



Ramadan & Diabetes

Are you planning on fasting during Ramadan?

Ramadan is a special time of the year that brings increased spirituality, self-discipline, compassion and gratitude. While fasting during Ramadan is obligatory for Muslims, there are exemptions that are emphasized in religious scripture. These include menstruating women, pregnant and breastfeeding women, children, individuals with acute or chronic diseases, or those who are sick, are elderly, and those who are traveling.

If you are planning to fast during Ramadan and have diabetes, there are some precautions you can take to stay healthy:

- make sure you have a way to check your glucose (blood sugar)
- meet with your health care team ahead of time to discuss a plan for potential medication adjustments that may be needed, as your meal timing and usual eating patterns will be different during fasting
- know what actions to take if you have high and low blood sugars during your fast
- stay well-hydrated

Schedule a Ramadan preparation visit with your diabetes care and education specialist and diabetes care team **before** the start of Ramadan. Here are the most important questions to get answered:

1. What is a good plan for checking my glucose?
2. How much water or non-sweetened beverages should I drink to stay hydrated?
3. Do I need to change how I take my medications?
4. What problems should I be looking out for that could put me at risk while fasting?

Risks of fasting

Fasting may be done safely by some while others may be at risk. The problems that need immediate attention are listed below with their symptoms.

URGENT PROBLEM	SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS
High blood sugar (hyperglycemia)	Blood sugar levels over 300mg/dl or feeling very thirsty, very hungry, peeing more than usual or having blurry vision
Low blood sugar (hypoglycemia)	Blood sugar level below 70mg/dl or feeling shaky, sweaty, weak, fast heartbeat
Dehydration (Not taking in enough fluids to support your body's needs)	Dizziness, increased thirst, dry mouth, weakness, headache
Diabetes-related ketoacidosis (DKA) (in type 1 diabetes)	Nausea, vomiting, stomach pain, very thirsty, peeing more than usual, drowsy, deep shallow breathing that has a fruity smell, coma if not treated





If these signs and symptoms occur, seek medical attention immediately. You may need to take extra insulin for high blood sugar. Injecting insulin does not break the fast.

Breaking your fast will be necessary if your blood sugar is too low (less than 70mg/dl). Treating your low blood sugar with about 15 grams of carbohydrate, such as 4 glucose tablets or a half cup of regular juice to get your blood sugar level back into a normal range is necessary for your safety.

Tips for a Healthy Ramadan

Check your blood sugar more often

- Sticking your finger or using a continuous glucose monitoring (CGM) device does not break your fast and will give you the knowledge that you need to take care of yourself throughout the fast. It is important to check your blood sugar a few times throughout the day and night to learn your new blood sugar patterns during this time.

Balance your meals

- Choose a combination of non-starchy vegetables, whole grains, lean meats and healthy fats like nuts or cheese to help you balance your blood sugar levels and keep you full and satisfied.
- You can follow the healthy plate method to balance your meals:
 - ½ of your plate non-starchy vegetables (eg. salad, cooked vegetables)
 - ¼ of your plate whole grains or starchy vegetables (eg. whole wheat pita, naan, rice, corn, potato, oats)
 - ¼ of your plate protein rich foods (eg. eggs, nuts, fish, meat, cheese, beans, lentils)

Stay hydrated

- Be sure to drink water and fluids during the non-fasting hours. Avoid or reduce the amounts of sugar-sweetened beverages and fruit juices you consume.
- Fruits and vegetables are also high in water content and can help keep you hydrated.

Move your body

- Bowing, kneeling and rising during nightly Taraweeh prayers provide some physical activity.
- Different eating and sleeping patterns may pose challenges to usual physical activity. Try to do 30 minutes of moderate physical activity such as walking to help keep you moving. More aggressive/intensive physical activity is not recommended while fasting.

Next Steps

Make this special time of the year a safe and meaningful experience. Reach out to a diabetes care and education specialist for more information on preparing to fast. To find a diabetes care and education specialist near you, visit <https://www.adces.org/program-finder>.