

Circumstances when a fast is not broken

Compiled by: **Iqbal Lambat**

Reviewed by:

- **Imam Uzair Akbar** and **Mufti J Akbar**, Holland Park Mosque, Brisbane, Australia
- Prior edition reviewed by: **Imam Y Patel** – Secretary, Jamiat-ul-Ulama, Mpumalanga and **Imam M Ali**, Mpumalanga, South Africa

Contents

- [Eating, drinking or engaging in sexual relations forgetfully](#)
- [Vomiting](#)
- [Applying ointment or drops to the eye](#)
- [Ear Drops/water in the ears](#)
- [Bathing while fasting](#)
- [Cleaning teeth](#)
- [Breast feeding a baby](#)
- [Swallowing saliva and slime](#)
- [Swallowing a particle less than the size of half a pea](#)
- [Blood Tests/Donating Blood](#)
- [Swallowing water whilst gargling and water in the nose](#)
- [Swallowing blood in saliva](#)
- [Smelling fragrance](#)
- [Smoke, dust, etc](#)
- [Using an inhaler](#)
- [Examinations/Injections](#)
- [Tasting Food](#)

Whilst this section focuses on actions that do not break a fast, it does by inference cover those acts that do break a fast.

1. Eating, drinking or engaging in sexual relations forgetfully

Eating, drinking or engaging in sexual relations forgetful of the fact that you are fasting does not break a fast. Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "If somebody eats or drinks forgetfully then he should complete his fast, for what he has eaten or drunk, has been given to him by Allah." (Bukhari, volume 3, Hadith number 154).

Al-Hassan and Mujahid said, "If one has sexual intercourse forgetfully, then no penalty will be imposed on him." (Bukhari, volume 3, page 85).

If one continues eating etc. after recalling the fast, the fast is broken.

2. Vomiting

Involuntary vomiting:

Involuntary vomiting does not break a fast. Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet (PBUH) said, "If one has a sudden attack of vomiting while one was fasting, no atonement is required of him, but if he vomits intentionally he must make atonement." (Abu Dawud).

Induced/intentional vomiting:

If one who has vomited intentionally swallows a mouthful, his fast is broken. Hanafi jurists differ on whether a fast is broken if a mouthful or small amount is swallowed unintentionally. If nothing is swallowed or a small amount is swallowed unintentionally, then the fast is not broken.

A pregnant woman's fast is not broken if she suffers from 'morning sickness' (Islamonline – fatwa section).

3. Applying ointment or drops to the eye

Narrated Anas ibn Malik: Anas told of a man coming to the Prophet (PBUH) and saying, "I have a complaint in my eyes, so may I apply collyrium while I am fasting?" He replied, "Yes." (Mishkat). The logic is that any medication applied to the eye will not enter the throat. A leading commentator on Fiqh in South Africa, Mufti Ebrahim Desai states¹: "Using eye drops in the state of fasting is permissible. It does not invalidate the fast."

4. Ear Drops/water in the ears

Dr Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Dean of the University of Qatar and a prominent author on Islamic fiqh has the following opinion²:

"As far as putting kohl on the eyes during the days of Ramadan - or putting medicine in the ears and or having anal injections' is concerned, all these are things in which some of them might reach the stomach. But they would not reach the stomach by natural means, would not provide nourishment, and would not stimulate people.

"The scholars of the past and present have differed regarding this issue. Some scholars judge that these things nullify the fast. Others say that these things do not reach the stomach through natural ways therefore they do not nullify the fast.

"In fact, I am in favour of the opinion that these things - using kohl, eye drops, ear drops, creams on the buttocks for those who have haemorrhoids, and anal injections (sometimes used for those with constipation) - do not nullify the fast. This is also what Ibn Taymiyyah preferred in his '*Fatawa*', saying: What has more support is that none of these things nullify the fast because it is something from the religion of Islam in which knowledge of its general and specific aspects are a must. If these things are from that which Allah and His Messenger (PBUH) prohibited during the fast, then this would have been made clear by the Messenger (PBUH). Concerning this, nobody from the people of knowledge have transmitted any hadith whether authentic, weak, etc. The narrated hadith about kohl is weak, and Yahya ibn Mu`een said: 'This hadith is rejected.'"

South African Fiqh scholar Imam Motala states³: "Of note is the fact that the medical profession has a slight disagreement with the (traditional jurists) with regards to:-

- The ear: whilst some Jurists considered the outer ear to have a direct pathway to the throat, subsequently reaching the stomach, the E.N.T experts are of the opinion that there is no link. Their view is that the only time when any liquid will pass through from the outer ear to the middle ear is when the tympanic membrane (eardrum) is perforated. Regarding this difference, contemporary Jurists like Mufti Rafi Uthmani (D.B) strongly advise that the views of the E.N.T experts of our time be accepted, since there is no certainty with regards to the ear having a passage to

the throat. We should therefore refer this matter to the medical experts. (Refer to Dhaabitul-mufattiraat fi majaanit-tadaawi p.g 54)

- The eyes: the medical profession clearly state that a narrow duct links up the eye cavity with the throat via the nose. Regarding this difference Hazrat Mufti Rafi Uthmani Saheb explains that: Ahadith have proven that the use of surma and/or eye drops does not nullify the fast. (One should bear in mind that after something is clearly proven from the Quran or the Ahadith, one is obliged to accept it whether it makes sense to him or not) additionally, this duct is so narrow that whatever passes through it from the eye is (insignificant and) negligible.”

