



Maintaining Health after Ramadan

A Public Awareness Message

Purpose:

Fasting has been practiced historically across different religions and cultures around the globe. Besides human experiences, different studies documented its benefits in terms of achieving appropriate weight, improving blood sugar control, boosting brain function and enhancing longevity. The observations and findings have recently led to skyrocketed popularity of 16/8 intermittent fasting, especially among those looking to lose weight and burn fat.

The purpose of this message is to summarize some known benefits of fasting and provide some easy tips to maintain health after Ramadan.

Benefits of Fasting:

- i. Dates eaten at the start of Iftar during Ramadan have multiple health benefits. Besides providing the right amount of energy and essential micronutrients like potassium, magnesium and B vitamins, dates also provide the body much-needed fibre that improves digestion process as a whole.
- ii. Weight loss is one of the apparent benefit of fasting during Ramadan, but a host of healthy changes are also going on behind the scenes. Cardiologists have observed its positive effect on the lipid profile including reduced cholesterol in the blood thereby improving the cardiovascular health and reducing the risk of heart disease, heart attack, or a stroke.
- iii. By not eating throughout the day, body metabolism becomes more efficient. The amount of nutrients absorbed from the food improves because of an increase in a hormone called adiponectin having health benefits all around the body.
- iv. Fasting improves mental wellbeing and also has the brain-boosting affect. Reduced levels of the hormone cortisol sooth mental stress. Studies also show association of Ramadan with increase in the level of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, which causes the body to produce more brain cells, thus improving brain function.
- v. Abstaining from smoking and sugary foods during Ramadan gradually acclimatize body to their absence that helps in kicking off addictions. The UK's National Health Service recommends it as the ideal time to ditch smoking.
- vi. Ramadan acts as a fantastic detox for the body; using fat reserves to create energy, and burning away any harmful toxins present in the fat deposits. This sets the perfect stepping stone to a consistently healthy lifestyle.

Simple Tips for maintaining Health after Ramadan:

- i. Eid celebrations require extraordinary care as the common practice of overeating, consuming sweets, fizzy drinks and other unhealthy food items could challenge the digestive system beyond its capacity to accommodate the sudden pressure.
- ii. Try to practice occasional fasting during the year to maintain the body discipline and continuity of Ramadan benefits listed above.
- iii. Make a habit of eating two regular meals a day, similar to Ramadan. The sensation of hunger between meals carries great benefits and according to a study published by PLOS ONE, may actually protect against Alzheimer's disease.
- iv. Increase veggie content of the food and minimize use of red meat, fats and spices as well as fast food consumption.
- v. Practice the 80/20 rule i.e. eat only until you are 80% full. A good way to do this is to eat slowly. Eating on the go or whilst working lead to overeating and hinder the body's ability to properly digest what is being consumed.
- vi. Consider taking a Probiotic Supplement, in consultation with your physician, to maintain the digestive health by replenishing the good bacterial flora in intestines. Studies have shown that probiotics help in keeping colds and infection at bay as well as improving the women's health and metabolism.
- vii. Continually strengthen the emotional health by regularly offering prayers, reading the Holy Qur'an and offering sadaqah. Researchers have found it to be highly therapeutic for individuals suffering from depression, anxieties, phobias, and addictions.
- viii. Abstain from smoking and make exercise a priority. During exercise, body releases endorphins, serotonin and dopamine that together improve the mood and keeps feeling of being healthy, fit and strong.