

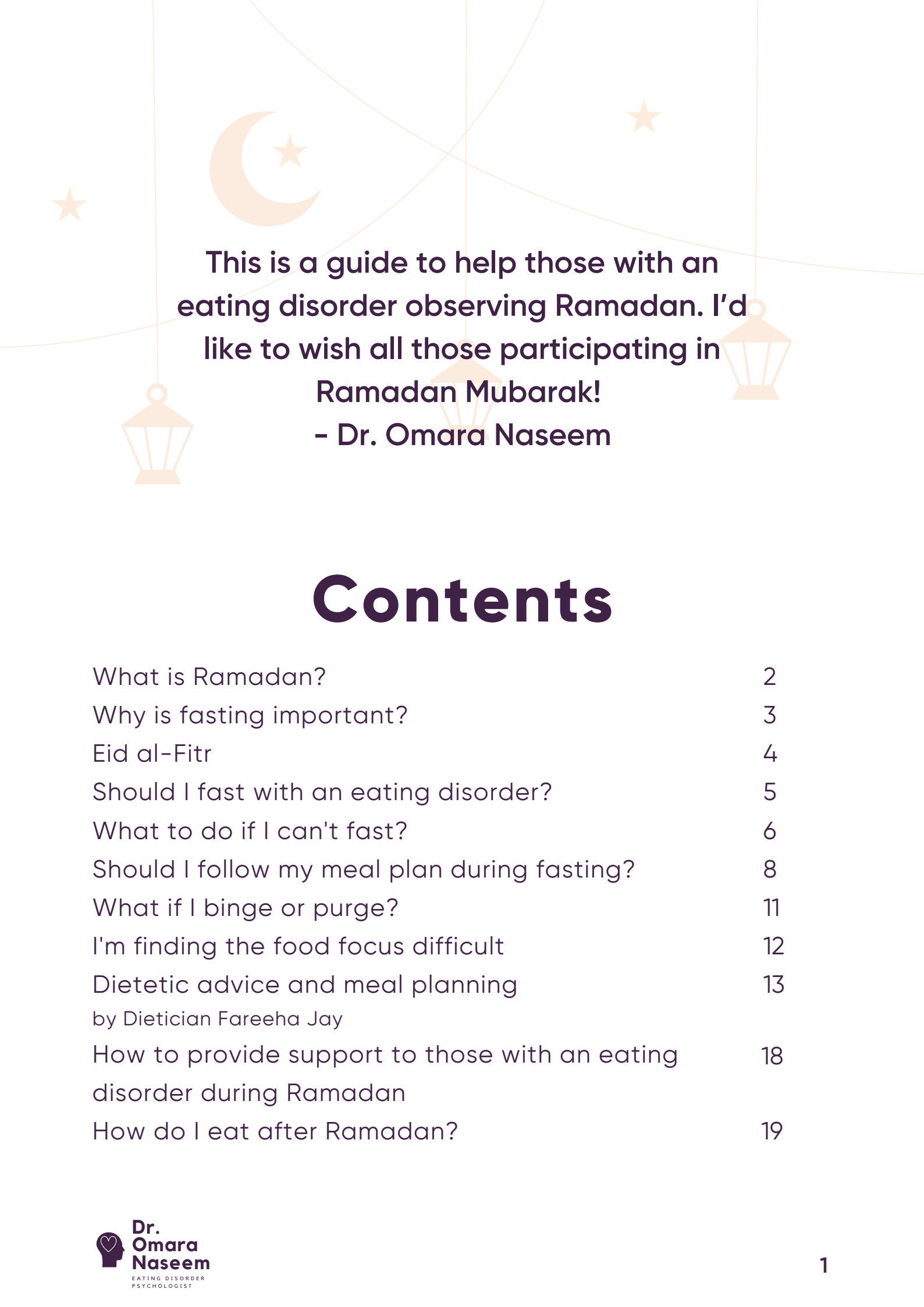


A Guide to Ramadan and eating disorders

Dr. Omara Naseem

EATING DISORDER PSYCHOLOGIST

Beat
Eating disorders



This is a guide to help those with an eating disorder observing Ramadan. I'd like to wish all those participating in Ramadan Mubarak!
- Dr. Omara Naseem

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What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and is a month of fasting. It is a month of spiritual reflection, self-improvement, and heightened devotion and worship. Those taking part in Ramadan don't eat or drink and are mindful of their thoughts between the hours of sunrise (Fajr) and sunset, allowing them instead to focus on prayer and connecting with Allah (SWT).

