

Ramadhan: The month of blessings and health

Ramadhan is not only a month of spiritual blessings but also a month which helps to improve our health.

- Our daily three meals and two snacks change into two meals of suhoor and iftar
- Keeping a fast does not mean that after eating sehri a person stays in a comfortable environment and merely waits for iftar, rather it is essential to keep doing your daily chores with the confidence that the food that a person has left for the sake of Allah, will help to improve their health. This will not only be spiritual but also physical.
- Ensuring that you adapt your sehri and iftar especially with regards to the longer fasts will bring physical comfort during and when breaking fasts.
- As soon as you wake up for sehri, your attention needs to be more towards wudhu and tahajjud, that is to say you should start the day with spiritual food. You need to make your body understand the concept of eating earlier than is the norm.
- Sehri food should contain lots of fibre, as fibre keeps hunger away for longer as compared to non-fibrous food. Examples of such foods are: brown bread, brown flour chapattis, vegetable/meat/egg curry, 2-3 glasses of water and a pot of yoghurt. Dry fruits and nuts e.g. pecans, almonds and walnuts are also good (the nuts should be without added salt)
- Try to take in less salt as this will help to decrease your thirst
- Keep changing the types of currys you eat as it takes away the monotonous feeling that you may experience with sehri. Some people just want to take whole fibre in the form of Weetabix, dry fruits, honey, fruit and milk in sehri. This is also a good option. You need to eat based upon the needs of your body
- After sehri pray fajr prayers, read the Holy Qur'an and give rest to your body by sleeping and then waking up to start your normal routine
- Always remember that according to the normal physiology of the body at the time of your regular meals, you will feel hungry and thirsty. Hudhur^{atba} in his June 2nd khutba said that in Ramadhan, the real food of our body is spiritual food, not physical food that fulfils the satisfaction of our nafs. The Holy Qur'an says that we should eat good food but it should be balanced and in moderation
- In a healthy person within four hours, food becomes a part of our body and provides regular energy. During fasting, at your actual mealtimes you will feel hungry. At this stage, if it is prayer time you should pray or read the Holy Qur'an or if you are at work, concentrate towards your work. Through this, within a few minutes, your mind and body will be distracted and spiritual food will give you the energy to successfully complete your fast because your body during this time takes energy from its stores of fat and glucose in the liver and normal body functioning keeps working in a healthy way. Every person who keeps fasts has experienced feeling thirsty during fasting and this urge disappears after some time because fluid from our tissues and cells comes out and fulfils the requirement of liquid within our body. This is how our body works in a very balanced way during Ramadhan. Always remember that if you are eating too much fatty food, whatever work your body does to break down the fat in your liver to

provide your body with the energy it needs, the fat-rich food will build these stores back up. This is why some people do not lose weight during Ramadhan

- You should start educating your mind and body for keeping fasts even before Ramadhan, this is not by keeping 'practice' fasts but instead by understanding the essence and purpose of Ramadhan
- For iftar, break your fasts with dates. Still water is good but you can have milkshakes, lassi or fruit juice in moderation too (2-3 times a week). Having a cup of tea is also good which you can have for sehri and iftar. After breaking your fast, pray maghrib and prepare your body for another meal. Through this practice your body will slowly increase its glucose levels. If at the time of iftar you take in a lot of high calorie foods, then it can work your body very hard and you may not be able to properly digest all of the food that you take in. This is because it makes your blood glucose levels increase to very high levels very rapidly and this can lead to you feeling very tired and even unwell which can lead to you not being able to pray properly. Try to avoid having samosas, pakoras and sweets everyday but dates, fruit chaat, dhaai ballay and chick pea chaat are healthier alternatives which also satisfy your nafs as they give a feeling of celebration
- Your evening meal should be very simple. Only one dish of curry with mint or coriander chutney (made with yoghurt) and one clove of garlic which helps with digestion and also adds more taste. Once you finish your food walking for a 100 steps is a healthy gesture as you do not get the feeling of bloating, stomach aches or weakness
- If you have a habit of doing exercise, do it before iftar and try to avoid very strenuous activities
- When you go out make sure you take an umbrella to avoid loss of water from direct sunlight.
- Pray five times daily and make sure you carry out wudhu to cleanse and satisfy your body
- Hudhur^{atba} said in his 2nd June khutba, that if someone keeps a fast in a state of illness or journey then he/she is disobeying the command of Allah. If you are suffering from any long-term conditions for which you may be using regular medication e.g. diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney problems or some mental issues etc. then you should contact your doctor and talk to them about whether or not you should keep a fast. Do not decide yourself as that can potentially lead to worsening of your illness or the production of complications
- Research has confirmed that there are no harmful effects of fasting to the body if it is kept within the rules. If we keep fasts regularly then toxins move out of body, hyperacidity improves, we can also improve our mental health through hormonal and enzymatic changes along with an increase in spiritual and mental control. This can also help us to maintain a positive mind set

It is our duty to look after our health and it is a part of our worship.

May Allah bestow upon us the blessings of this month and may Allah keep us healthy, Ameen.