

Healthy Ramadan 2021

Having a healthy Ramadan: BNF shares advice for celebrating the holy month under COVID-19 restrictions

From the 12th or 13th of April Muslims across the world are set to celebrate the holy month of Ramadan. During the holiday, many Muslims will be fasting during daylight hours, only eating one meal (the 'suhoor' or 'sehri') just before dawn, and another (the 'iftar') after sunset. While we are on the roadmap out of lockdown, Ramadan will still mainly be celebrated at home this year and the British Nutrition Foundation has shared practical nutrition advice to help Muslims eat well and support their health during the month.



Bridget Benelam, Nutrition Communications Manager, BNF, who will be observing the fast, comments: "Again this year, Muslims generally won't be able to share traditional iftar meals with those outside their household. So, planning meals will look a bit different to the holy month pre-COVID-19 but as always it's important to eat well to make sure you are getting all you need to be healthy and support you in your efforts while fasting."

Breaking the fast



During fasting hours when no food or drink is consumed, the body may become mildly dehydrated. When first breaking the fast, drink plenty of fluid and opt for low-fat, water-rich foods, such as soup or yogurt, to replace fluids lost during the day. Drinks with natural sugars like juices or smoothies can provide some energy as well as fluid when breaking the fast. However, it's best to have these in moderation and to drink mostly water as well as to avoiding too many drinks with added sugars.

In many South Asian cultures, fresh fruit is a traditional way to break the fast. Fruit provides fibre, natural sugars, fluids and some vitamins and minerals. Likewise, dates are another traditional food to break the fast, and contain fibre, natural sugars and minerals like potassium, copper and manganese. You could also try other dried fruit such as apricots, figs or prunes.

Find a balance in your meals

After breaking the fast, try to eat meals that provide a balance of foods, including wholegrains, fruit and vegetables, dairy foods and protein-rich foods like lean meat, fish, eggs and beans, as shown by the UK healthy eating model, the Eatwell Guide. For example, you could have a range of fish, meat or pulse-based curries including plenty of vegetables, served with rice, chapattis and yogurt, and this would include all of the key food groups. While meat



plays a big role in the cuisines of many Muslim countries, it is worth thinking about including dishes more plant-based sources of protein like beans and lentils. Ideally you should cook your food with unsaturated oils like vegetable or olive oil instead of saturated fats like ghee or palm oil.

In the morning, for your suhoor, it's important to drink plenty of fluids and to choose fluid-rich foods to ensure you are well hydrated for the day ahead. Opt for starchy foods for energy, choosing high fibre or wholegrain varieties such as oats, wholegrain breads or wholegrain low sugar breakfast cereals where possible, as these can help keep you feeling fuller. You could also include protein-rich foods like eggs or beans. It's a good idea to avoid salty foods like hard cheese, processed meats, olives and pickles for suhoor as these can leave you feeling thirsty during the fast.

Avoid over-indulgence

After a long fast it's natural to want to treat yourself, but try to limit the amount of fatty foods such as deep-fried samosas and sugary foods and drinks such as sweets or sugary fizzy drinks you consume. You only have a relatively short time each day to consume all the essential nutrients and fluids your body needs to be healthy, so the quality of your diet is especially important during Ramadan.

Planning ahead

Again this year, we are probably cooking for fewer people than normal and so it's a good idea to make a plan to balance your meals and avoid food waste. This year may be a good time to try out some new recipes with your household – either main meal dishes for iftar, or some healthy options that you could prepare ahead for a fuss-free suhoor such as breakfast bars or overnight oats.

Support your community where you can

Ramadan is a time to make an extra effort to behave well towards those around us - while we may not be able to do acts of charity or help others face to face, we can still help by looking for opportunities to provide support remotely. You could raise money for people who may be in need, or could offer food or support to those working on the front line or who may be vulnerable or self-isolating.