

Health Guidelines

This article provides useful advice on how to avoid some common problems encountered in Ramadhan. The advice should enable one to fast comfortably and enjoy fully the spiritual benefits of Ramadhan.

During Ramadhan, our diet should not differ greatly from normal and should be as simple as possible. We should be able to maintain our normal weight, neither losing nor gaining. However, if one is over-weight, Ramadhan is an ideal time to lose weight.

We should aim to consume slow digesting foods including fiber-containing foods. Slow-digesting foods last up to 8 hours, while fast-digesting foods last only 3 to 4 hours.

Slow-digesting foods are foods that contain grains and seeds like barley, wheat, oats, semolina, beans, lentils, whole meal flour, etc. (complex carbohydrates).

Fast-burning foods are foods that contain sugar, white flour, etc. (refined carbohydrates).

Fibre-containing foods are bran-containing foods, whole wheat, grains, seeds, vegetables like green beans, peas, sem (papry), marrow, mealies, spinach, methie, fruit with skin, dried fruit especially dried apricots, figs and prunes, almonds, etc.

Meals should be well-balanced, containing foods from each food group, i.e. fruits, vegetables, meat/chicken/fish, bread/cereals and dairy products. Fried foods should be limited. They cause indigestion, heart-burn, and weight problems.

AVOID

Fried and fatty foods.

Foods containing too much sugar.

Over-eating especially at sehri.

Too much tea at sehri. Tea makes you pass more urine taking with it valuable mineral salts that your body would need during the day.

Smoking cigarettes. If you cannot give up, cut down gradually starting a few weeks before Ramadhan.

EAT

Complex carbohydrates at sehri so that the food lasts longer.

Haleem is an excellent source of protein and is a slow-burning food.

Dates are excellent source of sugar, fibre, carbohydrates, potassium & magnesium.

Almonds are rich in protein and fibre with less fat.

Bananas are a good source of potassium, magnesium and carbohydrates.

DRINK

As much water or fruit juices as possible between iftar and bedtime so that your body may adjust fluid levels in time.

Problems to Avoid

CONSTIPATION

Constipation can cause piles (haemorrhoids), fissures (cracks in anal canal) and indigestion, with a bloated feeling. Causes: Too much refined foods, too little water and not enough fibre in the diet.

Remedy: Avoid refined foods, increase water intake, use bran in baking, brown flour when making roti.

INDIGESTION AND WIND

Causes: Over-eating. Excessive fried and fatty foods, spicy foods, and foods that produce wind e.g. eggs, cabbage, lentils, fizzy drinks like Cola also produce gas.

Remedy: Do not over-eat, drink fruit juices or water. Avoid fried foods, add ajmor to wind-producing foods.

LETHARGY ('low blood pressure')

Excessive sweating, weakness, tiredness, lack of energy, dizziness, especially on getting up from sitting, paleness and feeling faint are symptoms associated with "low blood pressure". This tends to occur towards the afternoon.

Causes: Too little fluid intake, decreased salt intake.

Remedy: Keep cool, increase fluid and salt intake.

Caution: Low blood pressure should be confirmed by taking a blood pressure reading when symptoms are present. Persons with high blood pressure may need their medication adjusted during Ramadhan. They should consult their doctor.

HEADACHE

Causes: Caffeine and tobacco-withdrawal, too much exercise, lack of sleep, hunger usually occur during the day and worsen towards the evening. When associated with "low blood pressure", the headache can be quite severe and can also cause nausea before Iftar.

Remedy: Cut down caffeine and tobacco slowly starting a week or two before Ramadhan. Herbal and caffeine-free teas may be substituted. Reorganise your schedule during the Ramadan so as to have adequate sleep.

LOW BLOOD SUGAR

Weakness, dizziness, tiredness, poor concentration, perspiring easily, feeling shaky (tremor), headache, and palpitations are symptoms of low blood sugar.

Causes in non-diabetics: Excessive sugar consumption i.e. refined carbohydrates especially at suhur (sehri). The body produces too much insulin causing the blood glucose to drop.

Remedy: Eat something at sehri, and limit sugar-containing foods and drinks.

Caution: Diabetics may need to adjust their medication in Ramadan, consult your doctor.

MUSCLE CRAMPS

Causes: Inadequate intake of calcium, magnesium and potassium foods.

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

Caution: Those on high blood pressure medication and with kidney stone problems should consult their doctor.

PEPTIC ULCERS, HEART BURN, AND GASTRITIS

Increased acid levels in an empty stomach aggravate the above conditions. It causes a burning feeling in the stomach area and can extend up to the throat. Spicy foods, coffee, and Cola drinks worsen these conditions.

Medications are available to control acid levels in the stomach. People with proven peptic ulcers and hiatus hernia should consult their doctor well before Ramadhan.

KIDNEY STONES

Kidney stones may occur in people who have less liquids to drink. Therefore, it is essential to drink extra liquids so as to prevent stone formation.

JOINT PAINS

Causes: Extra salah during Ramadhan increases pressure on the knee joints. In the elderly and those with arthritis this may cause pain, stiffness, swelling and discomfort.

Remedy: Lose weight so that the knees do not have to carry any extra load. Exercise the lower limbs before Ramadhan so that they can be prepared for the additional strain. Being physically fit allows greater fulfilment, thus enabling one to be able to perform salah with ease.