

## Some Health Guidelines for Ramadhan

How fortunate we are to be the Ummat of Rasulallah, Sallallahu Alaihi Wasallum. One of the miracles handed down to us is the month of Ramadhan. Our Allah Subhanahu Watha'ala, who created us, has granted us a way in which we can cleanse ourselves, physically as well as spiritually. This extra ordinary month will only be of benefit to those of us who take advantage of it. Allah Subhanahu Watha'ala has promised us rewards during this month beyond our expectations, only limited by his generosity and mercy. And we know that Allah Subhanahu Watha'ala is most generous and most merciful.

Here is some useful advice on how to avoid common problems that occur during Ramadhan. If followed, it would enable one to fast comfortably and enjoy fully the spiritual benefits of Ramadhan. Ramadhan is a time of Ibadat. Hunger and thirst can cause us to lose the purpose of Ramadhan.

### *Detox yourself*

If you are in the habit of drinking many cups of tea or coffee or caffeine –containing drinks during the day, please start reducing over a period of 1-2 weeks before Ramadhan. Tea and coffee contain caffeine, an addictive substance that causes severe headaches on withdrawal.

If you are a smoker, please start reducing 1-2 weeks before Ramadhan. Ramadhan is an ideal month to stop smoking completely.

### *The foods we eat*

During Ramadhan, our diet should not differ very much from our normal diet and should be as simple as possible. The diet should be such that we maintain our normal weight, neither losing nor gaining. However, if one is over-weight, Ramadhan is an ideal time to normalize one's weight.

In view of the long hours of fasting, we should consume slow digesting foods including fibre foods rather than fast-digesting foods. Slow digesting foods last between 8-12 hours, while fast digesting foods last for only 2-4 hours.

- **Slow-digesting foods** are foods that contain grains and seeds like barley, wheat, oats, millet, semolina, beans, lentils, etc; whole meal flour; whole meal pasta; unpolished rice; etc (called **complex carbohydrates**).
- **Fast-digesting foods** are foods that contain sugar, white flour, white rice, white pasta, etc. (called **refined carbohydrates**).
- **Fibre-containing foods** are bran-containing foods, like cereals; whole wheat or whole meal flour; grains and seeds, like beans and lentils; vegetables like green beans, peas, sem (papry), marrow, mealies, spinach, methie, leaves of beetroot (iron rich), etc.; fruit with skin, dried fruit especially dried apricots, figs, prunes, etc.; and nuts like almonds; etc.

The foods should be well-balanced, containing foods from each food group, i.e., fruits, vegetables, meat/chicken/fish, bread/cereals and dairy products. Foods from each food group should be eaten daily.

Fried foods are unhealthy and should be limited. They cause indigestion, heart burn, weight problems and blocking of arteries especially in the heart and brain.

### **AVOID**

- fried and fatty foods.
- Spicy foods and sauces.
- Foods containing too much sugar and refined carbohydrates.
- Over-eating at Sehrie (Suhur) and Iftaar.
- Caffeine-containing drinks like tea, coffee, colas, etc. Tea makes you pass more urine taking with it valuable mineral salts that your body would need during the long day of fasting.
- Smoking.

### **EAT**

- Complex Carbohydrates at Sehri (Suhur) so that the food lasts longer making you less hungry. (Muesli, bran-containing cereals, whole meal or brown bread, beans, lentils, etc.)
- Haleem, a soup made from barley and wheat is an excellent source of slow-burning food and protein.
- Dates are an excellent source of sugar, fibre, carbohydrates, potassium and magnesium.
- Almonds are rich in protein and fibre with less fat. Ground almonds and milk make a healthy drink.
- Bananas are a good source of carbohydrates, potassium and magnesium.
- Eat oven-grilled samoosas rather than fried samoosas.

### **DRINK**

Drink as much water, sports drinks, containing potassium or fruit juices as possible between Iftaar and bedtime so that your body may adjust fluid levels for the next day.

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## **Some Problems**

### **Constipation**

Constipation can cause piles (haemorrhoids), fissures (painful cracks in anal canal) and indigestion with a bloated feeling.

