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Ramadan Guide – Wellbeing during fasting and exams

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of the God the Merciful Beneficent

(We begin)

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُتِبَ عَلَيْكُمُ الصِّيَامُ كَمَا كُتِبَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

'O you who have faith prescribed for you is fasting as it was prescribed for those who were before you, so that you may be God wary'. Chapter 2:183

Fasting is prescribed as the fourth fundamental practice in Islam. This means that all Muslims should fast. Here God has prescribed fasting and has indicated that fasting should eventually bring about Taqwa / God Consciousness, which leads to the strongly desired quality of self-restraint.

Then God qualifies fasting with the following details;

أَيَّامًا مَّعْدُودَاتٍ ۚ فَمَن كَانَ مِنكُم مَّرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِّنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ ۗ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ
طَعَامٍ مَّسْكِينٍ ۚ فَمَن تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ ۗ وَأَن تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

(Ramadan fasting is during the) known days. But should any of you be sick or on a journey, let it be a [similar] number of other days. Those who find it straining shall be liable to atonement by feeding a needy person. Should anyone do good of his own accord, that is better for him, and to fast is better for you, should you know. Chapter 2:184

The message from God is that fasting is better for you if you actually knew (the status of the fasting person is extremely high in the sight of God). However, there are instances when fasting will not be compulsory and other measures are prescribed as a substitute. Nevertheless, fasting is strongly recommended.

God tells us that,

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِّلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِّنَ الْهُدَىٰ وَالْفُرْقَانِ

The month of Ramaḍān is one in which the Qur'ān was revealed as guidance to mankind, and clear explanation of the guidance. Quran 2:185.

Here God is informing us that the Quran was revealed in Ramadan. The clear connection between the importance of the Quran and fasting is made known (this issue will be further explored below).



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The Prophet (PBUH)

إِذَا دَخَلَ شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ فَتُخْتَبَرُ أَبْوَابُ السَّمَاءِ، وَتُغْلَقُ أَبْوَابُ جَهَنَّمَ، وَتُسَلِّسَلُ الشَّيَاطِينُ

"When the month of Ramadan starts, the gates of the heaven are opened and the gates of Hell are closed and the devils are chained". Bukhari 1899

The Prophet (PBUH) said that God says;

‘الصِّيَامُ لِي، وَأَنَا أَجْزِي بِهِ’

"...(Your) fasting is for me and (only) I will reward for it.." Bukhaari (1761) and Muslim (1946)

God has elevated the status of fasting in Ramadan; the reward for fasting is special, such that only God himself will award each person from unknown untold rewards. This is something to think about.

Fasting is about self-restraint. It is important to know self-restraint is not restricted to abstinence from food, but rather abstinence from all non-moral conduct as well. Examples of this include: abstaining from the cultivation of non-Islamic (immoral) thoughts and practice, thinking the worst of people rather than giving the benefit of doubt, not speaking harsh painful words to people or cursing, or plotting evil or engaging in activity that is harmful to anyone including oneself.

Fasting also extends to promoting excellence in conduct by helping people, restraining one's anger, forgiving people and even extends to speaking less.

Ramadan focuses on spending quality time in reflection on the messages and universal teachings of the Qur'an and, furthermore, learning about God and God's importance and relevance.

Does God advise us what type of food to eat?

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا كُلُوا مِن ثَمَرِهَا إِذَا بُرئَ مِن زُرْعَتِهَا وَلَا تُسرفُوا بِهَا أَن يَحْبِسَهَا عَلَيْهَا أُمَّةٌ مِّنكُمْ وَمَن يَسرفْ فَإِنَّ شَرَّ إِنسَانٍ ذُو بَخِيلٍ ذُنُوبٍ

'O you who believe eat from the good of what we have provided, and show your gratitude to Allah if it is he you truly worship'. Chapter 2–172 Qur'an.

Allah has focused on the word Tayyibaat here in describing the type of food discussed. Allah is advising us as to the type of halal food he would like us to eat.

