

Ramadan diabetes health education –a guide for the fasting diabetic

In the holy month of Ramadan, every healthy adult has an obligation to fast. However, Islam exempts those who have some acute and chronic ailments – diabetes being amongst one of those. If patients with Diabetes choose to fast, then the following information and advice is extremely important to support their decision. It is highly recommended that an Individual care plan is made for every diabetic by their treating doctor prior to the start of Ramadan. The message is to be 'SAFE'.

1. Doctor, can I fast?

Dr Mehjabeen Beebeejaun has designed a risk calculator which she uses in her practice as a guide for both the patient and the healthcare team to predict complications of fasting if a patient has diabetes.

Ramadan Fasting Risk Calculator*

Questions	YES	NO	My Score
1 Do you have well controlled diabetes by diet only -HbA1c <7%?	0	1	
2 Do you take tablets for your diabetes?	1	0	
3 Are you on insulin?	2	0	
4 Do you frequent low blood glucose < 4mmol/L?	3	0	
5 Have you recently been admitted for a very low or very high blood sugar?	3	0	
6 Do you have complications of diabetes(Eyes, heart,kidneys,feet)?	2	0	
Total			

Low Risk Score 0-1 OK to fast	Moderate Risk Score 2-3 Fast with caution	High Risk Score ≥4 Fast not advised
--	--	--

**Does not apply for pregnant diabetics – Pregnant women should not fast as they put both their unborn child and themselves at risk. This is only an indicator and should not replace medical advice*

Meet Abu Samad and Safia:

“ AbuSamad is 68 and has diabetes for the past 25 years. He has poor control with lots of hypos and recently had a heart attack. He takes insulin. Doctor can I fast?”

Ramadan Fasting Risk Calculator score :8 hence High Risk

“Safia is 47 and has good diabetes control on metformin. No complications of diabetes. Doctor can I fast?”

Ramadan Fasting Risk Calculator score : 1 hence Low Risk

2. What problems can I get during fasting if I have diabetes?

- High blood sugars especially after Iftar
- Low blood sugars during the day and sometimes after Taraweeh prayers
- Dehydration

3. Can I still test my blood sugars – could that break my fast?

It is very important that you check your blood sugars regularly to keep safe. No, testing will not break your fast.

4. What should I do if I feel unwell?

Test your blood glucose. You could either be having a 'hypo' – glucose < 4.0 mmol/L or a 'hyper' – glucose > 16 mmol/L. They can both cause you to become very ill and it is wise to break your fast if the situation is getting out of control.

5. Can I miss Sehri?

No. Ensure that Sehri is never missed to ensure a good balance of your blood glucose. Plenty of fluids should be taken between Iftar and Sehri. Avoid more than 1 glass of fruit juice – freshly pressed fruit juices have a high sugar content.

6. What should I eat at Sehri and Iftar?

At Suhoor, eat more starchy carbohydrates which release energy slowly such as semolina, whole wheat rotis, basmati rice, beans, dhal, pasta etc (moderate portion). Always include a fruit and a vegetable. At Iftar, avoid eating more than 2 dates as the sugar content is high – even if they are fresh dates.

7. Can I go to Taraweeh prayers?

Yes. Remember that Taraweeh prayers is intense exercise and can result in a hypo after. Check your blood sugar at the start and after prayers. Make sure you carry some sweets (3-4 Jelly Beans) to treat a hypo if you get one. This should be followed by 1 or 2 sweet biscuits or a piece of bread.

8. Do I need to change my treatment if I am on tablets?

Some tablets can increase the risk of low blood sugars. Timings and dose might need to change or they can be replaced with other oral medications that do not cause hypos. Discuss with your doctor.

9. What if I'm on insulin – what needs to change?

Fasting while on insulin is challenging but not impossible if you have good control of diabetes and you choose to fast. Some insulin regimens are more likely to cause hypos. A

more flexible regime should be established by your doctor. Note that if you have Type1 Diabetes, it is imperative that you don't miss your injections – timings need to be reviewed. Check your blood glucose regularly – this does not break your fast

Essential Take Home Messages

1. Check your blood sugars regularly. This does not break your fast
2. Drink plenty of non sugary drinks between Sehri and Iftar
3. Always carry some sweets(Jelly Beans or Small carton orange juice) if you are going for Taraweeh prayers in case you have a hypo.
4. Do your Ramadan Risk Calculator score and discuss with your doctor about medication adjustments
5. Plan carefully and fast safely

Dr Mehjabeen Beebeejaun *MBChB MRCP CCST Diabetes and Endocrinology ((London, UK)*

Consultant Physician, Diabetologist and Endocrinologist