

Food Consumption in Muslim Women and Its Impact during Ramadan

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Abstract

During Ramadan, Muslims wake up well before dawn to eat the first meal of the day, which has to last until sunset. It is very important while taking care of the pregnant ladies under fasting. Eating lots of high-protein foods and drinking as much water as possible right up until dawn, after which can't eat or drink anything. At dawn, they perform the morning prayer and initiates. Most religions encourage fasting as part of the ritual of some of the major holidays. For those of the Jewish faith, fasting happens during Yom Kippur. Muslims traditionally fast during Ramadan. Some Christians fast for Lent. But for pregnant women and moms who are breastfeeding, their health and that of their babies are at stake. But prolonged fasting or starvation while breastfeeding should be avoided because it can decrease milk quantity, which over time can slow your baby's weight gain. What's more, it's not a good idea to fast immediately after giving birth, while Mom and baby are still recovering from delivery and establishing maternal milk supply. Following a healthy breastfeeding diet is crucial, so fasting for any extended period of time isn't good for you or your baby. The manuscript is presenting the eating habits and dietary consumption in the muslim women under fasting.

Keywords: Dietary Patterns, Fasting, Muslim Women, Nutrition, Ramadan, Ramazan

Foreword

Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars — or duties — of Islam, along with the testimony of faith, prayer, charitable giving, and making a pilgrimage to Mecca. All Muslims are required to take part every year, though there are special dispensations for those who are ill, pregnant or nursing, menstruating, or traveling, and for young children and the elderly.

Although exempt, many pregnant Muslim women partake in the daily fast during daylight hours during the month of Ramadan. In other contexts an impoverished diet during pregnancy impacts on birth weight. The aim of this work is to determine whether Ramadan fasting by pregnant women affects perinatal outcomes. Primary outcomes investigated were perinatal mortality, preterm birth and small for gestational age (SGA) infants. Secondary outcomes investigated were stillbirth, neonatal death, maternal death, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, gestational diabetes, congenital abnormalities, serious neonatal morbidity, birth weight, preterm birth and placental weight.

The practice of fasting serves several spiritual and social purposes: to remind you of your human frailty and your dependence on God for sustenance, to show you what it feels like to be hungry and thirsty so you feel compassion for (and a duty to help) the poor and needy, and to reduce the distractions in life so you can more clearly focus on your relationship with God.

During Ramadan, Muslims abstain from eating any food, drinking any liquids, smoking cigarettes, and engaging in any sexual activity, from dawn to sunset. That includes taking medication (even if you swallow a pill dry, without drinking any water). Chewing gum is also prohibited (though I didn't find that one out until about halfway through my first Ramadan after converting — oops).

Doing any of those things "invalidates" your fast for the day, and you just start over the next day. To make up for days you didn't fast, you can either fast later in the year (either all at once or a day here and there) or provide a meal to a needy person for each day you missed.

Muslims are also supposed to try to curb negative thoughts and emotions like jealousy and anger, and even lesser things like swearing, complaining, and gossiping, during the month. Some people may also choose to give up or limit activities like listening to music and watching television, often in favor of listening to recitations of the Quran.

During Ramadan, Muslims wake up well before dawn to eat the first meal of the day, which has to last until sunset. This means eating lots of high-protein foods and drinking as much water as possible right up until dawn, after which you can't eat or drink anything. At dawn, we perform the morning prayer. Since it's usually still pretty early, many go back to sleep for a bit before waking up again to get ready for the day.

Muslims are not supposed to avoid work or school or any other normal duties during the day just because we are fasting. In many Muslim countries, however, businesses and schools may reduce their hours during the day or close entirely. For the most part, though, Muslims go about their daily business as we normally would, despite not being able to eat or drink anything the whole day.

When the evening call to prayer is finally made (or when the alarm on your phone's Muslim prayer app goes off), we break the day's fast with a light meal — really more of a snack — called an iftar (literally "breakfast"), before performing the evening prayer. Many also go to the mosque for the evening prayer, followed by a special prayer that is only recited during Ramadan.

This is usually followed by a larger meal a bit later in the evening, which is often shared with family and friends in one another's homes throughout the month. Then it's off to bed for a few hours of sleep before it's time to wake up and start all over again.

Social life during the month of Ramadan is particularly active: people have guests or are hosted by relatives and friends, primarily centered on the meal that breaks the fast, which is a rich and festive meal, served with all the best foods.

People fast during the day, and are awake and eat during the evening hours, but with no physical activity. Consequently, many people gain weight during the month of Ramadan, and people with diabetes become poorly controlled due to the adoption of unhealthy eating habits.

Recommended nutritional and health rules

- On the average, people fast some 15-16 hours per day. During the noon hours, when temperatures are high, it is important to remain in a cool and shaded place, and not to be in the sun. It is important to replenish the fluids that the body lost during the day of fasting: to drink before, during and at the end of the meal. The recommended beverage is water. Foods rich in water may be served, such as soup or fresh vegetable salad.
- It is recommended to eat "suhur – the light meal before the beginning of the fast day" every day; this applies especially to special groups such as the elderly, adolescents, pregnant women and nursing mothers, as well as children who choose to fast. This meal, which constitutes a light breakfast, needs to include vegetables, a serving of carbohydrates such as bread/ bread roll made from whole wheat, protein-rich food such as dairy products (cheese that is not salty/ labane/ milk) and/or egg, as well as a tehina/avocado side-dish.
- It is recommended not to eat a lot of the sweets offered after the alfutur meal. The sweets that are common during Ramadan contain large amounts of sugar syrup. The

recommended sweet for consumption is cold water-containing fruit, such as watermelon/melon or any other seasonal fruit such as peach or nectarine.

