

FASTING AND CHRONIC CONDITIONS: A GUIDE FOR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

As Ramadan approaches, millions of Muslims around the world prepare for a month of fasting, reflection, and spiritual growth. Fasting from dawn to sunset is an important part of this sacred month, but for individuals with chronic conditions, fasting may present additional challenges. This newsletter aims to provide useful information on managing chronic health conditions during Ramadan, ensuring your health remains a priority while still observing the fast.

While Ramadan is an opportunity for spiritual growth and reflection, it's important to balance your health, especially if you are managing chronic conditions. People living with conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, kidney disease, asthma, and others may need to adjust safely to observe the fast.



Key Considerations for Chronic Conditions

Diabetes and Blood Sugar



Adjusting medication:

If you take insulin or other medications for diabetes, consult your healthcare provider about adjusting the timing and dosage during Ramadan. Some people may need to reduce the dose or take medications at specific times during the fasting period.

Monitor your blood sugar levels:

Regular monitoring of blood sugar levels is crucial, especially during Ramadan when food intake is reduced. Keep a glucometer handy and check your levels regularly, especially before and after Iftar.

You must break your fast immediately if you experience any of the following:

- Blood glucose below 70 mg/dL (4 mmol/L)
- Blood glucose above 300 mg/dL (16.7 mmol/L)
- Symptoms of hypoglycemia, hyperglycemia, or acute illness

Healthy food choice:

During Suhoor, focus on complex carbohydrates and fiber-rich foods, lean proteins, and healthy fats. These foods will help maintain blood sugar levels for longer periods.

Stay hydrated:

Dehydration can affect blood sugar levels, so drink plenty of water between Iftar and Suhoor. Avoid sugary drinks that can cause blood sugar spikes.

Hypertension

Monitor your blood pressure regularly

Dehydration can increase the risk of high blood pressure. Regular monitoring helps you detect changes early.

Reduce salt and caffeine

At suhoor, limit salty and caffeinated foods that can spike blood pressure. Instead, eat potassium-rich foods like bananas or sweet potatoes to support healthy blood pressure.

Adjust medication timing

If you are on blood pressure medications, consider whether to take them while fasting. Some medications may need to be adjusted to avoid low blood pressure during the day.

Sodium intake

Reduce your intake of salty foods during Iftar and Suhoor, as excessive sodium can increase blood pressure.

Hydrate well

Dehydration can raise blood pressure, so drink plenty of water during non-fasting hours. Avoid caffeinated drinks, as they can lead to dehydration.

Heart Disease



Heart medication

People with heart conditions must also be cautious with their medications during Ramadan. Ensure your medication schedule is coordinated with your fasting hours.



Eat smaller, balanced meals

A balanced diet of lean proteins, healthy fats, and vegetables can help maintain heart health. Avoid overeating at Iftar, as large meals can strain the heart. Focus on foods like leafy greens, berries, nuts, seeds, and fatty fish, which are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, to support cardiovascular health.



Avoid heavy foods

Foods that are high in fat and sugar should be limited, as they can contribute to weight gain and increase the risk of heart-related complications.



Exercise lightly

Light physical activity, such as walking, is ideal during Ramadan. Avoid strenuous exercise during fasting hours, as it can strain your heart.

Kidney Disease

Fluid balance

Managing fluid intake is key for those with kidney disease. Your doctor may recommend specific strategies for hydration during Ramadan to ensure your kidneys are functioning well.

Protein intake

Limit protein-rich foods if your doctor has advised you to do so, as excessive protein can put additional strain on the kidneys.

Medication timing

Similar to other chronic conditions, adjusting the timing of medications, especially those related to kidney function, is essential.



Asthma and Respiratory Conditions

Inhaler use

If you use an inhaler for asthma or other respiratory conditions, consult your doctor about managing your condition while fasting. The timing or dosage of the medications may need to be adjusted.

Avoid triggers

Be mindful of environmental triggers like smoke, dust, or strong odours, which may be more difficult to avoid during Ramadan gatherings. Use your inhaler before fasting if prescribed to prevent flare-ups.

General Tips for Safe, Healthy Ramadan Fast

- **Stay hydrated:** Dehydration can affect heart and kidney function, so make sure to drink 8-10 cups of water during non-fasting hours. Electrolyte-rich drinks (without added sugar) can help balance sodium levels.
- **Listen to your body:** If you experience symptoms like dizziness, fatigue, or chest pain, break your fast immediately and consult a healthcare professional.
- **Manage stress:** Ramadan is a time for spiritual reflection, but managing stress during this time is also essential. Try relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or light physical activity to maintain physical and mental well-being.
- **Rest and sleep:** Fasting can be physically demanding. Ensure you get adequate rest at night, as disrupted sleep patterns can affect your overall health during Ramadan.

Conclusion

Ramadan is a time for devotion, reflection, and self-discipline. While fasting can be a challenge for those with chronic health conditions, it is still possible to maintain good health with proper planning and precautions. By working closely with your healthcare provider and making thoughtful adjustments to your lifestyle, you can observe the fast safely while managing your condition.

We wish you all a blessed Ramadan filled with peace, good health, and spiritual growth.

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