Fasting allows the individual to understand the pain and suffering of those less fortunate in the world who live in poverty and famine, leaving the participant feeling more grounded and grateful for all that they have. Ramadan includes Laylat al-Qadr, which is considered the holiest night of the year.

At the end of the month, people make Zakat donations and then Eid al-Fitr is celebrated with loved ones. Eid is a great time of feasting and celebration for Muslims, with gifts exchanged between loved ones.



Why is fasting important?

Fasting during Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. Fasting from sunrise to sunset is fard (obligatory) for all adult Muslims. However, Muslims who are ill, travelling, elderly, breastfeeding, diabetic, or menstruating do not have to fast. This also includes those with mental health difficulties who would experience negative effects from fasting.

The predawn meal is referred to as sehri or suhur, and the nightly feast that breaks the fast is called iftar. The spiritual rewards of fasting are believed to be multiplied during Ramadan. So Muslims avoid not only food and drink, but also tobacco products and sexual relations. Muslims are expected to put more effort into following the teachings of Islam, devoting themselves instead to salat (prayer) and recitation of the Quran.

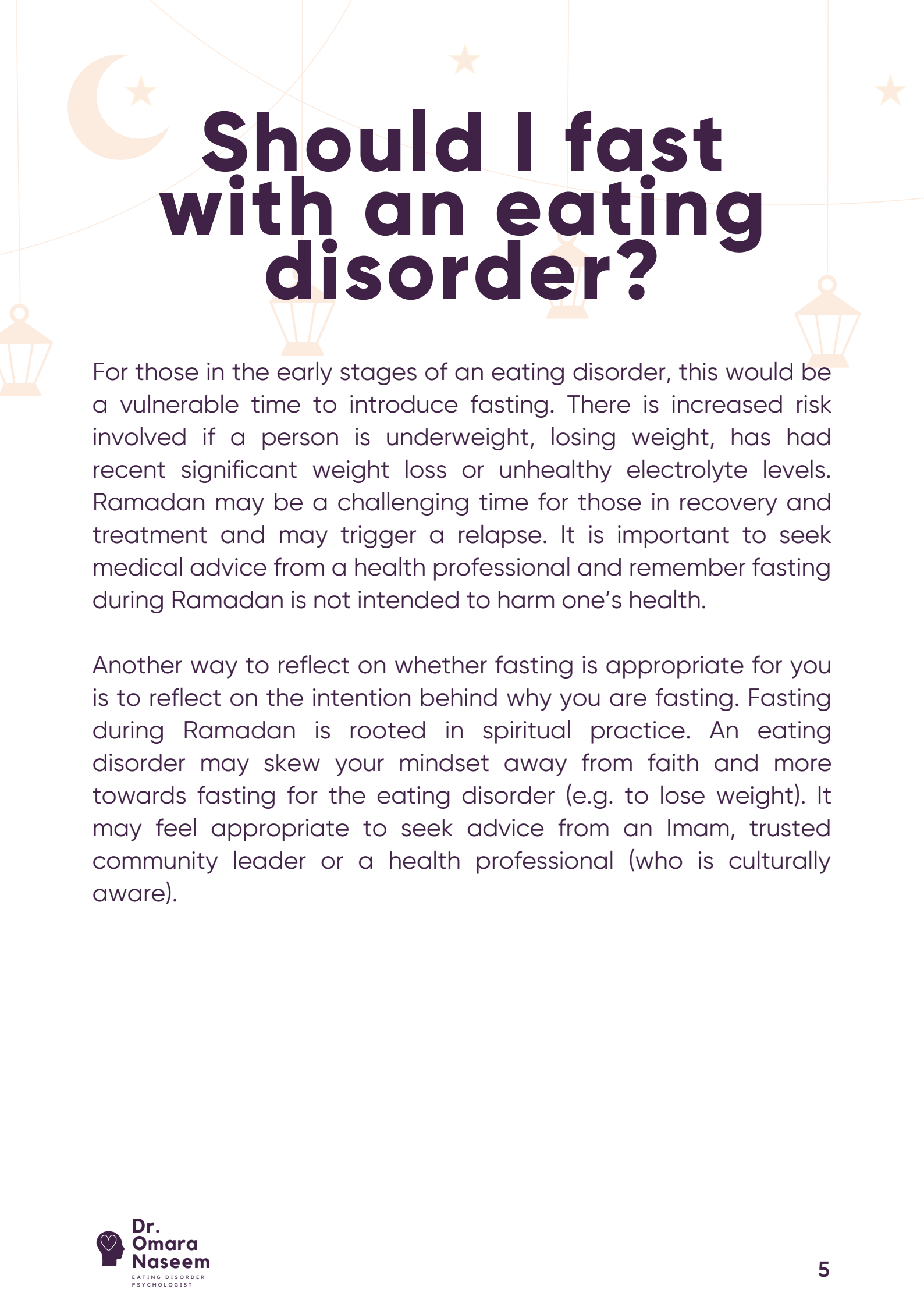
During this time, fasting is more than just abstinence; it is a means of worship and for Muslims to feel a closer and deeper connection with Allah (SWT). Muslims are expected to put more effort into following the teachings of Islam and increase their ibadah (acts of worship). Fasting helps individuals understand what it means to go without and to learn patience with oneself and those around them, as well as compassion for those less fortunate. It acts a form of cleansing the soul and redirects attention away from our usual daily distractions. Ramadan teaches Muslims to practice self-discipline, sacrifice, and empathy for those who are less fortunate, encouraging acts of generosity and charity.

