

Nutrition Tips for Fasting During the Holy Month of Ramadhan



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During this blessed month of Ramadhan there will be long days of fasting and it is important to maintain optimal nutrition while observing this important pillar of Islam.

Some important nutrition advice:

Many scientific studies have indicated that Ramadhan-type fasting slows down metabolism in the body. This means that our diet should be such that we maintain our normal weight neither losing nor gaining weight. However, those who are overweight can benefit by losing some weight by means of fasting. This should be done by eating healthy foods and appropriate serving sizes. All individuals who fast should maintain a healthy diet which includes a variety of foods rich in nutrients.

General dietary tips:

Suhoor meal: Slow-digesting foods are the best choice for nourishing the body throughout the day.

Choose foods such as: barley, wheat, oats, beans, lentils, brown rice and nuts.

These foods contain fiber which will help prevent constipation and stomach upset during fasting.

Try to combine some of these grains with a small amount of protein.

Some examples are: 1 cup serving of a mixture of lentils, brown rice and ground meat.

1 cup serving of meat and grain mixture (haleem, keema in whole wheat bread, or hareesa)

Avoid foods that are digested quickly such as: foods containing sugar, white flour or other refined carbohydrates.

AVOID CONSUMING SWEETS during the suhoor meal.

Also avoid fried foods which may cause stomach upset during the day.

High sodium containing foods should also be avoided to prevent increased thirst during fasting.

Eat 1 cup of fresh fruits and drink about (2-3) 8 oz cups of water or fluid during suhoor.

Iftar meal:

Divide this meal into two small meals

Although iftar will be late during the summer months it is still important to provide the body necessary nutrients. Start by consuming 2-3 dates and 2 cups of non-fat milk or water. Dates are excellent source of carbohydrates, fiber, potassium and magnesium.

Milk is a great source of protein and calcium.

Before eating more dense foods, try to have 1 cup of a light soup or broth and 1 serving of whole grain pita bread. For the rest of the iftar meal choose foods such as whole grains, steamed or roasted vegetables and fresh fruits. Try to avoid spicy foods. These foods stimulate gastric secretion which may cause an uncomfortable feeling after fasting. If you are accustomed to spicy foods such as Indian/Pakistani diet, then try to limit the amount spices used in cooking.

Other important tips:

Eat slowly and chew foods properly to ease digestion.

Avoid carbonated drinks which have poor nutritional value and increase gastric acidity.

Reduce caffeinated drinks such as tea and coffee and dark colas which can have a diuretic effect and make you lose much needed fluid during summer fasting.

Remember that a healthy individual does not need to overeat or compensate for normal daily meals. Allah SWT has designed the human body to physiologically adjust to temporary periods of food deprivation. Studies have shown that Ramadhan-type fasting can be very beneficial for the body.

For individuals with Diabetes:

Type 1 diabetes: These individuals should consult with their physician before fasting. If diabetes is poorly controlled, they are at high risk for developing severe complications. Proper monitoring of blood glucose levels multiple times a day is very important. Insulin regimens may need to be adjusted to avoid complications.

Type 2 diabetes: Individuals on diet controlled regimens may fast, however dietary principles must be reinforced. Large amounts of fried foods and carbohydrate-rich foods are abundant in the Muslim communities and these foods could have a severe effect on diabetes control. The suhoor meal should be the major meal of the day and consist of whole grains and protein rich foods. Individuals on diabetes medication need to be advised on how to change their daily doses.

For type 1 and 2 insulin-treated individuals, the safety of fasting during Ramadhan must be assessed since many require frequent snacks to avoid hypoglycemia. Home glucose monitoring and testing for ketones is essential to prevent hypoglycemia and other complications.

Physical Activity:

Due to fluid and electrolyte needs during this summer, it is better to exercise in the evening after you have broken your fast.

Food Safety:

Incorrect storage temperatures of hazardous foods result in food borne illness.

Bacteria in food will be active at 41° F or more.

Food should not be stored at room temperature for more than 2 hours-the bacteria can make you very sick. Discard the food if not stored properly.

References:

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