- One should try to curtail the consumption of fat-rich foods, especially fatty meats, foods containing puff pastry, or pastry with added fat/margarine or butter. Rather than frying, it is recommended to use other methods of cooking, such as steaming, cooking in sauce, stir-frying in a small amount of oil and baking.
- It is highly recommended to curtail foods containing large amounts of salt, e.g. sausages, processed and salted meat and fish products, olives and pickles, snack foods, salty cheeses, various types of ready-made crackers, salads, spreads and sauces (such as mayonnaise, mustard, ketchup). When preparing the meal, it is recommended to curtail the use of salt so far as possible, and of course it is recommended to remove the salt shaker from the table.
- To enhance the flavor of the foods in the meal, it is possible to use various herbs, which add rich aroma and flavor to the foods being cooked.
- It is recommended to eat slowly, and in amounts appropriate to the needs of each individual. Big meals cause heartburn and discomfort.
- It is recommended not to go to extremes and waste too much time and effort preparing too many dishes for the "alfutur – the meal that breaks the fast"; half of the food prepared is sometimes thrown out.
- It is recommended to try to move as much as possible and to be active in the evenings, for example, by going for a regular daily walk.

During the month of Ramadan, healthy adult Muslims abstain from eating and drinking from sunrise until sunset. This represents a form of intermittent fasting where both the quantity and quality of food eaten are altered. Although pregnant Muslim women are exempt from fasting, evidence suggests that up to 90% partake in Ramadan fasting for at least part of the month, being keen to share the cultural experience with their families. The estimate of 230 million Muslim women of childbearing age worldwide, with a fertility rate averaging 3.1 children per woman, leads to the potential for up to 535 million babies in each generation to be exposed in utero over Ramadan to a repeated cyclical pattern of maternal intermittent fasting.

Exposure to a restricted or sub-optimal diet during pregnancy affects fetal development and has life-long health impacts on the offspring. Low birth weight and altered neonatal growth trajectories are associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity and impaired cognitive function. Preterm delivery and reduced birth weight are more prevalent in women who eat less frequently while pregnant, suggesting that pregnant women who fast during Ramadan may be more likely to give birth to premature or underweight babies.

Although the impact of Ramadan fasting during pregnancy on the health of the child has been investigated, individual studies show conflicting results and sample sizes are often too small to allow evaluation of serious, but infrequent, outcomes. Furthermore, the timing of exposure to maternal fasting during Ramadan may affect the outcome, yet the trimester of fetal exposure to fasting is generally poorly defined in studies. Although fasting could arise at any pregnancy stage, occurrence early in the first trimester seems most likely as the mother may be unaware that she is already pregnant. Fasting during the first trimester has been reported to be associated with reduced birth weight, whereas placental weight, another predictor of health outcomes in offspring, is reportedly lower if the mother fasted during the second or third trimester.

Muslim women may seek advice from health practitioners regarding the safety of Ramadan fasting; however the current information available to pregnant women is contradictory and clear guidance is lacking. Therefore, available evidence regarding associations between Ramadan fasting and pregnancy outcomes needs to be evaluated.

Suhoor is the light meal before the beginning of the fast every day; this applies especially to special groups such as older people, adolescents, pregnant women and nursing mothers, as well as children who choose to fast. This meal, which constitutes a light breakfast, needs to include vegetables, a serving of carbohydrates such as

bread/bread roll made from wholewheat, protein-rich food such as dairy products (cheese that is not salty/labane/milk) and/or egg, as well as a tehina/avocado side dish.

Conclusion

Ramadan fasting does not adversely affect birth weight although there is insufficient evidence regarding potential effects on other perinatal outcomes. Further studies are needed to accurately determine whether Ramadan fasting is associated with adverse maternal or neonatal outcome. During the holy month of Ramadan, which occurs on the ninth month of the lunar-based Islamic calendar, all Muslims are required to abstain from food and drink from dawn to dusk for 30 days. Because Ramadan shifts approximately 11 days earlier each year on the solar-based Gregorian calendar, Muslims experience Ramadan in different seasons throughout the course of the lives. The act of fasting is meant to remind Muslims of the less fortunate and to reinforce the need to be thankful. As one of the five pillars, or duties, of Islam, fasting during the month of Ramadan is mandatory for all healthy adult Muslims. Children who have not reached puberty, the elderly, those who are physically or mentally incapable of fasting, pregnant women, breast-feeding mothers and travelers are exempt.

Conclusion

Fasting during Ramadan means abstinence from all food or drink, including water and chewing gum, from dawn to sunset. It is recommended that before sunrise, Muslims eat a prefast meal known as suhur. This meal often resembles breakfast, but in some cultures it may include more dinner-like foods. After sundown, Muslims break their fast with iftar, a meal which usually starts with dates and water or milk, followed by dinner. Muslims are permitted to snack at night between those two meals, and hydration is encouraged, especially when Ramadan falls during summer. For suhur, iftar and snacks, Muslims can more easily make it to sundown by eating high-fiber meals to sustain satiety over longer periods, fruits and vegetables to maintain electrolyte stores, and plenty of fluids to maintain hydration. Muslims should

also limit fried foods and sugary sweets, the latter of which is a common cultural tradition among many ethnicities during the holy month.

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