Ramadan Reset
Healthy Eating Ramadan Guide

Prepare yourself for your healthiest Ramadan! Learn what to eat for suhoor & iftar to fuel yourself all day long!

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Maryam loves Ramadan, but for some reason, **fasting days just seem so LONG!** She tries to wake up for suhoor, but she always feels starving later in the day, so she doesn’t feel very motivated to manage the early morning meal. As the hours tick by, Maryam can’t help but stare at her watch and **complain about her hunger.** Finally, it’s almost Maghrib time, and Maryam feels as if she’s about to faint! **All she can think about during her prayer is her rumbling stomach.** As soon as the adhan goes, she dashes to the kitchen, feeling tired, famished, and cranky. As she hurriedly eats her iftar, she sadly wishes that she had done more worship in the day. But, she was just too hungry to focus!

Ismail can’t wait for Ramadan! He loves spending the day quietly reflecting and praying. And, he always looks forward to enjoying time with friends at iftar parties around a huge spread of food! Ismail feels that he deserves a big meal after a long day of fasting. But, even though Ismail loves the masjid, **he struggles through Taraweh every night. His body feels heavy, and he suddenly starts to feel sleepy.** As he shifts from one foot to the other during the first few rakaats (stepping on his prayer neighbour’s toes in the process), **he can’t stop thinking about his bloated stomach and he wishes he could just lie down.** Before he realizes it, the Imam concludes the witr duaa, and **Ismail fumbles his way back home, wondering why he can never focus during taraweh.**
Ramadan fasts do NOT have to feel this way!

As Muslims, we understand that fasting is a blessing that has been prescribed to us as a means of purifying our souls, and our bodies. Unfortunately, many Muslims fall into the trap of adopting unhealthy habits during Ramadan, which makes you feel and perform worse; physically, emotionally and spiritually. We must show respect for this blessed month by treating our bodies with respect. In doing so, we unlock our full spiritual potential. A healthy body is able to worship Allah better and truly take advantage of this holy month! It’s time to approach Ramadan with a new attitude!

This quick-start guide teaches you how to eat while fasting.

Let’s go back to poor Maryam and Ismail. Both of them had the best of intentions approaching Ramadan, but their unhealthy habits held them back from worshipping Allah to the best of their abilities. The sad thing is, like most Muslims, Maryam and Ismail never realized that these feelings of laziness and sluggishness are NOT normal symptoms of abstaining from food.

It has become a common joke that “Muslims somehow are able to GAIN weight while fasting!”. However, this sad reality is far from funny. The majority of our community eats in such a destructive way to unbelievably promote fat GAIN…despite fasting for 17 hours of the day! This seems almost impossible, but unfortunately, many Muslims use Ramadan as an excuse to engage in gluttony and overfeeding.

Imagine this: Instead of dragging yourself through Ramadan feeling tired, sickly, and starved, what if you reached the end of the day feeling well-fueled from a sufficient suhoor? And what if you then ate a satisfying but portion-controlled iftar, allowing you to feel charged and awake for taraweh?

How amazing would you feel? How much energy would you have to devote to worship?

In fact, a healthy fast should leave you feeling energetic and alert, without suffering constant pangs of hunger throughout the day, or feeling bloated after an enormous iftar. And YOU can definitely achieve this supercharged Ramadan! You just have to be willing to LEARN what it truly means to be healthy in Ramadan.

The #1 secret to unlocking a healthy Ramadan: an open mind.

Let’s face it: In Ramadan, the most unhealthy practices become accepted as normal. Many people become stubbornly attached to unwise food decisions, simply because these food choices are considered “cultural essentials”. The problem is NOT cultural food; foods of ANY culture can be healthy if selected, prepared and cooked properly. Problems arise in Ramadan when Muslims ruin the ONLY two feeding opportunities they have in the day (suhour and iftar) and fill themselves with the most greasy, oily, deep-fried food options their culture has to offer! Something has to change!

Ask yourself if these unhealthy foods are really as important to your overall Ramadan experience, as many people make them out to be.

Instead of making unhealthy choices your main food source during Ramadan, what if you prepared overall healthier meals, and enjoyed your favourite cultural dishes as a small side snack? If this could help reduce the massive food coma and weight gain that many Muslims experience during Ramadan… would you do it?

Do you have the self-control to commit to modifying your suhoor and iftar eating habits?

Ask yourself these tough questions...
Busting the “Ramadan Laziness Myth”

During Ramadan, many Muslims feel that they are entitled to become unproductive, sedentary, and lazy, simply because of the lack of food during the day. However, this lazy attitude is in opposition to the example set for us by the Prophet (Peace be Upon Him), his companions, and the early Muslim generations!