5. Bathing while fasting

Bathing whilst fasting does not break the fast.

Narrated Abu Bakr: A man who narrated his tradition to me said: “I have seen the Apostle of Allah in al-Arj pouring water over his head while he was fasting, either because of thirst or because of heat.” (Abu Dawud).

6. Cleaning teeth

A miswak (a stick) may be used to clean teeth even though it is fresh and has a taste. Narrated Amr bin Rabia, “I saw the Prophet (PBUH) cleaning his teeth with Siwak (miswak) while he was fasting so many times as I can’t count.” Narrated Abu Huraira: The Prophet (PBUH) said, “But for my fear that it would be hard for my followers, I would have ordered them to clean their teeth with Siwak on every performance of ablution.” (Bukhari, volume three, page 86).

Scholars are divided on the use of toothpaste. Dr Ahmad Kutty, a senior lecturer at the Islamic Institute of Toronto, Ontario, Canada, states⁴: “It is absolutely fine to brush one’s teeth in the morning with toothpaste while fasting so long as one takes care not to swallow the paste.”

Dr. Muhammad Abu Laylah, professor of the Islamic Studies & Comparative Religions at Al-Azhar states⁵: “Islam urges its followers to be clean, decent, and pleasant in their appearance and smell. In this respect, you can have a mouthwash and gargle it but be careful not to allow the water to go into your stomach as best as you can. During the Prophet's lifetime, he and his Companions used to use *siwak* (tooth-stick) to keep their mouth fresh and clean.”

Certain scholars are of the opinion that using toothpaste makes your fast makrooh (that is, the reward of the fast is reduced). South African Mufti Ebrahim Desai states: “It is permissible to make miswak while fasting. To use toothpaste in the state of fasting is Makrooh (disliked). The minimum taste in the miswak is unlike the strong taste in the paste. Furthermore the paste is a solid substance and liquidifies more in the mouth thereby having the potential of going down the throat.”

7. Breast feeding a baby

Breast feeding a baby does not break a fast.

8. Swallowing saliva and slime

A fast is not broken if a person swallows his/her own saliva, or when some moisture remains on the tongue after gargling and it is swallowed with his/her own spit or saliva. It is a requirement

that water be spat out after gargling. However, it is not a requirement to spit out to the extreme so as to remove all moisture from the mouth⁶.

The Hanafi school are of the opinion that swallowing mucus or phlegm at the back of the mouth, whether intentionally or unintentionally does not nullify a fast.

9. Swallowing a particle less than the size of half a pea

Under Hanafi law, if a person swallows any residue remaining between his teeth (provided the particle is less than the size of half a pea) the fast is valid. If the particle is larger, the fast is broken.

10. Blood Tests/Donating Blood

Mufti Ebrahim Desai states⁷: "It is permissible for a fasting person to have a blood test. That does not invalidate the fast." The Mufti adds: "Donating blood does not invalidate the fast. However, one should consider one's health if one wishes to do so."

11. Swallowing water whilst gargling and water in the nose

Sheikh Muhammad Al-Hanooti, member of the North American Fiqh Council, states⁸: "Rinsing the mouth and the nose during *wudu'* (ablution) is either classified as a Sunnah act of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), according to Abu Hanifah, Malik, and Ash-Shafi'i, or as an obligation, according to Imam Hanbal who considers it to be a part of washing the face. In both cases, one should not abandon rinsing them when making *wudu'* whether fasting or not.

"It is noteworthy that a fasting person should not exaggerate in doing it. Here, we recall the Prophetic hadith that reads: **"When you rinse your nose, overdo it except if you are observing fasting."**

"Accordingly, if one rinses his mouth or nose in *wudu'* while fasting and some water goes down his throat without intending or overdoing it, his Fast remains valid. This is similar to the case when dust from the roadway or a fly enters the throat, which is regarded as a mistake, for which this nation will not be held accountable, even if some scholars differ regarding them.

"Also, rinsing the mouth for other aims than *wudu'* will not invalidate one's Fasting as long as none of the water goes down the throat."

12. Swallowing blood in saliva

Scholars are of the opinion that blood in the saliva will not break the fast if the blood is less than the saliva. If the taste of blood is discernible then the fast is broken.

