

How to Fast

Description: A detailed lesson on the topic of fasting; its types, obligation, method and exemptions, along with special regulations for women.

By NewMuslims.com

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Prerequisites

- Introduction to Fasting.

Objectives

- To identify the types of fasting in Islam.
- To realize the obligation to fast *Ramadan*.
- To identify who is exempt from fasting.
- To learn how to fast in *Ramadan*.
- To learn what must be avoided while fasting.
- To knowledge of special regulations for Muslim women.

Arabic Terms

- *Ramadan* - The ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is the month in which the obligatory fasting has been prescribed.
- *Salah* - the Arabic word to denote a direct connection between the believer and Allah. More specifically, in Islam it refers to the formal five daily prayers and is the most important form of worship.
- *Zakah* - obligatory charity.
- *Fajr, Dhuhr, Asr, Maghrib, Isha* " the names of five daily prayers in Islam.
- *Taraweeh* - These are special prayers performed in *Ramadan* after *Isha* prayers and in which long portions of the Quran are recited
- *Iftar* - meal to break the fast.
- *Suhoor* - pre-dawn meal eaten by fasting Muslims.

Types of Fasting

First thing to know is that fasting is of two types: obligatory and voluntary. Obligatory fasts are required worship - as a Muslim I do not have the option to leave it without incurring sin. Voluntary fasts are optional - I may keep them or not. If I don't, I won't incur any sin, but I will get extra reward for keeping them. In this lesson we will focus only on the most important obligatory fasts that are kept in the month of *Ramadan*.

Fasting In *Ramadan*

Fasting in *Ramadan* is one of the five pillars of Islam as the Prophet said:

Islam is built on five pillars: testifying that there is no true god except Allah and that Muhammad is His Messenger, the establishment of the prayer, the giving of *zakah*, the fast of *Ramadan*, and the pilgrimage to Mecca." (*Saheeh Al-Bukhari*)

Fasting in *Ramadan* is an obligation on every Muslim who has reached the age of puberty. Allah said in the Quran:

oeSo whoever witnesses the month should fast it." (Quran 2:185)

Whoever does not fast during *Ramadan* without a legitimate excuse commits what is considered a major sin.

Who is Exempt from Fasting?

(1) A Muslim child who has **not yet reached puberty** is exempt from fasting till one of the following signs of puberty appear:

- (a) discharge of semen, whether by experiencing a wet dream or otherwise
- (b) growth of pubic hair
- (c) menstruation
- (d) a person has turned 15

(2) If you are **traveling** in *Ramadan*, you have the option not to fast. If you choose not to, you must make up for the days missed at a later time before the following *Ramadan*.

(3) A woman is not allowed to fast during menstruation or post-natal bleeding, and she must perform the number of fasts she missed on other days before the following *Ramadan*.

(4) A **pregnant** or **breast-feeding** woman may be exempted from fasting if it proves harmful to her or the infant. This case is discussed in more detail below.

(5) The **mentally insane** are also exempt from fasting.

(6) The Merciful Lord does not burden a soul beyond its ability. If you are **sick**, you are also exempt from fasting.

There are two issues to know here:

First, how sick is sick? Cough or minor headache is not serious enough not to fast, but if there is medical reason, and you know from experience, or are certain that fasting will make your illness worse or delay recovery, you do not need to fast.

Second, you should make up the days when you get better.

The chronically ill who do not foresee any chance of recovery must feed a poor person for every day of *Ramadan* they miss. They do not need to fast for them on other days.

(8) Those **too old** to fast are also exempt from fasting, and they too must feed a poor person for every day of *Ramadan* they miss.

How Do I Fast in *Ramadan*?

First, check with your local mosque for the beginning of *Ramadan* by calling or visiting them. Usually, mosques print a special schedule for *Ramadan* that will tell you the times for starting and ending the fast (the time of *Fajr* and *Maghrib*, respectively) and maybe even the time for the *Taraweeh* prayer.

Second, intend in your heart the night before that you will fast the next day based on what the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, said:

oeThere is no fast for the person who did not intend to fast from the night before." (An-Nasa'i)

The idea is to remind yourself that one is fasting for the pleasure of our Creator.

