

RAMADAN 2020

RAMADAN AT HOME

STAY HOME, SAVE LIVES

"The month of Ramadan (is the month) in which the Qur'an has been sent down as guidance for mankind containing clear signs which lead (to the straight road) and distinguishing (the truth from falsehood).. " [Quran 2:185]

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Ramadan 2020 will take place between 23/24 April & 23/24 May (depending on moon sightings), and will prove a very different experience for Muslims due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This pack contains guidelines and advice, signposting resources to help Muslims in Britain make the most of the blessed month, as well as friends, neighbours and colleagues of Muslims.

WHAT IS RAMADAN?

The month of Ramadan is the holiest month of the Islamic year as it is when the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Muslims around the world fast during daylight hours, meaning they abstain from eating, drinking or engaging in sexual relations for the duration of their fast. Young children, the old, the sick, travellers and women who are breastfeeding or menstruating are examples of those who are exempt from fasting. Aside from fasting, Muslims observing Ramadan also increase in spiritual devotional acts such as prayer, giving to charity and strengthening family ties. Muslims are encouraged to share their food with friends, family and neighbours and to reach out to those who may be fasting alone, to share their Ramadan experiences.





WHAT'S THE REASON FOR FASTING?

Fasting plays an important role in many major world religions and is a central feature in all the Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In Islam, Muslims, who are able to, are required to fast during the month of Ramadan, and are recommended to fast at other times of the year too. Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam. A key objective of fasting increase in *taqwa* (closeness to God), and to engender a sense of gratitude, self-discipline and self-improvement, at both an individual and community level, which Muslims are encouraged to continue throughout the year. At an individual level, fasting encourages us to feel an affinity with the poor across the world who have little or no food to eat, whilst for our own bodies, scientific studies have shown that fasting provides several health benefits and forms of intermittent fasting have been incorporated into several diet regimes. At a community level, the breaking of fast meal (*iftar*) at sunset encourages families and local communities to share their meal together, whilst charity work in local communities typically increases during Ramadan.

IS FASTING HARMFUL TO YOUR HEALTH?

If you are healthy with no pre-existing conditions, there is no evidence to suggest fasting is harmful to your health provided you are adequately hydrated in non-fasting hours. Some studies suggest there may even be health benefits from fasting. For those who usually drink caffeine through tea or coffee, the lack of caffeine can bring on headaches and tiredness. However, this will reduce as the body adapts to going without caffeine during the day. Due to the timings of meals before dawn and after sunset, adjustment to new sleeping and eating patterns may also lead to some people feeling more tired than normal. If you have any queries regarding health during this Ramadan, contact the British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) on: ramadan@britishima.org





IMPACT OF COVID-19 - #RAMADANATHOME

Ramadan 2020 will be a very different experience for Muslims as we adapt to changing circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic, adjusting not only our holy month but our daily lives in accordance with public health guidelines.

This Ramadan, it is unlikely that social distancing measures will be lifted, enabling us to return to our normal routines. Thus, it is unlikely that there will be congregational acts of worship for Muslims outside of the home - no *taraweeh* prayers at the mosque or anywhere outside of our homes, no spiritual talks in the community or *iftars* with friends and family to attend. We will all be seeking to adapt to these changes while still enjoying the spiritual lift and community spirit that Ramadan provides.

HOW TO ADAPT OUR RAMADAN

It is important to plan our Ramadan activities given these restrictions. Consider:

- Organising *taraweeh* at home as a family and pray in congregation. See the Useful Links section for a comprehensive guide to performing *taraweeh* at home by the National Huffadh Association UK.
- Streaming Islamic lectures or *taraweeh* in your home, either pre-recorded or live.
- Arranging virtual *iftars* with loved ones and community members through the many online video calling facilities available.
- Planning your *iftar* menus in advance so that you can limit multiple shopping trips given social distancing measures.
- Hydrating well for the long fasting days. Dehydration can lead to tiredness, headaches, lack of focus/concentration.
- Eating high energy, slow burn foods for *suhoor* (starting your fast).
- Remaining energised throughout the workday, especially as we can experience heightened levels of anxiety during these times.
- Taking regular breaks to reflect and take time for yourself. Life can be full, and we try to fill it with more worship during Ramadan. We all want to pray more and this can help with anxiety but it is important to be good to yourself - sometimes it is quality over quantity.





