

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and the month of fasting for Muslims. Fasting is one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam. Muslims believe that fasting teaches empathy and sympathy, and it takes away some of our selfishness and self-centeredness in the pursuit of a greater closeness to God.

How do Muslims fast?

Fasting in Ramadan is compulsory for all physically and mentally healthy mature Muslims. Those exempted from fasting are the sick, old, children, breastfeeding, pregnant, or menstruating women and those travelling on long distances. Muslims fast from early dawn to sunset every day throughout the month (approximately 18 hours a day). The fast requires Muslims to abstain from food and drink during the fast.

Ramadan and smoking

Ramadan provides a great opportunity to have conversations with your Healthy Living Pharmacy team about smoking. During the fast, you will not smoke, making this month one of the best times of the year to quit smoking for good!

A Doctor's advice for fasting patients

Dr Razeen Mahroof, an anaesthetist from Oxford, says feasting during the non-fasting hours can be unhealthy. He recommends approaching the fast with discipline, or an opportunity to lose weight and be healthier could be wasted. "The underlying message behind Ramadan is self-discipline and self-control," he says. "This shouldn't fall apart at the end of the day".

Those observing the fast should have at least two meals a day, the pre-dawn meal (Suhoor) and a meal at dusk (Iftar).

Dr Mahroof says your food intake should be simple and not differ too much from your normal diet.

Complex carbohydrates are foods that help release energy slowly during the long hours of fasting. They are found in foods such as barley, wheat, oats, millet, semolina, beans, lentils, wholemeal flour and basmati rice.

Fibre-rich foods are also digested slowly and include

bran, cereals, whole wheat, grains and seeds, potatoes the skin on, vegetables such as green beans, and almost all fruit, including apricots, prunes and figs. Foods to avoid are the fast-burning, heavily processed foods that contain refined carbohydrates (sugar and white flour), as well as fatty food (such as cakes, biscuits, chocolates and sweets such as Indian mithai).

It's also worth avoiding caffeine-based drinks such as tea, coffee and cola. Caffeine is a diuretic and stimulates faster water loss through urination.

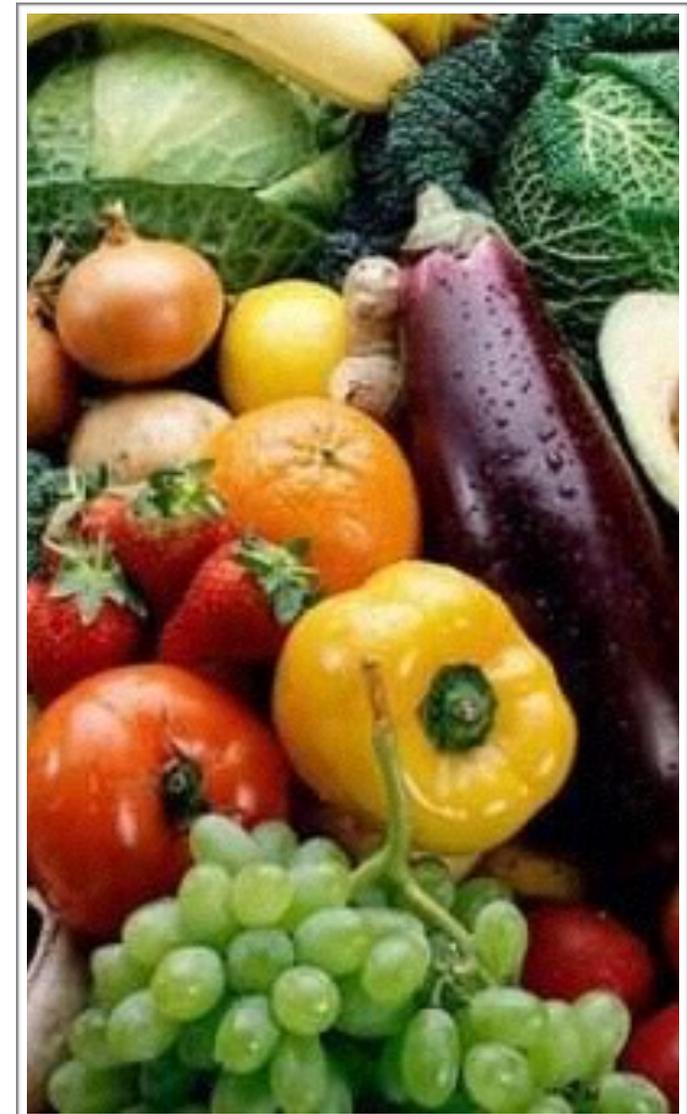
Healthy alternatives

- **baked** samosas and **boiled** dumplings
- chapattis made without oil
- baked or **grilled** meat and chicken
- homemade pastry using just a single layer
- milk-based sweets and puddings, such as rasmalai and barfee



Keeping Healthy in Ramadan

Fasting during the month of Ramadan can be good for your health if it's done correctly. Ask your Healthy Living Pharmacy for advice.



Frequently asked questions about using medications and Ramadan



Can I use my Eye drops/contact lenses/ear drops whilst fasting?

Yes to all. Recent findings by ENT specialist doctors have revealed that any liquid inserted into the ear cannot pass through the external auditory canal into the middle and inner ear unless

the ear drum is perforated. Hence why it is permissible for one to use ear drops while fasting since there is no direct link between the ear and the throat/ stomach.

Could dehydration become so bad that you have to break the fast?

Yes. You could become very dehydrated if you do not drink enough water before the fast. Poor hydration can be made worse by weather conditions, and even everyday activities such as walking to work or housework. If you produce very little or no urine, feel disoriented and confused, or faint due to dehydration, you must stop fasting and have a drink of water or other liquid. Islam doesn't require you to harm yourself in fulfilment of the fast. If a fast is broken, it will need to be compensated for by fasting at a later date.

Diabetes and fasting

People who have their diabetes under control, either by their diet or using tablets, may fast. However, their GP may require them to change their medication to help them take tablets outside fasting times. Those who need insulin to control their diabetes should not fast

I get severe migraines when I don't eat and they get worse when I fast. Should I fast?

People with uncontrolled migraines should not fast. However, managing your migraines is possible with the right medicine and certain lifestyle changes. Ask your GP for further advice on controlling your migraines.

Should a person with high or low blood pressure fast?

People with well-controlled high blood pressure may fast. Their GP may require a change to their medicine to help them take tablets outside fasting times. Someone with low blood pressure

who is otherwise healthy may fast. They must ensure they drink enough fluid and have enough salt.

Can I use an asthma inhaler during Ramadan?

Muslim experts have differing opinions on this issue. Some say that using an asthma inhaler isn't the same as eating or drinking, and is therefore permitted during fasting. In their view, people with asthma can fast and use their inhalers whenever they need to. However, other scholars say that the inhaler provides small amounts of liquid medicine to the lungs, so it breaks the fast. They say that people with poor control of their asthma must not fast until good control is achieved. Some people with asthma may opt for longer-acting inhalers so that they can fast. See your GP for further advice.

Ask your pharmacist

Ramadan is a month where you could benefit from having a chat with your pharmacist about your medication. This is a great free service and you won't usually need an appointment. If you are confused about what times are best to take medication, your pharmacist will be pleased to guide you. Your pharmacist can also liaise with your GP if changes are required in the way you take your doses. You can work together with your pharmacist and GP to stay healthy in Ramadan, fast and continue with an appropriate dose regime .