Month: 9/1426, 10-11/ 2005 C.E

Location: Seattle, WA, USA

Calculation Method: ISNA

Juristic Method: Standard

Day	Ramadan	Gregorian	Fajr	Sunrise	Dhuhr	Asr	Maghrib	Isha
Tue	1	4/10	5:50	7:12	12:58	4:05	6:43	8:07
Wed	2	5/10	5:52	7:14	12:58	4:04	6:41	8:05
Thu	3	6/10	5:53	7:15	12:58	4:02	6:39	8:03
Fri	4	7/10	5:54	7:17	12:58	4:01	6:37	8:01
Sat	5	8/10	5:56	7:18	12:57	3:59	6:35	7:59
Sun	6	9/10	5:57	7:20	12:57	3:58	6:33	7:57
Mon	7	10/10	5:59	7:21	12:57	3:56	6:31	7:55

Figure 1 Specimen *Ramadan* Schedule for Seattle residents prepared using www.islamicfinder.org. For example, on Tuesday, the first day of *Ramadan*, take your pre-dawn meal (*suhoor*) before 5:50 am. You can resume eating and drinking (*iftar*) at 6:43 pm.

Second, wake up well before time for *Fajr* begins and have your pre-dawn meal called *suhoor*. You may hear Indians and Pakistanis refer to *suhoor* as *seh-ri*. Some calendars may mention a time when you should stop eating before *Fajr*. There is really no basis for this and should be ignored, as clear texts show that it is allowed to eat and drink up and until the time of *Fajr*. One may, on the safe side, stop eating and drinking a few minutes before the time for *Fajr* starts, as most people use a time schedule and there is no guarantee that their watches are 100% correct. Allow yourself enough time beforehand to eat and drink, because if you wake up late after time for *Fajr* has started, you can not have your pre-dawn meal and have to fast rest of the day on an empty stomach! If you happen to sleep through the *Fajr* prayer time frame and wake up after sunrise, you must fast for the remainder of the day, and the fast is still valid.

Third, you must abstain completely from things that break and invalidate the fast that are discussed below. It is basically no eating, drinking, or having marital relations.

Fourth, the time for *Maghrib* or evening *salah* begins when the sun sets. That's also when you 'break' your fast and can resume eating and drinking. This meal is called '*iftar*'. The Prophet would first break his fast, even if only with a sip of water, and then pray the dusk or *Maghrib salah*. You are totally free to have your dinner at this time or later, however, you should not miss the *Maghrib* prayer because you are busy eating!

What Can I Not Do While Fasting?

You essentially fast from dawn (time for *Fajr*) till sunset (time for *Maghrib*). From dawn to dusk you must stay away from:

- Eating or drinking, including taking pills or oral medicines. If you ate or drank by mistake, that is, you forgot you were fasting, then do not worry. Continue to refrain for the rest of the day. It is forgiven, the fasting is valid, and the day will count. The Prophet of Mercy, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, said:

oelf he forgets, and eats and drinks, then let him complete his fast, for Allah has fed him and given him to drink." (Saheeh Al-Bukhari)

- Sexual intercourse, whether one ejaculates or not, invalidates the fast. Beware of this most serious violation of the fast that incurs sin and a heavy penalty to make up. For this reason, even kissing is forbidden if there is a risk that it will lead to intercourse. Again, this is just during the day when you are fasting. There are no restrictions at night. By extension, masturbation also invalidates fasting.
- Self-induced vomiting ruins the fast as the Prophet said:

oeWhoever vomits unintentionally does not have to make up the fast later, but whoever vomits on purpose does have to make up the fast." (Al-Tirmidhi)

- Smoking, prohibited at all times, also invalidates the fast.[\[1\]](#)

Special Regulations for Women

(1) Menstruation & Post-Natal bleeding

If the period begins before sunset, the woman's fast is invalidated and she has to make up that day. During the rest of her period she cannot fast. If she becomes pure before *Fajr* then she should fast, even if she does not bathe until after the time of *Fajr* starts. All the missed days have to be made up after *Ramadan*.

(2) Pregnancy and Nursing

Both nursing and pregnant women are required to fast in *Ramadan*. You should not fast if you fear harm for yourself or your child, or if it is too physically difficult. . On the other hand, if fasting does not result in hardship or harm, then a pregnant or nursing mother *must* fast.

For more details in any of these issues, we recommend you to browse the following link: [Islam QA- Fasting](#).

Endnotes:

[\[1\]](#) For other details about some common issues regarding what does and does not break the fast, you may see: <http://islamqa.info/en/cat/298>, and <http://islamqa.info/en/cat/464>.

The web address of this article:
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