

Breastfeeding in Ramadan



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What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. It is an important month for Muslims as it was in this month that the Qur'an was revealed for the first time to Muhammad (pbuh), the Prophet of Islam in 610 CE.



The dates for this month vary each year, as the Islamic calendar follows the cycle of the moon, while the Western calendar follows the cycle of the sun. Lunar months are shorter than solar, which means Ramadan occurs around 10 days earlier every year. Its exact start date is different from country to country by about a day, depending on when the moon is sighted.



Once the moon announcing the new month is sighted, Muslims enter the sacred month of Ramadan. It is a period for reflection, self-restraint and sharing intended to bring Muslims closer to God.

Fasting in Ramadan

- Ramadan is also the month in which all Muslims are required to fast from dawn to dusk for the entire month as part of their religious duties
- ‘O you who have believed, decreed upon you is fasting as it was decreed upon those before you that you may become righteous.’ (Qur’an 2.183)
- A meal is eaten before dawn known as ‘Suhoor’ and this starts the fast. After this, nothing else is consumed, not even water, until sunset. A light meal known as ‘Iftar’, usually made of dates and finger foods is then taken to end the fast for that day
- Between the Iftar and the Suhoor, Muslims are allowed to drink and eat as much as they want, but since it is also night-time, most Muslims only have dinner before sleeping

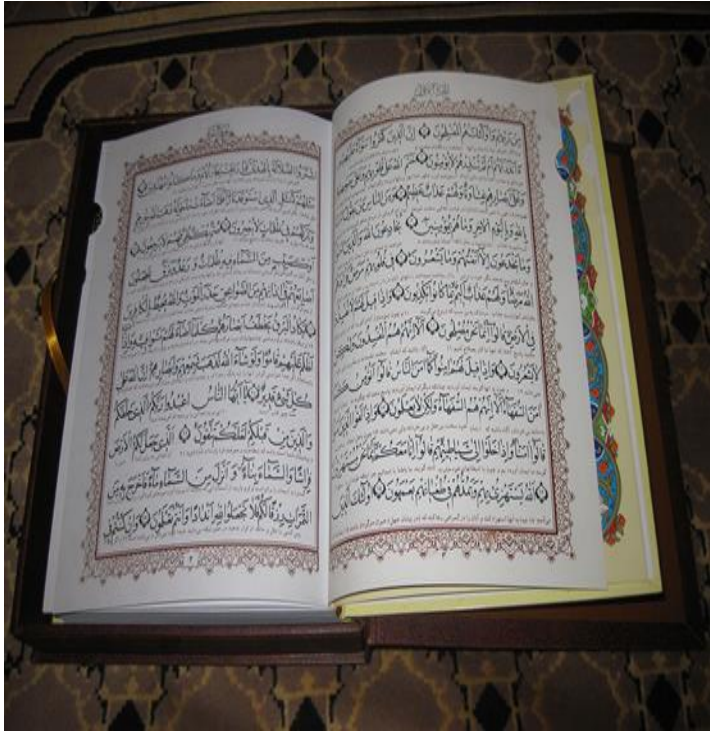


Exemption in Islam (Rukhsa):

- In Islam, for Muslims in special circumstances (e.g., ill person, elderly, traveller, poor, and so on), an exemption from performing an obligatory act, called Rukhsa, is given by Allah to accommodate for their situation
- Rukhsahs are exceptions when there are acceptable needs to justify them
- While some Muslims may feel bad to use these exemptions, as they fear they are choosing the easy way out, it is encouraged in Islam to use them according to a saying (hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) :
- ‘Verily, Allah loves for you to take His concessions, just as he dislikes for you to be disobedient.’ Musnad Ahmad
- There is a general consensus that pregnant and breastfeeding women may use the exemption from fasting Ramadan as shown in the Islamic texts.

Islamic texts

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Exemption in the Qur'an and Hadith

- While there is no precise text in the Qur'an that says that pregnant and breastfeeding women are exempted from fasting per se, the books explaining verses of the Qur'an (Tafsir) mention that the following verse refers to them as they fall in the category of an ill person:

'The month of Ramadan [is that] in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights [the new moon of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey – then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you, and perhaps you will be grateful' (Qur'an: 21.85)

- The hadith mentioning the exemption is as follows:

The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) has said: "Allah has relieved the traveller of half of the prayer and of the duty to fast, and He has relieved the pregnant and nursing mothers of the duty to fast." (Abu Daud, Tirmidhi, An-Nasai, Ahmad and Ibn Majah)

Opinion of the 4 schools of thought (Madhhab)

- Most Muslims follow one of the four schools of thought (Madhhab), which are the Hanafi, the Maliki, the Shafi'i and Hanbali school of thought when it comes to guidance on the application of the laws of Shariah. According to the four schools of thought if a pregnant or nursing woman fears for herself or her baby, she can leave fasting and make it up later.
- While all agree that if there is potential for harm then the fasting can be missed, none of them explain what sort of harm and how it can be measured. The Shafi'i Madhhab is the only one which stipulates that the illness should be significant to justify leaving the fast.
- They differ on whether the woman needs to only make up for the missed fast when her situation has improved, or she also has to pay compensation money to the poor (Fidya).
- It is a good idea for mothers to contact their own Imam/scholar if they are unsure about whether to take advantage of the exemption or not.

