

Health Aspects of Fasting in Ramadan.

Stay Healthy during Ramadan.

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The spiritual uplift, self-control and many other similar benefits of Fasting in Ramadan are well recognized. This article deals exclusively with the physical health aspects of Fasting.

Overview. A working knowledge of nutrition, common health issues, and healthy eating habits with a touch of commonsense can go a long way to make your Ramadan Fasting free of adverse health effects and an enjoyable experience. The suggestions given here are only rough guidelines. Consult your doctor if you have a medical condition before you make a decision to observe Fasting in Ramadan. Explain to your doctor, (if he is not familiar with Islamic Fasting) the details of Ramadan's spiritual significance so he can make an informed decision and make appropriate recommendations. If you are not satisfied, a second opinion (optional) with a Muslim physician of the same specialty may help.

General Recommendations:

Do's

- ❖ Maintain calorie intake to roughly what you take when not fasting. Ramadan is not for losing weight, unless you are overweight and want to lose weight. Maintain the same level of activities (calorie expenditure) as when you were not fasting.
- ❖ Eat slow burning foods, esp. at Suhur time. Complex carbohydrates are slow burning foods; e.g. Wheat, bran, oat, beans, lentils, whole wheat flour, etc. Haleem is a good healthy slow burning meal!
- ❖ Eat high fiber foods, like whole wheat, oats, beans, lentils, vegetables (green beans, peas, spinach, and beetroot), fruits like figs, prunes, etc.
- ❖ Eat balanced meal, e.g. Vegetables, fruit, meat (chicken, beef, and fish), bread, cereal, dairy products.
- ❖ Drink plenty of water and fluids. (Water is preferable)

Do not

- Do not eat fast burning foods. Refined carbohydrates are fast burning foods, e.g. White flour bread, refined sugar, etc.
- Do not eat fried and fatty foods. These cause heartburn and weight gain.

Do not (continued)

- Do not over-eat, especially at Suhur time.
- **Tea:** Do not drink excessive amount of tea, especially at Suhur time. It contains theophylline, which is a mild diuretic (causes urination) and may exacerbate fasting related dehydration, and may contribute to salt and electrolyte deprivation. (Coffee does not contain theophylline.) *It is not healthy to drink tea for breaking the Fast.*

Special Considerations:

Diabetes. Non-insulin requiring diabetes mellitus (NIDDM) is also called adult onset diabetes. If it is diet controlled or requires oral medication, then fasting may be done with precaution, after consulting your doctor. It may require reducing the dose of diabetic medication, and strict adherence to anti-diabetic diet, including eating complex carbohydrates (Slow burning foods.) If you require insulin shots, then it may be **too risky** to observe Fasting.

Constipation. **Causes:** Dehydration may exacerbate constipation, leading to piles or anal fissure, which is very painful cracking lesion in anal area. **Remedies:** Drink plenty of water and fluids, high fiber containing foods & vegetables. Using a stool softener pill (over the counter), psyllium (metamucil, etc.) powder, prune juice, etc. as a preventive measure might be helpful.

Indigestion, Bloating. **Causes:** Overeating, fried and fatty foods, eggs, cabbage, carbonated drinks, like colas. **Remedies.** Avoid the above foods.

Lethargy, Feeling weak & Lightheaded. **Causes:** Insufficient fluid and salt intake, or excessive fluid and electrolyte loss. **Remedies:** Increase water and fluid intake. Avoid excessive sweating and keep cool.

Hypoglycemia. Low blood sugar. May cause feeling of weakness, especially in the afternoon. **Remedies:** Eat Suhur. Eat slow digesting foods (complex carbohydrates.) Avoid fast burning refined foods (white flour breads, refined sugar containing foods)

Headache, nervousness, irritability. **Causes:** This may be due to caffeine or nicotine withdrawal in those people who are dependent on these substances. **Remedies:** One to two weeks prior to starting the Fasts, gradually reduce the intake of tea, coffee, and cigarettes. Several carbonated drinks have added caffeine. Read the label and know what you are drinking!

Muscle Cramps. **Causes:** Inadequate intake of calcium, magnesium and potassium. **Remedies:** Eat foods rich in minerals, like vegetables, fruits, dairy products, dates, meat products.

Peptic Ulcer, Hiatal hernia, Gastritis, High Blood pressure, Kidney Stones. Consult your doctor if you intend to Fast in Ramadan, if you suffer from any of these.

(Have a happy and Blessed Ramadan.)