Did you know that several INCREDIBLE events in Islamic history took place in Ramadan?

In fact, the famous Battle of Badr, and the Conquest of Makkah BOTH took place during Ramadan! The Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) and his Companions were active during Ramadan… to the extent that they were defending themselves at war while fasting! SubhanAllah,

Now… what about fasting during work hours was so hard, again…?

Finding energy to devote ourselves to worship, be productive at work, and squeeze in a healthy meals during Ramadan is not as overwhelming as it seems! The modern Muslim must understand that Ramadan is NO time for laziness. However, many Muslims believe our bodies start to “shut down” when we fast, and use this as an excuse to be unproductive and sluggish during Ramadan. To properly utilize our time, energy and resources during Ramadan, it is essential to understand the effects of fasting upon our bodies.

How does our BODY interpret fasting?

Did you know, that fasting during Ramadan is NOT considered a period of “starvation”?  

Many Muslims complain of a lack of energy due to “starvation effects” during Ramadan. However, one study conducted in 1994 found that the effects of starvation begin to emerge only after 36 to 72 hours without food! Thankfully, in Ramadan, at most we are fasting for 17-18 hours, so our fasting cannot be considered “starvation”!

Some Muslims complain that Ramadan results in a lack of energy due to reduced calorie intake. Now, it is true, that in Ramadan, some people may eat less calories in a day due to fasting. However, others end up eating the SAME amount of food, if not MORE food when fasting. Either way, a study in 2008 found that reducing calorie intake (while maintaining proper nutrition) is NOT related to eating disorder symptoms, decreased quality of life, depressed mood, or even cognitive impairment.

So even if you’re eating less during Ramadan… the mental repercussions are minimal!
Ramadan is a PHASE SHIFT in eating patterns.

So if Ramadan is not starvation, and it may or may not be considered calorie reduction… then how do our bodies interpret our Ramadan fasting…?

One study in 2007 summarized the effects of fasting during Ramadan as a phase shift for our bodies! Here’s what that means:

“Ramadan can best be summarized as a phase shift in calorie intake and a change in sleeping habits. These phase shifts may have effects on some activities of daily living, mood, motivation and maximal performance, with little effect on submaximal exercise.

Food intake is not restricted during Ramadan; the restriction is when food is eaten. Shifting food intake until after sunset upsets the timing of intake and sleep patterns to accommodate the change in mealtime. This makes the influence of Ramadan on daily activities more a matter of CHRONOBIOLOGY than of calorie restriction.”

Let me break down EXACTLY what this article is stating about the effects of Ramadan fasting upon our bodies, because it is truly GROUNDBREAKING for how we view Ramadan!

Here’s what we’ve learned:

- During Ramadan, our food intake itself is not restricted… the TIMING of WHEN WE EAT is restricted (suhoor & iftar).

- This timing change of eating may disrupt your internal clock… potentially causing typical “fasting side effects”. In fact, these “fasting side effects” are similar to symptoms of being sleep deprived!

- Sleep, mood and motivation may be affected, NOT because of the lack of food, but because of the PHASE SHIFT in eating that is disrupting your internal clock!

- Maximal exercise (performing at athlete-level or at your MAXIMUM capability) may be affected during Ramadan. BUT, SUBMAXIMAL exercise (regular, “normal-person” exercise) such as light cardio, aerobics, strength training, is NOT substantially affected and CAN be performed while fasting!!

So all of us can stop complaining about why we are “STARVING” while fasting and cranky or tired or lethargic… in reality, we may just be suffering from the symptoms of chronobiological disruption! In which case, it’s a great opportunity to practice the tried and true Sunnah of napping!

Healthy Ramadan Tip!

- Many of the typical “Ramadan Symptoms” of an irritated, unhappy, grumpy, tired, moody, starving faster can be attributed to a disruption in your internal clock!

- Recharge and get proper rest by adding a short nap into your afternoon routine!

- "And We made your sleep a means for rest“ ~ The Holy Quran, (78:9)

- The Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) said, "Take mid-day naps, for verily shaytaan does not take naps" (Sahih al-Jami’)

- A short, 20-minute power nap before or after Dhuhr prayer is all you need to boost your energy and finish your fast feeling energetic!5

- A short nap will also take your mind off of food and allow you to refocus on what matters most when you wake up - taking advantage of the month and utilizing time for worship.
So now that we’re busted some of the myths surrounding laziness in Ramadan, let’s talk about another major way to boost your energy while fasting… suhoor! Remember, The Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) always encouraged eating suhoor and discouraged skipping it.