Criteria for using the exemption

- The common factor that most of the scholars of Islam have regarding the exemption is the element of harm, either to the baby or the mother
- What would qualify as harm and how to measure it? Since harm is relative, what is safe for one mum might not be for another and what affects one woman may not affect another
- Each breastfeeding experience is unique to the mother-baby dyad and each woman has a unique situation which may justify her taking advantage of the exemption
- Research has shown that the quality of milk is not affected in its macro-nutrients, however the micro-nutrients such as selenium, magnesium and magnesium could be reduced
- There are other ways in which mother or baby may be affected. Especially in early days, fasting can impact on the establishment of breastfeeding. The nutrient intake of mothers may reduce while fasting. Some mothers might feel too tired/weak to look after baby or to feed him



Other considerations :

Age of the baby:

First 6 months – baby entirely depending on Mum's milk and has no other source of nutrition

6- 12 months – Weaning. With the introduction of solid food, breastmilk will provide half or more of the child's nutritional needs. If solid intake is low babies can still rely heavily on milk

1-2 years – Breastmilk provides up to one third of a child's nutritional needs, and most of the nutrition is from solid food. However, breastfeeding is still important for emotional and immune support

Number of feeds: some babies feed for longer and others have frequent short feeds

Developmental stages: if baby is going through milestones such as growth spurt, sleep regression, this might make them more in need of breastfeeding

Health issues: If baby is poorly due to cold/flu, vaccination, teething which might reduce their solid intake



Signs of dehydration in mother

While there is no set way for mothers to know if they are dehydrated there are some symptoms which are obvious:

- Feeling very thirsty
- Constipation
- Dark color urine/ less urine
- Feeling dizzy or light-headed
- Have a dry mouth, lips and eyes
- Developing a headache
- Fatigue and a lack of energy
- Severe dehydration can lead to mothers feeling disoriented and confused, or faint. If this happens then it is advisable to contact a health professional and if required they can also break their fast



Signs to look for in babies

Some babies might be affected indirectly by the fasting of the mother and there are some red flags that a mother need to look out for in their babies:

- Asks for feeds but seems discontent or dissatisfied after feeding.
- Has fewer wet and dirty nappies than usual
- Has lost weight or isn't putting on weight
- The skin looks dry and wrinkled
- Seems generally unsettled & cranky
- Is drowsy and tired
- Sleeping more than normal
- Very few or no tears when crying
- Urine that is dark colour

A mother is the best judge of what is normal in her baby and what is not.

She should trust her instincts if she feels something is amiss and take the necessary steps.

Other acts of worship (Ibadah) that mothers can do apart from fasting

While fasting is the most rewarding act of worship in Ramadan, there are other ways for those who are not fasting to reap the benefits of Ramadan. Below is a short list of acts of worship that pregnant or nursing women can do with ease:

- Feed those who are fasting: There is great merit in cooking and sharing food with those who are fasting, whether family members or friends and neighbours
- Give charity: The Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) used to be more generous in Ramadan and would give more in charity. The reward for giving charity is greater in Ramadan
- Making personal request to Allah (Dua): This is a very encouraged action in Ramadan as God answers the request of people more in this month
- Qur'an recitation: As Ramadan is the month in which Qur'an was revealed, Muslims are encouraged to do lots of Qur'an recitation or study it in this month. There are so many apps on mobile phones where mothers can listen to the recitation
- Doing remembrance of God (Zikr): This is a very easy worship to do while sitting but again very rewarding
- Taking care of the family: Even the act of taking care of the house and the family can be an act of worship if done with the right intention

Tips for fasting mothers

For those breastfeeding mothers who find they can fast, either because their babies are older or because they have done it before and found it manageable there are a few things they can do to help them manage their days:

- Plan ahead-minimise your workload in Ramadan
- Do any deep cleaning well before Ramadan while your energy level is high
- Prepare meals in big batches in advance and freeze them
- Prioritise what is most important and cut back on things that are not a priority, example delegate shopping to others
- Plan a daily nap where possible to make up for the missed sleep during night feeds
- Ask for and accept help from others
- Have some low key, low prep activities in mind for older children
- Bear in mind that babies might want to feed more during the night and plan some activities to do during the night feeds, for example reading
- Expect baby to want to feed while it is Iftar/Suhoor and to have some food that is easy to prepare
- Remember it's not selfish to think of your own needs. You can't give from an empty cup.



Iftar and Suhoor ideas

- Breastfeeding mothers should avoid skipping Suhoor while breastfeeding to get as much calories as possible
- A balanced diet including all the different nutrients, over the course of the two meals and anything in between is recommended
- Stay hydrated, by drinking frequently and eating veg and fruits that are good sources of extra fluids too
- Keeping a water bottle close by between iftar and Suhoor and drinking often is a good idea
- Nuts, seeds, dates and dried fruit are nutrient dense and easily portable and can be easily eaten while breastfeeding babies during the night
- Have fresh fruit, dates and smoothies for Iftar for a quick boost of energy
- For dinner, avoiding heavy, oily and salty foods as much as possible
- Eggs, soups and smoothies are quick and easy to prepare/reheat and eat at Suhoor time
- Try to plan meals in advance to ensure they have a balance of nutrients



Conclusion

Ramadan is a very spiritual and rewarding month and a woman can still benefit from its spirit whether she is fasting or not. The decision to fast is a personal one that she has to take based on her circumstances. Her own well-being and that of her child should be the main priority. God will never ask something that is beyond the means of the individual and a mother will know her own limits, and what is right for her and her baby.

She should not feel pressurised or guilty for whatever choice she makes.

Mothers and families can contact Leicester Mammias at any time for sensitive and non-judgemental support -

Mammias Breastfeeding Helpline - 07794667791 Gujarati/Hindi/Urdu line - 07794667901

You can also come to one of our Baby Cafes to get face-to face support – [Drop-In Groups \(mammias.org.uk\)](https://mammias.org.uk)