COVID-19: WORKING FROM HOME

Many Muslims are likely to be working from home during this time. While this may have benefits and provide ease in some ways to those fasting, it can also provide some new challenges. Consider the following:

- Ensuring you are taking regular breaks from work for rest and reflection – perhaps around *salaah* (prayer) times.
- Starting your day earlier if you are permitted to so that you can finish earlier and have some down time prior to *iftar*.
- Giving your employer and colleagues advance notice that you will be fasting.
- Sharing Ramadan with colleagues by having a conversation or sharing what you're doing for it, what food you're preparing, and what the month means for you.
- Honouring your workplace duties with patience and good grace to those around you.
- Taking a break if you find yourself frustrated or tired.

Employees who are fasting may ask to take their lunch break at a later time to break their fast depending on their work timings, or to enable them to finish work earlier. Employers may be justified in refusing such a request if this conflicts with legitimate business needs which they are unable to meet in any other ways. However, if they are unable to objectively justify such a refusal, this could amount to unlawful indirect discrimination.

COVID-19: STUDYING FROM HOME

Much like working from home, studying from home without the benefit of your classmates and direct face to face time with your lecturers can have its own challenges. Fasting may tire you out further, and dehydration is often a factor in reducing focus and concentration. Much like with working from home, consider:

- Giving your university, student advisor or professors advance notice that you will be fasting.
- Ensuring you are taking regular breaks from studying for rest and reflection - perhaps around *salaah* times. Set yourself a study timetable.
- Taking into account *salaah* and *iftar* times, as well as class lecture times, when structuring your day.
- Starting the day earlier if your timetable allows you to so that you can finish earlier and have some down time prior to *iftar*.
- Sharing Ramadan with classmates and friends by having a conversation about Ramadan, or sharing what you're doing for it, what food you're preparing, and what the month means for you.
- Honouring your studies and commitments with patience and good grace to those around you. Should you find yourself frustrated or tired, take a break.





COVID-19: IFTARS AT HOME

"But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not." (2:216)

While we are all longing for the opportunity to get together as families for *iftar* and share in the blessings together, it is vital that we continue to follow UK Government guidance and only remain with those that we live with until otherwise stated. Though this will mean that we are not able to physically get together as a community during Ramadan, it is for the safety and wellbeing of our loved ones that we must heed these warnings. We must remember that as Muslims, everything is a test from Allah, and it is up to us how we choose to respond to such tests.

COVID-19: VIRTUAL IFTARS

Due to the likely inability to host in-person *iftars* this Ramadan, one way to still connect with friends and loved ones is to host a 'virtual *iftars*', in which individuals or families can join via video conferencing facilities like Zoom, FaceTime or video-calling apps like Skype or WhatsApp. This could be an important way for individuals to stay connected during these times, especially for those who are living alone or away from family.

It is vital in these times that we encourage ourselves and our communities to adapt and make the most out of our circumstances, even though they may be difficult. It is a great time to practice gratitude and remember that others who are less fortunate may not have families to celebrate with as it is, and we can at least find comfort in knowing that we will be reunited with ours when this has all passed, God willing.





CAUTION WHEN SHOPPING

The Prophet (pbuh) said in plain terms: "He who hoards is a sinner" (Muslim)

Though it is typical for families to stock up on products for meals during the month of fasting, we should remain conscious of the difficult circumstances we all face now with the pandemic and ensure that we only purchase in reasonable quantities which allow for everyone to acquire what they need.

COVID-19: SHARING RAMADAN IN SOCIETY

Use this opportunity to share your faith and your fast with your neighbours, friends and colleagues, be they Muslim or otherwise. While this Ramadan it is unlikely we will be able to open our mosques, centres and homes to the community, we can find other creative ways to share our traditions and practices with the wider community and local residents. Here are some suggestions:

- Let people know about Ramadan by sharing this guide.
- Put a Ramadan banner on your front door to let neighbours know you're observing Ramadan.
- Offer to help your neighbours with any shopping they need, especially those who are elderly and at greater risk of contracting COVID-19.
- Publish Ramadan information in your neighbourhood newsletter or local newspaper.
- Encourage your children to speak to their friends about Ramadan, how they celebrate the month and what it means to them.
- Talk about what Ramadan means to you with colleagues and classmates while working or studying from home.