Eid al-Fitr

Eid al-Fitr marks the end of Ramadan and is the final act of celebration following a month of fasting. During Eid, which is celebrated for two to three days, Muslims wear their best clothes and attend Eid prayers. Following this, friends and family gather together, share celebratory meals and exchange gifts.



If you are suffering with an eating disorder Ramadan may lead to fear and confusion over whether to fast. It's important to talk with someone close to you, such as a trusted family member or friend who can offer you support during this time. It's also important to address any feelings of shame that may arise and understand that fasting is not obligatory for those whose health would be negatively affected. You can take part in Ramadan in other ways.



Should I fast with an eating disorder?

For those in the early stages of an eating disorder, this would be a vulnerable time to introduce fasting. There is increased risk involved if a person is underweight, losing weight, has had recent significant weight loss or unhealthy electrolyte levels. Ramadan may be a challenging time for those in recovery and treatment and may trigger a relapse. It is important to seek medical advice from a health professional and remember fasting during Ramadan is not intended to harm one's health.

Another way to reflect on whether fasting is appropriate for you is to reflect on the intention behind why you are fasting. Fasting during Ramadan is rooted in spiritual practice. An eating disorder may skew your mindset away from faith and more towards fasting for the eating disorder (e.g. to lose weight). It may feel appropriate to seek advice from an Imam, trusted community leader or a health professional (who is culturally aware).

What do I do if I can't fast?

If you have made the decision not to fast there are other ways in which you can take part in Ramadan and reap the benefits of the holy month. You can make arrangements for Fidyah, which is a charitable donation offered if you are unable to fast during Ramadan. When you are unable to fast, Allah (SWT) still allows you to share in the reward of Ramadan in various ways, including Fidyah to the poor. Fidyah applies to the person who cannot fast for a valid health-related reason.