Tayyibaat is plural of the Arabic word Tayyib which means Good. In essence, the Quran is saying eat that food which is Halal and good for you.



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For example, processed food may have its benefits such as ease and speed of preparation. However, would it qualify under the terminology of Tayyibat? Its preservatives and many additives, and the long period of its refrigeration may preclude it from being Tayyib / good for you. Other such examples may include excessively sugared drinks and salted foods.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ كُلُوا مِمَّا فِي الْأَرْضِ حَلَالًا طَيِّبًا وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا خُطُوَاتِ الشَّيْطَانِ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ

'O People, Eat from the provisions of the Earth of what is Nutritiously Allowed, and do not follow the footsteps of Shaytan as he is certainly a clear enemy'. Chapter 2:168 Qur'an.

The ruling of Halal / Permitted (food) is clear and very well known, for example which meats are Halal are known and which type of meats are Haram (impermissible) are also clearly known. For example, Blood and Carrion (Animals found dead without slaughter) are not permitted. They have clear health risks. Whilst correctly slaughtered meat is clearly Halal.

However, Tayyibaat food is not just Halal food, but food that has nutritional value or is good for you. Therefore, all food that are Halal will not always be Tayyib. For instance, it is known that all fish are Halal, but not all fish are good for your health, therefore not all fish are amongst the Tayyibat.

You may already know the Prophet's (PBUH) favorite foods included; Grapes, Melon, Dates, Figs, Pomegranate, Olives, Honey, Mushroom, Milk and Wheat, and lots of water. These are examples of Tayyib foods.

The Prophet (PBUH) also liked to eat meat, which has its benefits. However, he practiced the idea of limiting the consumption of meat. This is because over eating certain type of food that is Tayyib loses its Tayyib value when over consumed.

What was the Prophet's (PBUH) advice as to the quantity of food consumption?

" مَا مَلَأَ آدَمِيٌّ وَغَاءَ شَرًّا مِنْ بَطْنٍ بِحَسْبِ ابْنِ آدَمَ أَكْلَاتُ يُقَمِّنُ صُلْبَهُ فَإِنْ كَانَ لَا مَخَالََةَ فَلْتُ لِبَطْعَامِهِ وَتُلْتُ لِشَرَابِهِ وَتُلْتُ لِنَفْسِهِ "

'It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat that amount which will support his back

If this is not possible, then a third for food, a third for drink, and third for air (ease of breathing)'.

Al-Tirmidhi (2380) Sahee

The Prophet (PBUH) practiced balanced eating and eating in moderation and avoiding over indulgence. He advised the drinking of water and not to over drink.

It is recommended that the fasting student follow the advice of the Qur'an and the practices of the Prophet (PBUH). There is consistent advice on the importance of wholesome and healthy food and its consumption. These healthy eating benefits focus on the health of your body and extend to the soul (Ruh).



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يَابَنِي آدَمَ خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ
الْمُسْرِفِينَ.

'O children of Adam display your good (dress well) at your places of worship and eat and drink but refrain from excessiveness, as He does not love those who waste'. Chapter 7:31 Qur'an.

The subject of this verse ends in 'Israaf' / 'Excess' also termed as 'Waste'. God informs us that he does not love those who eat or drink in excess. God attaches his love to a person with good eating practices, and therefore distancing those who waste food from his love. Therefore, these good food practices can only assist the one fasting in Ramadan both in health and in soul, by attracting God's love.

A very important quality which fasting brings about is that the fasting person is more in control of his body by breaking snacking habits, remaining free from a heavy stomach and reducing cravings for sensual pleasure. The connection between certain foods and pleasure is one that seems to exist and can be subtly addressed through fasting.

The Prophet (PBUH) also said;

من قام رمضان إيماناً واحتساباً غفر له ما تقدم من ذنبه

Whoever stands for prayer in Ramadan out of certainty of faith and expectation of reward his previous sins will be forgiven. Bukhari (Volume 3, Book 32, Number 226) & Muslim.