Why we must NOT SKIP SUHOOR...

The Prophet Peace be Upon Him) said:
"Eat Suhoor, for there are blessings in it."
[al-Bukhari and Muslim]

The Prophet Peace be Upon Him) said:
“The Suhoor is a meal of blessings, so do not leave it, even if one of you just takes a gulp of water, as Allah sends mercy and His angels seek forgiveness for those who take Suhoor”.

A companion reported:
"I entered upon the Prophet (S) and he was taking the Suhoor and he said: “It is a blessing which Allah has given to you, so do not leave it”.

Suhoor is our breakfast during the month of Ramadan. We know that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Suhoor is even more important than breakfast, because it is our last opportunity to fuel our bodies and replenish our energy before a long day of fasting.

Think about how sluggish and grouchy you feel if you skip breakfast, on a regular day. Skipping breakfast causes us to crave sweets and overeat later on throughout the day. It slows our metabolism and studies have shown people who skip breakfast are more likely to be overweight.

Skipping suhoor has the same effect… except worse!

If you skip suhoor, you cannot make up the meal during the day. Your body has no stored fuel to use. The food you ate during iftar and dinner has been digested and utilized. Your body will turn to breaking itself down for energy. Eventually, this may lead to the breakdown muscle, which will lead to fatigue and low energy levels.

If you want to have sustained energy during the day and avoid energy crashes, DO NOT SKIP SUHOOR!

Remember, if you skip suhoor, you are going 24 hours without food from iftar on one day, to iftar the next day. This is making your 17-hour fast much difficult than it needs to be, and starts to approach the 36-hour point of starvation!
Everyone enjoys suhoor differently, but it’s important to remember healthy eating basics to ensure a satisfying morning meal that will carry you throughout the day.

Healthy Ramadan Tip!

- Aim to include at least three of the four food groups in your suhoor for a total of between 350 and 600 calories, depending on your health goals.
- If you are looking to maintain your health & weight, eat a higher caloric range during your suhoor.
- If you are hoping to lose some weight for better health during Ramadan, you may choose a lower-calorie meal.

Here are four components of a healthy suhoor for you to build-your-own meal:

1. **Complex Carbohydrates**
   Complex carbs *(such as whole grains, brown rice, etc.)* are important sources of glucose and energy for your body. Complex carbohydrates are digested slowly during the day and are a great choice for lasting fasting energy. Simple carbs, on the other hand (such as white bread and flours), are processed foods that are stripped of their nutrients, wheat germ and bran during the refining process. They offer little nutrition, are low in dietary fiber and are a source of refined simple sugars.
   Good examples: sweet potatoes, oatmeal made with rolled oats *(NOT sugar quick oats!)*, quinoa, whole grain breads/cereals, etc.

2. **High Fibre Foods**
   Fibre keeps you feeling full longer, which is perfect for suhoor! High fibre foods will keep you from feeling hunger pangs early in the day. Fibre also helps keep everything moving through and out of your digestive system.
   Good examples: Flax/chia seeds, apples, whole grains, oatmeal, broccoli, spinach, quinoa, beans, spinach, etc.

3. **Lean Protein**
   Eating lean protein is another great way to stay full longer during the day. Along with fat and carbohydrates, protein is a "macronutrient," meaning that the body needs relatively large amounts of it. Unlike fat and carbohydrates, the body does not store protein, so our major source of protein is from the foods we eat.
   Good examples: chicken breast, fresh fish *(eg. salmon, tuna)*, skim milk, nuts, eggs, beans, light peanut butter, tofu, chia seeds, etc.

4. **Healthy Fats**
   Eating fats does not make you fat - if you’re eating the right kind of fat, that is! Bad fats increase cholesterol and your risk of certain diseases, while good fats protect your heart and support overall health. Studies have shown that some good fats like avocado may keep you feeling full and prevent feelings of hunger!
   Good examples: avocados, coconut oil, extra virgin olive oil, olives, small handful of nuts *(moderation is key!)*, fish *(eg. salmon)*, etc.
Examples of a Healthy SUHOOR...

To make this guide extremely practical, we have included examples of suhoor meals that fulfill the above requirements and will keep you feeling fueled and supercharged throughout the day! Feel free to try these ideas, or mix and match based on whatever foods or leftovers you have at home.

Ranges of servings are given. Women can go towards the lower range, and men can use the higher range. Feel free to substitute any foods for items from similar food groups.

