**Fasting Safely During Ramadan**

**Introduction**

Ramadan is one of the most holy months in the Muslim calendar. During this period Muslims will fast for 30 days during daylight hours and increase in spiritual devotional acts such as prayer, giving to charity and strengthening family ties. Ramadan is due to start on the 12th or 13th April 2021.

**Ramadan During COVID-19**

This Ramadan will be a different experience for the Muslim community due to the on-going COVID19 pandemic and it is important people stay healthy and fast safely.

Adherence to the Government guidelines on social distancing, isolation and shielding should be followed.

GOV UK - National lockdown: Stay at Home : <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdownstay-at-home>

GOV UK - COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable click here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

The British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) has information on Ramadan and safety of fasting here: [https://britishima.org/saferamadan/](https://britishima.org/saferamadan/%20)

 Patients with suspected COVID-19 like symptoms should be advised to follow Government advice and contact the NHS via 111 and further information can be found here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, episodes of any illness should be taken seriously and may require breaking of the fast. In this instance particularly prolonged fever, it is important to remain hydrated. Medical attention should be sought where appropriate and advised to contact their GP or 111.

If a household member has COVID-19 or develops symptoms whilst fasting, they should break the fast immediately and contact their GP or use the 111 online service.

Following a COVID-19 illness patients should only restart fasting when they have fully recovered and after consultation with an appropriate clinician.

**Exemptions from fasting**

Fasting is not considered compulsory for certain groups:

- people who are acutely unwell or have a long-term condition (physical or mental)

- very frail

- women who are pregnant or breastfeeding or menstruating

- travellers

The British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) are advising people to consider the concession whereby those who are more at risk if they contract COVID-19 are excused from fasting at this time, and that missed fasts can be made up at a later date in the year.

The British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) has also undertaken a series of rapid evidence reviews to explore the effect of observing the fast of Ramadan with common health conditions, and provide recommendations for health professionals. Patients with pre-existing conditions who intend to fast should be risk stratified giving consideration to age, frailty, previous experiences of fasting and the number of medical conditions. See here:<https://www.britishima.org/ramadan-initiative/>

**Fasting safely during Ramadan**

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.

Considerations:

1) Avoiding dehydration

 - During the longer, warmer days can bring an increased risk of dehydration

- Dehydration can particularly affect people with existing medical problems such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease / lung disease, pregnant or elderly.

- Avoid long periods of time in the sun

- Drink plenty of plain water during non-fasting hours

- Reduce caffeinated drinks including tea, coffee and sweet / fizzy drinks

- Eating balanced diet and slow release energy foods at the start of the fast to help maintain energy levels. Have appropriate portion sizes. Reduce carbohydrate content of consumed foods and use healthier cooking methods (e.g. baking rather than frying).

2) Regular physical activity and light exercise during non-fasting hours where possible

3) Taking medicines

- It is really important patients continue to take their medicines even when fasting.

- Some medicines may need changes but should be discussed with their GP or specialist prior to fasting.

- Do not stop taking medications

- Often it is possible to make temporary changes to enable fasting safely.

- If you experience any problems taking any medicines and fasting please consult with your GP.

4) Covid vaccination and fasting

Questions have been raised about whether taking the coronavirus vaccine, potential side effects of feeling unwell after being vaccinated, or taking daily pain relief medication will invalidate fasting. **BIMA has produced information supporting that having the COVID-19 vaccination does not invalidate the fast.**

BIMA Question and Answer: [https://britishima.org/operation-vaccination/hub/statements/#FAST](https://britishima.org/operation-vaccination/hub/statements/%23FAST).