

# Don't break your fast with a feast



The month of Ramadan is a great opportunity to focus on bringing back a balanced and healthy lifestyle in your life. Through fasting you begin to learn how to manage your eating habits, how to improve self-control and discipline.

This special edition is aimed at helping you understand the health issues related to fasting, so that you are able to make more informed choices, minimize complications and maximize the benefit of your fast.

## Slow Down Suhoor

Suhoor should be a wholesome, moderate meal that includes foods that are digested slowly and will help release energy gradually during the hours of fasting.

A well-balanced Suhoor can reduce the effects of fasting such as headaches, fatigue and hunger.



## Did you know?

The fasts of Ramadan can improve a person's health, but if healthy eating is not followed, can possibly worsen it!

The deciding factor is not the fast itself, but rather what you eat and drink during the non-fasting hours.

## Sources of slow releasing energy

**Complex carbohydrates** are found in grains and seeds, like barley, wheat, oats, millets, semolina, beans, lentils, wholemeal flour, basmati rice.

**Fibre-rich foods** such as bran, cereals, whole wheat, grains and seeds, vegetables such as green beans and almost all fruit, including dates, apricots, prunes, and figs.

## Balanced meals are essential during Ramadan

**Balanced Iftar.** The Iftar meal should remain a meal and not become a feast!

A meal that has less than a normal amount of food but is sufficiently balanced will keep a person healthy and active during the month of Ramadan. Your plate should be simple and not differ too much from a regular healthy meal that includes the right portions of all the major food group.

## Tips for a balanced iftar meal

- **Break your fast with a date.** Dates contain beneficial minerals and fiber and help balance your blood sugar levels. Remember: everything in moderation, have up to three dates and don't overeat!
- **Enjoy a bowl of soup.** They are warm and easy on the stomach and provide the body with fluid and essential minerals. They are a healthy start to your iftar meal.
- **Include fresh vegetables.** They contain fiber, an essential part of healthy eating during Ramadan. They help to avoid constipation and help maintain a healthy digestive system. Be creative! Prepare salads using vegetables of different colors.
- **Remember moderation.** Keep your portion of dessert not more than three fingers in size. You can have fresh or dried fruits and nuts instead of sugary cakes and cookies to satisfy your sweet cravings.

## Keep moving

It is important to continue exercising during Ramadan to avoid weight gain and loss of strength.

### Activities during Fasting Hours:

- **Set simple exercise goals**, such as walking to the Mosque instead of using the car and using the stairs instead of an elevator.
- **Stretch your muscles** several times during the day.
- **Avoid strenuous exercise during fasting hours**, such as running or weight lifting. These may lead to dehydration and fatigue.

### Activities after Breaking your Fasting:

- **Practice brisk walking**, jogging or swimming for 30-45 minutes a day.
- **Wait for 2-3 hours** after your Iftar meal or before Suhoor meal to give your body the chance to digest the food.
- **Be motivated** and practice exercise with friends and / or family members, and enjoy the experience. Try to make it a family affair. Ramadan is an opportunity for all family members to adopt a healthy lifestyle.





## Be prepared: Fasting and...

Here are some common health concerns and ways to help prevent and manage them during the month.

### Heartburn

People who regularly take medicine for indigestion you may want to continue taking them. A good time to do this could be with the pre-dawn meal.

#### Help control heartburn

- Eat in moderation
- Avoiding oily, deep-fried or very spicy food
- Reduce your caffeine intake
- Stop smoking
- Sleep with your head raised

### Diabetes

People who regularly inject insulin are advised not to fast, as the potential risk to health – both in the short and long term – of not taking insulin is too great.

If you have your diabetes under control using tablets be sure to should seek careful advice from your doctor before starting a fast.

Low blood sugar levels are dangerous, and may lead to fainting or fits if left untreated.

Feeling dizzy, sweaty and disoriented may all suggest low blood sugar. If a person with diabetes has these symptoms, they should immediately have a sugary drink, or place sugar or a sugar-rich sweet below their tongue.



### Headache

Headaches during a fast could be due to dehydration or hunger, poor rest, or the absence of caffeine or nicotine.

#### Prevent or reduce the risk of headaches

- Eat a moderate and balanced diet
- Do not miss the pre-dawn meal
- Take in enough fluid
- Wear a hat and sunglasses when in direct sunlight



**Remember to continue to regularly self-monitor your blood glucose.**

## Dehydration

Dehydration is common during a fast. The body continues to lose water and salts through breathing, perspiring and urinating.

If you are unable to stand up due to dizziness, or you are disoriented, you should urgently drink regular, moderate quantities of water – ideally with sugar and salt.

If you faint due to dehydration, your legs should be raised above your head by others, and when you awake - rehydrate.

## Weight control

Food consumed during the pre-dawn and dusk meals may lead to some unintended weight gain. However, if you approach the fast with discipline, it can be an opportunity to lose weight and become healthier.

## Constipation

When you are fasting, being active, drinking water regularly and eating healthily (during the times when you are not fasting) will help to keep your bowel motions regular.

### Avoid constipation

- Include fruit and vegetables in your diet and
- Increase the fiber intake



### Source

- Ramadan Health Guide: a guide to healthy fasting supported by the NHS: [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/equalops/resources/a\\_guide\\_to\\_healthy\\_fasting.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/equalops/resources/a_guide_to_healthy_fasting.pdf)
- Healthy Ramadan: <http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthyramadant/Pages/healthyramadant/home.aspx>
- Fasting: health risks: <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Healthyramadant/Pages/fastinghealthrisks.aspx>
- International Diabetes Federation: <http://www.idf.org/sites/default/files/Exercise%20Plan%20during%20Ramadan.pdf>