RAMADAN



ADVICE FOR MOSQUES AND PRAYER FACILITIES

- We encourage mosques to remind their congregations prior to Ramadan of the importance of continuing to adhere to social distancing measures and following UK Government policy to help stop the spread of COVID-19, as well as some guidance that we have included in this document and on our website.
- While it is not possible for mosques to serve *iftar* on their premises or as a group, the opportunity of using the capacity to provide boxed food for those who may be struggling to make ends meet or who are vulnerable within the community and in wider society, including NHS staff, is possible. You can find more information about Muslim-led community initiatives at mcb.org.uk/community-volunteer-initiatives.
- Lectures, Qur'an recitations and supplications cannot be done in person, even though these often attract large crowds. However, these can still continue by pre-recording or livestreaming using Skype, Zoom, Facebook, YouTube or Instagram. The infrastructure to make this possible is not difficult to put in place – with many mosques ahead of the curve. Whilst you cannot be a physical hub for communities to gather, you can find ways to be a virtual hub of community activism. We will be sharing examples of this on the MCB social media channels throughout the course of the month.
- It's important to keep congregants informed of the plans the mosque has for Ramadan and to continue to offer support. The MCB has produced a template letter for mosques to send their members, available at mcb.org.uk/ramadan.

ADVICE FOR EMPLOYERS

What to be aware of:

- Some employees will be abstaining from food, liquids and smoking from dawn to sunset, which can be for up to 17 hours this year.
- Many Muslims will be fasting during daylight hours, eating one meal just before dawn (*suhoor*) and one meal at sunset (*iftar*). Muslims can eat or drink as they please through the night as needed.
- Depending on the weather and the length of the fast, some people who fast during Ramadan will experience mild dehydration, which can cause headaches, tiredness and a lack of concentration.
- For those who usually drink caffeine through tea or coffee, the lack of caffeine can bring on headaches and tiredness. However, this will reduce as the body adapts to going without caffeine during the day.
- Due to the timings of meals before dawn and after sunset, adjustment to new sleeping and eating patterns may also lead to some people feeling more tired than normal.
- Don't assume that all employees want to be treated differently because they are fasting, but be open to having a discussion with your employees.



ADVICE FOR LINE MANAGERS

- Be aware and open to discussing Ramadan and what support or adjustments your employee would like. Managers may experience requests for annual leave for those observing - be prepared for people to request to take holiday towards the end of Ramadan to celebrate *Eid* (holiday marking the end of Ramadan).
- Be accommodating over annual leave requests particularly as the majority of Christian holidays are national holidays. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has produced a useful decision-making tool to help employers deal with requests for time off for religious reasons.
- Allow for flexible working and adjusting working hours (i.e. an early start, working through lunch and an early finish) during this period if requested.
- Bear in mind that staff will be required to work from home during some or all of Ramadan as the COVID-19 situation develops, so try and apply flexibility to current working from home practices.
- Allow workers to have regular breaks for afternoon prayers as needed (*Dhuhr* and *Asr*) if requested - this is especially important for Muslims observing Ramadan to be able to pray their daily prayers on time.



USEFUL LINKS ON HEALTH

For more information about Ramadan, visit mcb.org.uk/ramadan, or about COVID-19, visit mcb.org.uk/coronavirus.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many voluntary Muslim-led community initiatives have been set up across the UK providing support for those in need. To volunteer, access support or find out more, visit mcb.org.uk/covid-volunteer-initiatives.

The MCB will be hosting a number of virtual *iftars*, streaming Qur'an recitation and sermons, as well as sharing key information on Ramadan and COVID-19. Follow the MCB on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) to take part.

As part of the Muslim Spiritual Care Provision in the NHS, a project of the MCB, a Ramadan Health Factsheet has been produced in conjunction with BIMA to provide NHS frontline staff with key information about Ramadan, who is exempt from fasting and how best to support patients during Ramadan. This can be found at mcb.org.uk/ramadan.

BIMA has produced a wealth of resources for Muslims and the medical community to provide expert advice and guidance on issues pertaining to Ramadan. For more information, visit britishima.org/ramadan. If you have any medical queries regarding Ramadan, contact ramadan@britishima.org.

FEEDBACK

- This guidance was developed by the Muslim Council of Britain – information is accurate as of 20 April 2020.
- Feedback welcome, please email: admin@mcb.org.uk
- Keep up to date with the work of the MCB by joining the mailing list, visit: mcb.org.uk/get-involved.

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FOUNDED IN 1997, THE MUSLIM COUNCIL OF BRITAIN IS THE UK'S LARGEST AND MOST DIVERSE MUSLIM UMBRELLA BODY WITH OVER 500 MEMBERS INCLUDING MOSQUES, CHARITIES, AND PROFESSIONAL NETWORKS.

OUR MISSION IS:

EMPOWERING MUSLIM COMMUNITIES TOWARDS ACHIEVING A JUST, COHESIVE AND SUCCESSFUL BRITISH SOCIETY.

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