**Causes:** Too much refined carbohydrates, too little water and not enough fibre in the diet.

**Remedy:** Increase fibre intake and complex carbohydrates, increase water intake, use bran for baking, use brown flour when making bread (roti).

### **Indigestion and “Wind”**

**Causes:** Over-eating. Too much fried and fatty foods, spicy foods and foods that produce wind, e.g., eggs, cabbage, lentils, beans, carbonated drinks, etc.

**Remedy:** Do not over-eat, drink adequate amounts of water and fruit juices. Avoid fried and fatty foods. Add tymol or celery seeds (ajmor) to lentils and beans to lessen wind production.

### **Lethargy (“Low blood pressure”)**

Weakness, tiredness, lack of energy, dizziness especially on getting up from a lying or sitting position, pale appearance and feeling faint, are symptoms associated with low blood pressure. This tends to occur at the end of the day when Ibadah is so important.

**Causes:** Too little fluid intake, decreased salt intake, not eating enough at Sehri and Iftaar.

**Remedy:** Increase fluid and salt intake. Eat enough to sustain you through the next day. Drink at least 1 litre of sports drinks between Iftaar and bedtime.

**Caution:** Low blood pressure should be confirmed by taking a reading when symptoms are present. Persons with high blood pressure may need their medication adjusted for the month of Ramadhan. Diuretics should be avoided.

### **Headaches**

**Causes:** Caffeine and tobacco withdrawal, doing too much during the day, lack of sleep, hunger (usually occurs at the end of the day), stress, etc.

**Remedy:** Cut down or stop caffeine containing drinks 1-2 weeks before Ramadhan. Herbal teas and caffeine-free coffee may be substituted. Re-organise your schedule so as to have adequate time to do the necessary things and to have adequate rest and sleep.

### **Low Blood Sugar**

Weakness, dizziness, tiredness, poor concentration, feeling shaky (tremor), unable to do physical activities, headache, palpitations are symptoms of low blood sugar.

**Causes:** Consuming too much sugar-containing foods, i.e., refined carbohydrates especially at sehri (suhur).

**Remedy:** Limit sugar-containing foods and drinks at sehri (suhur). Eat more complex carbohydrates.

This applies to non-diabetics. Diabetics will need to adjust their medications during Ramadhan. Please consult your doctor.

### **Muscle Cramps**

**Causes:** Inadequate intake of calcium or magnesium-containing foods.

**Remedy:** Eat foods rich in above minerals, e.g., fruit and vegetables, dairy products, meat dried fruit and dates.

**Caution:** Those on high blood pressure medication or those prone to kidney stones should consult their doctor.

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### **Heartburn, Gastritis, Hiatus Hernia and “Peptic Ulcers”**

**Causes:** Increased acid levels in an empty stomach during Ramadhan can aggravate the above conditions. It presents as a burning pain in the stomach area and under the ribs radiating up the chest to the throat. Spicy foods, especially sauces, coffee and Cola drinks, fatty and fried foods.

**Remedy:** Avoid all the above foods. Do not over-eat. Have small meals rather than one big meal, e.g., small Iftaar and a snack after Taraweeh salaah.

Medications are available (PPIs) to control acid levels in the stomach. These should be taken daily for the whole month of Ramadhan.

### **Kidney Stones**

Kidney stones may not present themselves for months to years after they are formed.

**Causes:** Some people have a tendency to produce stones in the kidney. Other causes include not drinking enough liquids to flush out the kidneys.

**Remedy:** Drink excessive amounts of liquid between Iftaar and bedtime. Those prone to kidney stones must also decrease their calcium intake, e.g., dairy products.

### **Joint Pains**

**Causes:** During Ramadhan, when extra salaah are performed, the pressure on the knee joints increases. In the elderly, and those with arthritis, this may result in pain, stiffness, swelling and discomfort.

**Remedy:** Lose weight so that the knees do not have to carry extra loads. Exercise the lower limbs before Ramadhan (walking 30-45 minutes 3 times a week) so that they can be prepared for the additional strain. Being physically fit allows greater fulfillment of physical obligations thereby enabling one to be able to perform salaah with ease.

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