

## How to Fast

Article taken and slightly adapted from: [newmuslims.com](http://newmuslims.com)

---

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

### 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 article we will focus only on the most important obligatory fasts that are kept in the month of Ramadhaan.

### Fasting In Ramadhaan

Fasting in Ramadhaan is one of the five pillars of Islaam as the Prophet (*May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him*) said:

**“Islaam is built on five pillars: testifying that there is no true god worthy of worship except Allaah and that Muhammad is His Messenger, the establishment of the prayer, the giving of zakaah, the fast of Ramadhaan, and the pilgrimage to Makkah.”<sup>1</sup>**

Fasting in Ramadhaan is an obligation on every Muslim who has reached the age of puberty. Allaah said in the Qur'aan:

**[“So whoever witnesses the month should fast it.”]<sup>2</sup>**

Whoever does not fast during Ramadhaan 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 appears:

- (a) Discharge of semen, whether by experiencing a wet dream or otherwise
- (b) Growth of pubic hair

---

<sup>1</sup> Saheeh al-Bukhaaree

<sup>2</sup> Qur'aan [2:185]

## How to Fast

(c) Menstruation

(d) A person has turned 15

**(2)** If you are travelling in Ramadhaan, 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 Ramadhaan.

**(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 Ramadhaan.

**(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 Ramadhaan 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 Ramadhaan they miss.

### How do I Fast in Ramadhaan?

Intend in your heart the night before that you will fast the next day based on what the Prophet, may Allaah praise him, said:

**“There is no fast for the person who did not intend to fast from the night before.”<sup>3</sup>**

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

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 no basis for this and should be ignored, as clear texts show that it is allowed to eat and drink up and until the

---

<sup>3</sup> An-Nasaa'ee

## How to Fast

time of Fajr. Allow yourself enough time beforehand to eat and drink, because if you wake up late after time for Fajr has started, you cannot 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 Salaah begins when the sun sets. That's also when you 'break' your fast and can resume eating and drinking. This meal is called 'Iftaar', or breakfast. The Prophet, *(May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him)*, would first break his fast, even if only with a sip of water<sup>4</sup>, and then pray the dusk or Maghrib Salaah. 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 Allaah praise him, said:

**“If he forgets, and eats and drinks, then let him complete his fast, for Allaah has fed him and given him to drink.”<sup>5</sup>**

- 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, may Allaah praise him, said:

**“Whoever vomits unintentionally does not have to make up the fast later, but whoever vomits on purpose does have to make up the fast.”<sup>6</sup>**

---

<sup>4</sup> From Anas bin Maalik *(May Allaah the Most High be pleased with him)* 'that the Messenger *(May the peace and blessings of Allaah the Most High be upon him)* used to break fast upon a few moist dates before he would pray, if there were no moist dates then he would break fast upon a few dry dates, and if there were none then he would take a few sips of water.' [Taken from: 'Silsilah as-Saheehah' No. 2840 of Shaykh al-Albaanee *(May Allaah the Most High have mercy on him)*].

<sup>5</sup> Saheeh al-Bukhaaree

## How to Fast

- Smoking, prohibited at all times, also invalidates the fast.<sup>7</sup>

### Special regulations for women

#### (1) Menstruation and 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 Ramadhaan.

#### (2) Pregnancy and nursing

Both nursing and pregnant women are required to fast in Ramadhaan. 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:  
<http://islamqa.info/en/search?key=fasting>.

---

<sup>6</sup> Al-Tirmidhee

<sup>7</sup> For other details about some common issues regarding what does and does not break the fast, please see: <http://Islaamqa.info/en/cat/298>, and <http://Islaamqa.info/en/cat/464>.