The Prophet teaches us that the night prayer during Ramadan carries great weight. The benefits of fasting gradually move from bodily benefits through fasting in the day to spiritual nourishment through prescribed prayer at night.

We therefore learn that the fasting person receives great biological advantages through self-restraint during the daylight hours whilst earning God's pleasure. He is further connected to God in the hours of darkness through night prayer where the Qur'an is recited and pondered over.

Does God intend difficulty or ease for you?

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعُسْرَ

'Allah desires ease for you, and He does not desire hardship for you'. Chapter 2:185.

God wants us to know that throughout the journey of life God chooses ease for us over hardship. The Prophet (PBUH) said the Deen / religious matters are easy. If the prophet ﷺ was presented with two options, he would always select the easy of the two.



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We should always try hard to fulfill God's obligatory commandments. This is because they carry many known and unknown benefits. However, there will be instances when this is not possible, and it is only in those instances when the exceptions and substitutes apply.

If you are on medication or medically ill, and you know you cannot fast, then fasting is not obligatory for you on those days.

Ease is at the core of Deen / religious matters. God will not place upon any individual any obligation that a person cannot bear.

A Sahabi (contemporary of the Prophet (PBUH)) came to him and asked, "Should I leave my camel whilst I attend prayer in the Mosque?" The Prophet (PBUH) advised him to secure his camel first, and to then to pray in the Mosque. The Prophet (PBUH) is teaching that one should first be obliged to make certain that one's own responsibilities are taken care of, and then one should carry out one's religious obligations.

Those who have exams during the earlier periods of the month of Ramadan are advised to fast few days in the month of Shaban (immediately before the month of Ramadan). These Shaban Fasts will prepare the body to fast during the month of Ramadan. The fasting student will feel these benefits and be strengthened through them. This was the known practice of the Prophet (PBUH).

مَنْ كَفَرَ بِاللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ إِيمَانِهِ إِلَّا مَنْ أَكْرَهَ وَقَلْبُهُ مُطْمَئِنٌّ بِالْإِيمَانِ وَلَكِنْ مَنْ شَرَحَ بِالْكُفْرِ صَدْرًا فَعَلَيْهِمْ
غَضَبٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ

Whoever disbelieves in Allah after having believed, except the one forced to (renounce his religion) whilst his heart is content with faith (his faith is secured) But those who (willingly) accept disbelief; on such is the wrath of God, and they shall receive a grievous chastisement. 16: 106 Qur'an

God tells us that if a person is forced to pronounce words that contradict his faith, whilst really holding true belief in his heart, then he will not be held liable in the sight of God for his outwardly coerced pronouncements.

There is an important lesson here. When circumstances, internal or external constrain you from carrying out the obligations that the Qur'an and the Sunnah (practices of the Prophet (PBUH)) teach, then carry out what is permissible as a valid substitute. For instance, if water for ablution is unavailable then ablution can be performed with dry earth. If prayer cannot be performed standing then it can be performed sitting and if not sitting then lying down. If you cannot afford the Journey of Hajj then it can be delayed until you can afford it. If you do not reach the threshold of paying Zakat (religious compulsory charity / taxation) then you are not obliged to pay, and if you are not in control of that wealth then Zakat will be delayed.



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أَيَّامًا مَعْدُودَاتٍ فَمَنْ كَانَ مِنْكُمْ مَرِيضًا أَوْ عَلَى سَفَرٍ فَعِدَّةٌ مِنْ أَيَّامٍ أُخَرَ وَعَلَى الَّذِينَ يُطِيقُونَهُ فِدْيَةٌ
طَعَامٍ مِسْكِينٍ فَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَهُ وَأَنْ تَصُومُوا خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

"[Fasting is during the] known days. So whoever among you is ill or on a journey [during them] - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person [each day]. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him. But to fast is best for you, if you only knew." Chapter 2:184 Qur'an.

