



رمضان كريم

Managing Diabetes during Ramadhan

Health Guide for People with Diabetes Fasting During the Month of Ramadhan

Introduction

Ramadhan is one of the most important months in the Islamic calendar when Muslims observe fasting. It is one of the five pillars of Islam, and during Ramadhan, healthy Muslim adults refrain from eating, smoking and drinking during daylight hours. The benefits go beyond just refraining from eating as it is also an opportunity for spiritual uplift, encouraging good deeds, and exercising self-discipline as well as physical and moral benefits. It is an opportunity to make significant and long term changes in your lifestyle.

Some groups of patients are exempt from fasting including people with sickness and certain medical conditions which may cause them harm from fasting. Diabetic patients need to discuss this with a healthcare professional well before the month of Ramadhan.



“This booklet has been produced to give you general advice on managing your diabetes during the holy month of Ramadhan. It is important that diabetic patients think about their medication, diet, exercise and monitoring of blood glucose levels during Ramadhan.”

Preparing Yourself for Ramadhan

Managing your Diabetes is related to the food eaten, the amount of exercise done and the medications taken.

Medication



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Food



+

Exercise



“If you are Diabetic and considering fasting then before the month of Ramadhan starts, speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about managing your Diabetes.”

Many smokers take the opportunity to stop for life during this month. Ramadhan is a good time to give up smoking. Speak to a health professional for support and information on quitting.



What happens to your body when you fast?

Our body normally enters into a state of fasting 8 hours after the last meal. During the fasting state, the body first uses up stored sources of glucose in the liver and muscles for energy. This is followed by breaking down the fat in our body as the next source of energy. Reducing the fat can aid weight loss, improve control of diabetes and reduce blood pressure.

To remain healthy during Ramadhan, you should aim for a balanced diet. It is important that you have a balanced food intake and drink plenty of fluids between the fasts. The diet

should not vary much from a normal healthy diet which you should follow all year round.

Dates are an excellent source of carbohydrate and fibre, often eaten at Iftar and they will provide much needed energy.

Food in Ramadhan

During Ramadhan the two meal times are:
Sehri: Meal before sunrise to start the fast.
Iftar: Meal at sunset to break the fast.

During the summer months, this time gap between the meals can be considerably longer (approx. 18 hours): hence, it is very important that the choice of foods will support the energy requirements throughout the day.

There is no need to eat excess food at the meal times. By over eating at the Iftar meal you will raise your sugar levels and can bring on excessive thirst, increase urination and dehydration. Excessive eating can also cause symptoms of indigestion and heartburn.



What you should try to eat

Sehri Meal

It is important not to skip this meal as the length of the fast is extremely long. You should aim to eat starchy foods that are slow digesting. They are known as the “complex carbohydrates”.

These foods will release energy slowly throughout the day and so ensure your glucose levels are maintained and make you feel less hungry. It is also advisable to drink plenty of water between the Iftar and Sehri meal to avoid dehydration.

An important point to remember is that one should reduce intake of caffeine containing drinks e.g. tea, coffee, fizzy drinks, tropical juice, as they will cause faster water loss through increased urination.

Examples of starchy foods:

Wholegrain bread, lentils, pasta, milk, chapattis, oats porridge, yoghurt, beans, boiled rice and potatoes.



Iftar Meal

The Iftar meal ends the day's fast. Dates, which are an excellent source of carbohydrate and fibre, are often eaten at Iftar and will provide much needed energy.

At the Iftar meal you should eat fruit, vegetables and starchy foods such as Basmati Rice or naan. Fruit juices will also provide a source of refreshing energy.

The key and most difficult message to practise upon, is avoiding large amounts of high-calorie refined foods at the Iftar meal. fried foods such as kebabs, samosas and pakoras. They will cause weight problems, indigestion and heart burn. Similarly foods with high sugar contents such as Indian cakes and sweets, which are a traditional part of Iftari, should also be avoided.



Dealing with Health Complications

“There are risks associated with diabetics fasting including conditions such as low glucose levels (hypoglycaemia), dehydration, indigestion and headaches. It is important that you understand some of these risks and know how best to manage them.”

Hypoglycaemia

Low blood glucose levels “hypos” can occur in the fasting state and must be managed immediately to avoid possible fainting.

The symptoms of “hypos” are commonly: confusion, dizziness, excess sweating, looking pale, blurred vision, headaches, poor concentration. If you suspect that you are having a “hypo” episode then closer and regular monitoring of blood glucose levels will be very important.

Dehydration

Reduced fluid intake can lead to dehydration which can be worse in warmer climates. The loss of body fluids through sweating and urination can lead to depletion of vital electrolytes in the body. This will cause symptoms such as muscle cramps, tiredness, dizziness, poor co-ordination and if severe, it may cause you to collapse or faint. Avoid tea or coffee at Sehri time as the caffeine will cause faster water loss through urination.

“If you experience dehydration symptoms then try to re-hydrate your body by drinking regular quantities of water.”

Indigestion

Fasting normally reduces the quantity of acid produced in the stomach. However, when we think of food, more acid is produced resulting in the increase of acid. Eating in moderation whilst avoiding fried foods as discussed earlier will reduce the symptoms.

Treatment for “Hypos”

- 3-4 Glucose Tablets
- 100-200ml Sugary Drink (Coke, Lucozade, Orange Juice)
- 2 Teaspoons of Sugar or 3 Lumps of Sugar

Repeat if the symptoms do not improve within 10-15 minutes. This should then be followed up with a snack e.g. sandwich, piece of fruit, slice of toast, small chapatti or biscuits and milk. ↗





Advice on Diabetic Medication

If you are diabetic and currently take tablets or insulin to control your condition, it is important that you discuss whether it is safe for you to fast with your Doctor or Nurse.

If you are taking oral medication e.g. metformin then you may need to make adjustments to the timing and amount of medication taken at the two meal times.

Patients taking medicines in the group called sulphonylureas e.g. gliclazide, glimepride or glibenclamide may be at greater risk of low sugar levels (hypoglycaemia). It is advisable to consult your doctor or nurse well in advance of Ramadhan to discuss any dosage changes that may be needed.

“Remember it is equally important that once Ramadhan finishes you consult with your doctor to make any necessary changes to your medication.”

Insulin

You will need to discuss any changes required to your Insulin dose by consulting with your doctor or nurse a few weeks before Ramadhan starts. You must never stop using Insulin in Ramadhan.

It is advisable to monitor your blood glucose levels throughout the month to ensure any changes that have been made are managed appropriately.



Finally...

“With careful planning, people with Diabetes should be able to gain the benefits from Ramadhan whilst also managing their diabetes. Early discussions with your doctor or nurse, will better prepare you to fast and avoid any potential complications which may occur.

Fasting during the month of Ramadhan should be used as an opportunity to make long-term lifestyle changes in your life. Many smokers take the opportunity to stop for life during this month. Similarly, it is an opportunity to manage your eating habits with self discipline by restraining from excessive consumption of foods. Reducing your food intake but maintaining a balanced diet during Ramadhan will provide the extra benefit of helping you lose weight and become healthier. Speak to a health professional for support and information on helping you stop smoking or further dietary advice.

This booklet is aimed at providing some general advice to all diabetic patients. You should always discuss your individual circumstances with, and gain further advice from your doctor or nurse.”

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Reference

*1. British Medical Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain. British National Formulary. 63rd ed. UK: BMJ Publishing Group. March 2012.