How to assist patients during fasting traditions

Fasting for prolonged periods of time, including Ramadan, may present **significant health risks** for people with pre-exisiting health issues like diabetes.

Although individuals with certain health conditions are exempt from fasting, **many may still choose to fast for several reasons,** including connection to family and community. However, it is **recommended to consult with a medical professional on their medical condition** and find out if fasting is safe for their health.

HOW PATIENT'S HEALTH AND MEDICATION SCHEDULES ARE AFFECTED?

During periods of fasting, such as Ramadan, the tradition involves abstaining from all oral intake, including medications, from sunrise to sunset. However, there are **certain categories of people who are exempt from fasting**.
These include:

- **People who are sick**, have a chronic condition, or are taking medication that requires them to eat and/or drink at certain times.
- **Elderly people** who are not able to fast due to health reasons, including frailty.
- Women who are **pregnant or breastfeeding** and whose health or their baby's health would be negatively affected by fasting.
- Women who are **menstruating.**
- **Children under the age of puberty.**
- People who are **traveling and who find it difficult to fast** while on the road.

Ultimately, if fasting causes one's condition to suffer, and/or renders them unable to perform their normal daily activities, one is generally considered exempt from fasting. For Ramadan in particular, those unable to fast may need to make up for the missed days when they are well. Alternatively, if they are unable to fast due to an ongoing health condition, they may donate to a charity or feed a needy person.

WHAT DOES HEALTH RESEARCH SHOW?

A 2021 Austin Health study found that **almost half of the surveyed Muslim patients would fast for some or all of Ramadan** that year:

- Many patients made changes to their medication regimen to allow them to fast, without input from a healthcare professional.
- Some experienced **adverse effects from these medication changes**.
- Some patients said they would like their **healthcare professional to partner with them** to better manage their medications during Ramadan.

SUPPORTING YOUR PATIENTS WHILE FASTING

For those patients who wish to fast for Ramadan, it's important to note that:

- During this time, some **may not want to take medications** between sunrise and sunset.
- Many patients with comorbidities **still want to fast** to celebrate their family traditions and practice their Muslim faith.
- Some **patients may not know or understand** that they may be exempt from fasting from a religious and health perspective due to their health condition(s).

As a medical professional, you may use the **RAMadan COMmunication (RAMCOM) tool** (see following page) to help guide conversations and provide well-informed health advice to your Muslim patients during the month of Ramadan.

For more resources on fasting, community practices and beliefs, and how it impacts patients' health, please refer to the resource links/QR codes below:

Recommended: If you would like to have an in-depth understanding of Islamic practices and beliefs, and its interaction with medical practice, feel free to refer to the course at *Al Balagh Academy*.

Scan QR code for file
Islamic Council of Victoria: Caring for Muslim Patients. A Guide for Health Care Workers and Health Service Providers

Scan QR code for course
Al Balagh Academy:
The Medical Fiqh of Fasting

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RAMadan COMmunication (RAMCOM) tool

Category	Suggested script
Identification	I notice in your hospital records that your faith is recorded as 'Muslim' [or Islam]. It is Ramadan soon/at the moment. Do you celebrate Ramadan? [If yes, you can say 'Ramadan Mubarak' - roughly translates as 'Happy Ramadan']
Partnership	Do you mind if I talk with you about how you manage your medicines during Ramadan? I understand that some patients choose to fast, and some patients choose not to fast. Are you thinking about fasting during Ramadan this year? **YES, I would like to fast.** The decision to fast or not will always be up to you. I will do my best to work with you to make sure you have all the information you need. Do you have any questions to start with?
Gather patient information	• To help me understand your situation, what is your experience with fasting? Did you fast last year? • Can we look at the medicines you are taking now? Do you feel that any of these break your fast if you take them between sunrise and sunset? • What is your usual routine during Ramadan with regards to medicines, meals, exercise and sleep?
Advice	I understand you wish to fast because... [e.g., connection to family/community, traditions etc.]. Considering your current health, I also need to let you know the possible risks of fasting include... You might choose to fast or try fasting and stop if problems occur or choose not to fast at all. What is your preference? **YES, I would like to fast.**
Patient decision	*Document the patient's decision and your advice in the medical record.*
Medical and medicine plan	• Here is how we can adjust your medicine...... How does this sound? This... [provide chart or relevant resource]... can help you track things. • Here are some symptoms or warning signs you should look for when fasting.... This is what you should do if you experience these symptoms... • If these symptoms [e.g., signs of severe hypoglycaemia, etc.] occur, you should break your fast and contact... [In outpatient clinic or at hospital discharge]
Teach back	• Can you tell me how you will take your medicines? • What will you keep an eye on and what will you do in case of an emergency? • What do you plan to do regarding meals, exercise and sleep? • Who are you going follow-up with and when? [e.g. GP or treating doctor] Thank you for your cooperation. Please let me or your healthcare team know if you have any questions or concerns in the future.

Decision branches:
- **NO, I won't fast.** → **Proceed with usual care/ procedures**
- **NO, I won't fast.** → **Proceed with usual care/ procedures**