This is a very interesting verse about those who did not fast in the month of Ramadan, in the earliest Islamic history, out of choice for whatever personal reasons. Such persons were commanded to pay a daily fine of feeding one poor person for each fast missed. However, there are differing scholarly opinions on this subject of a 'fine for not fasting'. It was previously acceptable to choose to feed a poor person as a substitute to fasting. Taafsir Tabari and Tafsir Ibn Kathir.

The following guidelines will assist in effective time management during the blessed month of Ramadan with a view to excellent Exam preparation.

- Be encouraged to pray Esha in the Mosque (the final obligatory prayer of the day)
- The Prophet (PBUH) was clear that the nighttime optional prayers (later called Taraweeh) be offered at home. If one has the ability then such prayer can be offered in the Mosque
- Pray twenty Rakaat / units of prayer behind the Imam or alone and listen to the recitation of the Qur'an
- Eat Suhur / breakfast in the small hours of the mornings (before dawn)
- Perform your Fajr Salaat (Dawn prayers) in your local Mosque if nearby

Should you have exams and you feel you are not able to cope with the above then then the following can apply;

- Pray your Esha at home as soon as the time begins.
- Perform only eight Rakaa of Taraweeh at home and recite smaller surahs / chapters of the Qur'an or single Ayahs. This should not take long
- Go to bed early and have good sleep
- Make sure you eat Suhur and drink sufficient water before dawn
- Then study a little till Fajr begins and pray your Fajr/Dawn prayer and sleep. This will not take long
- Wake up sufficiently early to be prepared for your day and ask Allah for assistance in your exams
- It is important that you wake up for Suhur as the summer fasts are longer. Suhur was the practice of the Prophet (PBUH). Such intake of food will help you in your fast and your day.

Should you require more information and advice or have some concerns you wish to discuss on the above topic then please contact [Musa Admani](#) at the City University Chaplaincy.



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Nutrition and Wellbeing Tips

A common mistake made by many students during the exam period is to eat poorly and unhealthily.

For most students they are so busy with revision that they replace normal meals with Junk food e.g. high fat content takeaways, crisps, chocolate, energy drinks, and coffee.

However, this is not only harmful to your long-term health, but can also negatively affect your revision quality and exam performance.

For students who are fasting, good nutrition becomes even more crucial. When you break your fast, you have an opportunity to fill up on amazing, healthy foods that will give you long lasting energy and boost concentration for the next day.

Here are some healthy suggestions to keep you feeling your best, during this important time.

- Eggs are a good way to start the day, boiled scrambled or poached, they are healthy and are more likely to leave you feeling fuller than sugary cereals or pastries will. Just one egg contains vital nutrients, 6g of protein, vitamin B12 (which helps convert glucose into energy) and less than 100 calories - depending on how you cook it
- If you'd rather have porridge in the morning instead of eggs, you could try mixing some peanut butter into it as it contains protein and healthy fats
- At Iftar your body will be dehydrated, so it's important to drink plenty of fluids before filling up on food. Water is ideal, but fresh juices or smoothies are also a great way to get in fluids whilst providing vitamins and minerals. Coconut water is another refreshing option and is full of electrolytes. Try to have at least another serving of water by Sehri, or have sips throughout to ensure you are well hydrated the next day.
- Consider fluid-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, soups and stews as another way to stay hydrated, especially at Iftar. A juicy watermelon is a delicious starter to hydrate you before your main meal. Reduce salty foods too, as salt makes you thirsty.
- Try to eat a balanced diet focussed around whole foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, wholegrains (oats; brown rice; whole-wheat bread; whole-wheat pasta), protein sources (beans; pulses; fish; meat; eggs; quinoa; nuts & seeds) and healthy fats (nuts & seeds; avocado; coconut). This will ensure you have a slow release of energy and contribute towards a clearer head.
- Dark leafy greens are an essential part of a healthy diet, packed with Vitamin K and naturally occurring nitrates and antioxidants. Kale, chard, spinach and rocket are all great examples. Try adding to smoothies to disguise the taste, or sneak them into your main meal.