- 2-3 cups of water
- 1 cup of fat free milk
- Scrambled eggs made with 1-2 eggs, mixed bell peppers & tomatoes, served with 1-2 slices of whole wheat toast
- 1/2 cup of berries with fat-free yogurt
- 1 cup of garden salad

- 2-3 cups of water
- 1-2 cups of fat free milk with all-bran or fibre1 cereal, topped with strawberries
- 1-2 boiled eggs
- 1 cup of spinach and mushrooms
- 1 apple eaten with 1 tablespoon of light all-natural peanut butter

- 2-3 cups of water
- 1-2 cups fat free milk
- 1 cup of oatmeal made with rolled oats, stevia, and mixed fruit
- Spinach salad with baby tomatoes and sliced boiled eggs

- 2-3 cups of water
- 1-2 boiled eggs
- Ultimate green banana-strawberry smoothie:
  - 1 cup of fat free milk
  - 1 banana (frozen)
  - 1 handful strawberries
  - 1 cup of spinach
  - 2 tablespoons of chia seeds

- 2-3 cups of water
- 1 cup of fat free milk
- 1/2 - 1 whole wheat roti
- 1/2 cup - 1 cup of chickpeas (cholay)
- 1/2 cup - 1 cup steamed or lightly sautéed broccoli (or any vegetable curry cooked with minimal oil)
- 1/2 cup of berries with fat-free yogurt

- 2-3 cups of water
- 1-2 cups foul modammes (fava beans with olive oil, salt, and pepper)
- 1/2 - 1 Whole wheat pita bread
- Scrambled eggs with 1-2 eggs (substitute olive oil spray instead of butter)
- 1/2 cup of berries with fat-free yogurt
A solid suhoor full of nutrients is only half the battle! We all know... the real struggle to be healthy happens at Iftar, and more specifically, at the HUGE Iftar spread that’s been calling your name all day long! Unfortunately, our community tends to over-obsess about Iftar parties, and overindulgence is seen as normal. It’s time to get back to basics and learn what a healthy iftar REALLY looks like!

Healthy Iftar Basics

Realize that you do not need to compensate for all the missed meals during the day into one meal of iftar. While fasting, often your energy and activity levels are naturally lower, so your nutrition needs are less as well. Therefore, you do not need to eat as much as you normally do. You have not eaten for the whole day, so your body needs to be gradually eased into the process of eating and digesting food again.

The best thing you can do for yourself is to eat slowly and in small quantities. Eating a lot of food at one sitting will only lead to feelings of fullness, indigestion, fatigue from high blood sugar, and acid reflux. Eat foods that are good for you and full of nutrients and you will be satisfied eating a normal amount of food.

When cooking, bake more as opposed to frying foods. Use extra-virgin olive oil, coconut oil or macadamia nut oil to cook your food instead of butter, ghee, or vegetable oil.

What are Some “Must-Have Foods” at Iftar?

1. Fluid-Filled Foods
   Your body needs to be replenished with fluids after the day without. Therefore, having a good amount of water is good (the closer to room temperature the better). Avoid sugary and caffeinated drinks as they act as diuretics and deplete fluids from the body. They also cause high energy spikes and then subsequent energy crashes.
   Good examples: Besides water, other fluids would be soups, fruits, vegetables, milk, yogurt, and salads.

2. High Fibre Foods
   Fibrous foods include fruits, vegetables, whole grains (brown breads, brown rice, couscous, quinoa, brown pasta), lentils (daal, haleem). The ideal fruit, which we break our fast with is the date. Because of its fibrous properties and natural sweetness, it provides healthy sugars to the body as energy and is absorbed by the body at a timely and useful rate. Low-fat protein foods also provide long-lasting energy: eggs, turkey, fish, tofu, lean chicken, garbonzo beans (chole with yogurt).
Our iftar healthy eating guidelines are purposely less specific, as we understand that everyone has their own preferences for iftar meals, based on taste and culture.

**Healthy Ramadan Tip! Iftar Guidelines to SUPERCHARGE your Ramadan!**

- All of your favourite foods can be enjoyed in moderation.
- When it is time to eat, it’s natural to want to avoid tasty foods.
- However, listed below are foods that will NOT benefit your long term energy levels and productivity (waking up for suhoor and fajr, etc), **so eat them in small quantities**.
- Be careful when attending iftar parties, eat the foods you know that are good for you, even though the treats laid out look very tempting.
- Eat small portions at a time.
- Eat more of lean proteins, vegetables, and whole grains **instead** of fried foods, overloading on fruits, and white carbohydrates. For carbohydrates, a fistful is a good recommended size. Do not fill your plate with carbohydrates. **Fill up your plate mostly with lean proteins and veggies.**

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**THE DANGER LIST: AVOID THESE FOODS!!!**

**Avoid/Limit:**

1. **Sugary foods:** Overloading on sweets or high-sugar foods will quickly lead to fatigue and irritability after being eaten (includes white breads, white rice, chips, cookies, juices, soda, candy). Eat fruits instead of sweets to satisfy your craving. Remove juice completely OR (if you must) water down your juice to decrease the amount of sugar you drink.

