam in the language of Sri Lanka. So far this service only has access to people whose expertise is in the English language. Anyway, here is something which I hope you find useful on the effects of fasting:

### **How to Fast**

Firstly, I should explain the way fasting is prescribed in Islam. To prepare to fast you should get up before sunrise and eat a meal called suhur. This should be finished before the first bit of light appears in the sky indicating that dawn is coming. Then from that moment until the sun sets behind the horizon, you should avoid eating anything, drinking anything, having sex, or smoking. Then as soon as the sun sets, you should eat a small snack preferably something sweet and some liquids, then pray the sunset prayer (maghrib) before eating the main meal of the day.

### **Health Benefits of Fasting**

The medical effects are many and important but first I should mention that it can be harmful for some people and for this reason, if you are ill or fasting makes you ill, then you do not have to do it until your health improves:



"O ye who believe! fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that ye may (learn) self-restraint. (Fasting) for a fixed number of days; but if any of you is ill, or on a journey, the prescribed number (should be made up for) from days later..." **(Al-Baqarah 2:183-184)**.

The key reason for fasting which is mentioned in these verses is to learn self-restraint. There are many aspects to this. The primary aspect is that we learn to hold back the fulfillment of our material desires until the right time and place. This lesson in itself if properly learned has a great transforming effect on all aspects of human life far beyond the effects on health.

There have been a few academic studies on the medical effects of Islamic fasting. The basic conclusions are that when healthy people fast, it does not cause any adverse medical effect and on the contrary, it may have some beneficial effect on weight and lipid metabolism (increasing excess fat destruction).

One of the main health benefits of fasting is that it is the ideal way for people to give up bad eating habits and other bad habits such as smoking. I do not need to tell you about the bad effects of smoking.

Fasting teaches the Muslim to restrain himself from sins more generally. While fasting it may be possible to sneak away and eat in



private but any Muslim knows that Allah sees everything he does. So, following the fast properly increases the awareness that Allah sees all your actions both secret and open.

Fasting is known to have specific benefits for certain illnesses including epileptic fits and cancer. You can find much of this information on the internet through simple searches.

Restraining your desires so that they can be fulfilled at the appropriate time is an important metaphor for the whole of the human condition. It reflects the especially human characteristic of being able to plan our future and make those concepts determine our actions instead of our actions being determined by ingrained instincts. It is at the core of our mental faculties that make us humans; flexible and able to achieve the success we have in our control over our environment.

Ultimately this ability to plan is expressed in our ability to sacrifice things in this life in order to achieve something better in the next life. Thus, giving of charity in the way of Allah is the definitive teaching of what is a good deed. The very conflict this ability brings between short term gains and long term gains is at the very centre of what being human is about. It is why we have to have free will.

Fasting should teach us the importance of these lessons. To illustrate this further, let me relate a study done in the USA. A group of



children (about 7 years old as far as I recall) were sat in a room one by one. An adult came in and put in front of each child a single sweet. The adult then said that they were going away for a couple of minutes and that, if when they came back again and the child had not eaten the sweet, then the child would be given a second sweet.

So the child had a clear choice to make between eating the sweet in front of them now or to wait for a couple of minutes and then eat 2 sweets. About 40% of the children managed to wait for the adult to return.

These children were then followed while they grew up. It turned out that the children who waited for the second sweet achieved results in academic tests at the age of 17 which were considerably higher than those who couldn't wait. The difference was so great that it made the same difference to their results as the difference between having parents who had Masters degrees at university and parents whose education stopped after high school (17/18 years old).

As you can see fasting is an important religious practice which teaches us an important lesson in life. I hope this answer is helpful and that you are able to convey it to your friend. Please keep in touch. Salam.