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- Fresh fruits are much better for a 'sugar boost' than sweets or chocolate as they contain naturally occurring sugars. Darker coloured fruits like berries and dark grapes have been shown to improve memory whilst bananas and pears boost mood. However you'll feel the benefits of eating any fruit!
- Omega 3 which is found in oily fish, flaxseeds, chia seeds and walnuts, is essential to keeping your brain working well. Try adding nuts or seeds to smoothies or sprinkle them on foods; or get some oily fish like salmon or sardines into your main meal.
- Dried fruits and nuts can be a delicious and healthy alternative to sweet deserts. Try dates or apricots dipped in peanut butter or almond butter; or go for a healthy snack such as a Nakd bar.
- Caffeine in the short-term can provide a useful boost, be careful not to drink too much and not to combine it with energy drinks, as too much caffeine could result in you being unable to focus properly. A good alternative is Green tea as it provides antioxidants as well as boosting your concentration.
- When you're extremely hungry it can be easy to eat anything in sight and forget these top tips, that's why planning is key. Try discussing with your family the importance of good nutrition during this time and see if they would also like to try adding some healthy recipes to the menu.
- You could get creative with different smoothie recipes and make them in advance, so it's easy to grab at Iftar, or even easier, purchase some ready-made healthy smoothies and juices to add to the menu as well as things like fruits, veggie sticks & hummus, coconut water, nuts and dried fruits.
- The Students' Union will be giving out free fruit as part of the Study Well campaign so keep an eye out for them on campus. Also, Sodexo will be offering discounts on healthy food to support your wellbeing, so look out for nutritional items that you can save for later!
- Something that goes hand in hand with good nutrition is exercise. You may not feel like doing a challenging workout and it's good to conserve energy, however it's important to still get some light exercise in during Ramadan. Something like a gentle walk for 20 minutes during the daylight hours is a perfect way to get some fresh air and take a beneficial break from revision.
- It's a good idea to practice fasting in advance too, to ease your body into it. For example fasting for a couple of days a week for a few weeks beforehand, or starting the fast a week early.
More information about healthy eating can be found on the NHS website:
<https://www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthy-eating/Pages/Healthyeating.aspx>

[Chris Barnes](#) (Student Health Service) for her diligent work on well-being and helping to put the nutrition and wellbeing advice together



[Yasmin Bowmer](#) (Students Union) for her diligent work on well-being and helping to put the nutrition and wellbeing

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Study Well Campaign



Study Well is the Students' Union campaign to support you through the Examination Period, with a host of events, activities and more. During Ramadan, look after your wellbeing by taking advantage of the Study Well campaign.

The campaign is split into four unique themes:

Revise Well

Learning Success are offering sessions to help you get the most out of your revision. These include how to structure your revision, specific revision and exam techniques, and wellbeing tips around the exam period.

Move Well

Exercise is proven to boost concentration and improve your mood, so it's the perfect study break! Thanks to CitySport, we're offering a selection of free classes to help you relax and reenergise, such as yoga, HIIT and pure hip-hop.

Feel Well

Thanks to the Chaplaincy, we're offering a selection of guided mindfulness meditations and listening sessions, to help clear your head and make you feel better.

Relax Well

Come and take part in a whole host of fun and relaxing activities where you can chill out, recharge and enjoy yourself. Activities include a Petting Zoo, Dog Cuddle Room, Relaxation Rooms, Juggling and more! If you also want to have a power nap to boost your energy, we've got that covered too!

To keep up to date with all of the Study Well activities, be sure to check out our website citystudents.co.uk/studywell or come and talk to us at the Students' Union reception, Level 1, Tait Building.



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Credits

[Rebecca Price](#) (Directorate Operations Administrator) for her patience and support

[Ian Worsfold](#) (Chaplaincy Co-Ordinator)

& Osman Ghani LLB

Musa Admani, City University Chaplaincy



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