2. **Fried foods:** Deep-fried and oil-laden foods inhibit/slows digestion of the food, can cause indigestion and acid reflux (fried pakora, samosa, dosa, pizza, fast food). Cut down the amount of oil used in cooking, and switch from fried foods to baked foods. Substitute veggies and herbs for flavour to make up for using less oil. Flavourful examples are onions, tomatoes, garlic, ginger, basil, rosemary, sage, vinegar, lemon.

3. **Caffeine:** Overloading on caffeine may result in fluid loss, irritability, heartburn. (soda, black tea, coffee, chocolate). Drink green and white tea, decaf tea and coffee, herbal tea to attenuate your cravings for caffeine.

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**Staying in control at iftar parties can be challenging, especially when everyone around you is overindulging. Take a deep breath when you approach the food spread, and commit to eating healthy for the Sake of Allah!**
Keep in mind when fasting, you are asking your body to go almost 20 hours with no water! This is no small task, so you must prepare your body in advance by hydrating adequately at suhoor.

**Before and after the fast, stay as hydrated as you can by drinking water as your main source of fluids.** Sodas and juices are filled with sugar and only will lead to more thirst. Caffeinated drinks deplete the body of fluid and lead to thirst as well. Besides water, you can meet your daily water requirements by consuming water-filled foods such as fruits, vegetables, milk, yogurt, and soup.

“**How Much Water Do I Need to Drink Daily?**”

The amount of water recommended is based on your height, weight, and energy. You should have 1mL of water per kilocalorie consumed.

**Water Requirements for Women**

On average women need about 1200-1500 calories a day.

So that equals 1200-1500 mL of water a day. 1500mL = **SIX 8-ounce glasses of water**

**Water Requirements for Men**

On average men need about 1800-2000 calories a day.

That equals 1800-2000mL of water a day. 2000mL= **EIGHT 8-ounce glasses of water.**

**Note:** Dietitians of Canada recommend **10 cups+ of water per day!**

Keep in mind that fasts during the summer heat will cause you to sweat more and lose additional water. It’s important to get plenty of water to replenish the electrolytes lost from sweating, etc. Take sips from your reusable water bottle throughout the evening.

**A good rule of thumb is to consider the water requirements for men and women listed above as a minimum, and work towards drinking closer to TEN glasses a day while fasting.**
This short guide has given you practical foundational nutrition knowledge to reach your health goals and stay in control this Ramadan, inshAllah! There’s only one piece of the puzzle that’s missing, now.

What’s missing… is YOU.

All the nutritional guidance and information in the world will not matter until YOU make the conscious decision to have a healthy Ramadan. Until you make that decision, nothing will change.

However, once you make the decision to take responsibility and ownership for your health in Ramadan, the rest is EASY. Healthy eating is a game of decision-making and mindset shifts. If you decide now, that you are a winner at this game, it becomes easy to keep your eyes on the finish line, and maintain your health as a priority during Ramadan.

But, if you DON’T make health a priority, every single iftar party—every single samosa, gulab jamun or piece of baklava—will feel like a never-ending battle with your willpower.

You deserve a healthier lifestyle.

Your body and soul will thank you for it, inshAllah.

Please, take what you have learned in this guide, and seriously try to implement healthy eating in your life this Ramadan.

Please help us share the khair by SHARING this FREE guidebook with anyone who is fasting this Ramadan by forwarding the download link www.amanahfitness.com/ramadan.

At Amanah Fitness, your health is an amanah (trust) that we are committed to helping you improve!

May Allah (swt) bless your efforts this Ramadan—both spiritual and physical—and allow us all to reach our fullest potential, Ameen!

With greatest wishes to see you succeed at the highest level,

Your coach,
Amina Khan
Founder, Amanah Fitness

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It has been narrated that
The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said:
“Two blessings are often overlooked by most of mankind:
Good health and free time.”
[Sahih ul-Bukhari]

Let’s work hard to maintain this immense blessing - our health!

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