However, the late Saudi scholar Sheikh Muhammad Al-Uthaymeen⁹ was of the opinion that unintentional blood swallowing does not break the fast irrespective of whether the blood can be tasted: "unintentional bleeding is not among the things that invalidate the fast. So, whoever bleeds by accident or unintentionally does not need to make up for that day of fasting." Mufti Desai is of the opinion that gum bleeding and nose bleeding do not break a fast¹⁰.

13. Smelling fragrance

Smelling anything fragrant, provided that there are no vapours, is permissible.

14. Smoke, dust, etc.

Smoke, dust, etc which is inhaled unintentionally, not by one's volition or conscious action_— does not break a fast.

15. Using an inhaler

Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi, a member of the Fiqh Council of North America, states¹¹: "The use of an inhaler during fasting is permissible because the inhaler only provides some moisture; it doesn't involve the taking in of any liquid or food through the mouth. Even when we take a breath, we take in some moisture into our throats and that doesn't break our fast. Therefore, in any similar way, the use of an inhaler is permissible."

The late Saudi scholar Sheikh Abdul-`Azeez Ibn Baz, said in one of his fatwas¹²: "It is permissible because it does not resemble food or drink; it is similar to undergoing a blood test or taking non-nutritional injections."

Both Mufti Ebrahim Desai and Imam Naeem Motala from South Africa are of the opinion that the use of medicated inhalers by asthma sufferers breaks the fast. Mufti Desai¹³: "The inhaling of the asthma pump invalidates the fast. There is no difference between the ingestion and inhaling of medication. The inhaler contains medication (salbutamol)."

16. Examinations/Injections

The opinion of Islamic scholars is that any injection of medicine into the body will not break the fast provided that the medicine does not reach the brain or the stomach. Sheikh `Atiyyah Saqr, former head of Al-Azhar Fatwa Committee, states:

"Fasting is not broken by vaginal examination, examination of piles or tonsils using a spoon or things of the sort. An enema does not invalidate fasting unless the tool reaches the stomach."

"Fasting is not invalidated by intravenous, intra-muscular or subcutaneous injections, since they do not provide one with food or drink that satisfies hunger or quenches thirst."

"Nutritive injections, such as glucose injections and the like, are conventionally regarded as food that does break one's fast. Whoever takes nutritive injections can do without food for a long time as they satisfy hunger the way food does. This is in effect because when food is digested and absorbed, it is circulated in the blood to the entire body to meet its needs. Alternatively, nutrition could be directly injected into the blood without necessarily passing through the alimentary canal."

With regards to vaginal examinations, Mufti Ebrahim Desai states: "If no medication has been inserted into the vagina, the fast will not be broken. If any gel or other substance was inserted into the vagina, the fast will break. Ultrasound scanning does not invalidate the fast." With regards to injections, the Mufti states: "It is permissible to take an injection during fasting. The injection does not nullify the fast. (Ahsanul Fataawa vol.4 pg.432)."

17. Tasting Food

It is permissible for a fasting person to taste the food, if necessary, and his/her fast is still valid so long as he/she does not deliberately swallow anything of it. Sheikh M. S. Al-Munajjid, a prominent Saudi Muslim lecturer and author, adds¹⁴: “There is nothing wrong with a fasting person tasting the food if he needs to, as long as he tastes it with the tip of the tongue and then spits it out without swallowing anything. But if the fasting person forgets and swallows it by mistake, there is no sin on him, and he should complete the fast. This is because the general rule of Shari`ah is that the person who forgets is excused.”

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Holy Quran – Yusuf Ali translation

Hadith: Bukhari; Mishkat; Abu Dawud; Muslim.

Lambat EI: Fasting in Ramadhaan, Razara Publishers CC

Imam Ali: The Essential Hanafi Book of Fiqh

Bakhtiar L: *Encyclopedia of Islamic Law*, ABC International Group.

Sallie: The Book of Fasting

Ask the Imam – Mufti Desai

¹ Mufti Desai – Imam Online - <http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/index.php>

² Using Kohl & Ear Drops While Fasting – Islamonline – 12 November 2003

³ Imam Online - <http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/index.php>

⁴ Brushing One's Teeth while Fasting – Islamonline – 6 November 2003

⁵ Using Mouthwash while Fasting – Islamonline – 4 November 2002

⁶ Sallie: The Book on Fasting, page 87.

⁷ Mufti Desai – Imam Online - <http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/index.php>

⁸ Rinsing the Mouth & Nose during Fasting – Islamonline – 3 April 2003

⁹ Does Gum Bleeding Break One's Fast? – Islamonline – 27 November 2002

¹⁰ Mufti Desai – Imam Online - <http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/index.php>

¹¹ Does Using an Asthma Inhaler Break the Fast? - 27 November 2002

¹² Does Using an Asthma Inhaler Break the Fast? - 27 November 2002

¹³ Mufti Desai – Imam Online - <http://www.islam.tc/ask-imam/index.php>

¹⁴ Tasting Food while Fasting – Islamonline – 18 November 2002