

Fasting in Ramadan

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Fasting is as old as the human race. All the major religions in the world, Judaism, Christianity etc, expect their followers to fast in some form or another. The most common motives for fasting are religious ones. In a religious fast there are three primary purposes: self-control over the body and its appetites; focusing the mind on God or prayer and making sacrifice to God. How fasting is prescribed varies across different religions. This document provides guidance about fasting during the month of Ramadan.

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar when Muslims observe 29-30 days of fasting and try to better themselves in the principles of their faith. Islamic months follow the lunar calendar. Islamic events fall roughly on the same time in the Islamic calendar but differ in the mainstream solar calendar which moves around 11-12 days forward each year. In 2011 Ramadan will start on the 1st of August dependent on the sighting of the moon.

What is Fasting?

Fasting in Ramadan means abstaining from both eating and drinking during daylight hours. Fasting is undertaken between sunrise and sunset. A meal (sehri) is taken before sunrise and the fast is broken at sunset when individuals can eat and drink as normal. The fast is often opened with a date or water.

What is the point of Fasting?

Fasting is a form of discipline for the body and mind. The absence of food and drink and other pleasures allows the individual to concentrate on prayer and worship. Fasting is one of the pillars of Islam, it helps improve one's character and encourages Muslims to recognise how poverty stricken and starving people bear the burden of daily life. A lot of charity is given during Ramadan and individuals make renewed intentions for the future.

Who is required to fast?

Fasting is obligatory on every Muslim beyond adolescence (over the age of 10). However some parents may encourage younger children to fast for one or two days in preparation for the years ahead. Muslims who have a medical condition which makes fasting difficult, those who are not of sound mind, pregnant women, women in their menstruation cycle, the young and really old are exempt. In some circumstances, individuals who cannot fast for a number of reasons will make up the fasting a later date.

The End of Ramadan

The end of Ramadan is marked with the festival 'Eid' when people receive guests, exchange gifts and visit family.

Exercise is important and is encouraged during Ramadan, however individuals should follow the guidelines below when carrying out sport, training or other forms of physical activity:-

GUIDELINES FOR INDIVIDUALS

- Eat complex carbohydrates during the meal before sehri (dawn) so that the food lasts longer and drink as much water or fruit juice between iftar (breaking fasting) and bedtime so that your body adjusts to fluid levels.
- Individuals who are training or taking part in sport activity should ensure balanced nutrition is taken and oily foods avoided to help maintain energy levels throughout the day.
- Individuals should warm up and prepare before undertaking activity to ensure they are prepared mentally and physically for the task ahead.
- Activities should be paced and regular rests undertaken to avoid reduced energy levels and dehydration.
- Lack of energy and nutrients may cause fatigue so individuals are recommended not to carry out sporting activity if they feel weak.
- Those individuals suffering from medical conditions such as diabetes should consult their GP if they fast and further advice should be sought around undertaking sports or physical activity.
- Sport and physical activity should be avoided when the weather is really hot to avoid dehydration.
- During the hottest part of the day it is advised to stay in cool areas (indoors or in shade), and limit the amount of physical activity carried out.



Service Providers should follow the guidelines below to support individuals and best manage situations when people are fasting to ensure sessions are equitable and inclusive:-

GUIDELINES FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

- Individuals can train and participate in sport, however caution is required when carrying out high energy activities.
- Flexibility should be allowed to enable individuals to stop and take breaks to help maintain energy levels.
- Individuals may be concerned about swallowing water so sports such as swimming where water can enter the mouth are often avoided.
- Parents should be consulted where children are fasting to ensure they feel comfortable with their child undertaking sporting activity.
- Timetabling of activities should be done around prayer times as most individuals will increase worship and prayer during the month of Ramadan.
- Organisations should consider making special provision during the lunch break for those people who are fasting. For example a quiet room where Muslims can rest and avoid having to watch others eat.
- When holding activity late in the day ensure water and food is available for Muslims who will need to break their fast at sunset.
- Most individuals will attend the 'travi' late night prayer after the fast has opened so limited time is left in the evenings for other activities.
- Organisations should try and plan competitions and tournaments outside the month of Ramadan.



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