Make sure you have adequate food so you can eat according to your meal plan throughout the day (especially if shops around you will be closed). It would be worthwhile having a conversation with those you live with to explain that you will not be fasting to reduce any shame or pressure and allow you to be transparent.



What do I do if I can't fast?

If you feel comfortable, you could also help with prepping the iftar meal and joining in, as this also holds spiritual reward. You can also focus on building your spiritual practice by increasing your salat and dhikr. For example, you can aim to read four pages of the Quran after every namaz, which will enable you to complete the Quran during Ramadan. Focusing on your personal spiritual goals in Ramadan will help you to still take part and find meaning in the experience.

Other ideas may include watching Islamic lectures on YouTube, making a list of daily duas to recite, downloading an Islamic app to increase your knowledge, and engaging in more charitable activities.

Should I follow my meal plan while fasting?

If you have decided to fast, please speak with your therapist/clinician regarding how to best structure your sehri and iftar meals. Your energy requirements will be individual to you so planning with your clinician/therapist is important to help gain support with this. Preparing meal ideas beforehand and sharing these with your support system will help. Having a meal at sehri is a part of the practice, so do not be tempted to miss this meal. Try to include energy-boosting foods consisting of complex carbohydrates. Some ideas are: barley, oats, cereal, breads, yoghurt, paratha, eggs or dates.



Should I follow my meal plan while fasting?

For iftari it can be overwhelming if faced with a wide range of foods at once.

- Aim to break your fast with dates and water (as is the Sunnah) which allows your blood sugar levels to gradually rise. If feeling overwhelmed ask for someone to help you put a small plate together and help with portion sizes. This will help you have a better idea of what you are eating, minimise confusion around portion sizes, and manage feelings of distress around large amounts of food.
- Start with a small meal such as yoghurt with fruit or starters and take a break. You can use this time to pray maghrib. This will allow for slower and easier digestion and avoid the crash that can often occur when having a large meal straightaway. This will also help to protect against overeating or bingeing.

Should I follow my meal plan while fasting?

After maghrib, return and have a main meal and eat with others if possible to help with portion control and pace and to enjoy the experience of sharing iftar together.

The iftar meal should be made up of energy-dense food after fasting for the day, so try to include a mix of:

- Complex carbohydrates (such as potatoes, rice, bread)
- Protein such as chicken, fish or meat.
- Fibre in the form of lentils, beans or fruit to aid with digestion.

Due to the short window of time between sehri and iftar meals, having dessert would help ensure you have enough energy required for the next day's fast. It is common to have a milk-based dessert or even a yoghurt-based drink to help settle the stomach.



Hydration is key to ensure a safe and healthy fast. Aim to drink water gradually from iftar to sehri and eat dates to help prevent dehydration. The change in eating pattern will present challenges and take time to get used to so please remember to ask for support from those close to you during mealtimes and in general through Ramadan.

What if I binge or purge?

You might be worried about bingeing and purging due to long fasting hours and feelings of hunger. To protect against and minimise binge/purge urges, it is important not to skip sehri or iftar meals. Ensure these meals are balanced and provide you with energy rich foods to allow you to have adequate energy throughout the day. It's worth remembering that restricting will likely lead to bingeing so try to eat slowly and pace yourself as you eat. Having a break between opening your fast and eating a main meal will also help with this.

It is normal to feel full after iftar. Practicing tolerating this feeling prior to starting fasting may help you with managing this feeling during Ramadan. It's a good idea to have enjoyable activities set up for after iftar, which can help you tolerate this feeling as it passes and avoid purging. Some ideas may include:

- Dhikr
- Namaz
- Reciting Qur'an
- Listening to spiritual lectures
- Mindful colouring
- Meditative breathing
- Watching an episode of something you enjoy
- Listening to a podcast
- Playing a game with family/friends

Remember, it is normal to feel this way after a meal, and focusing on those with you or a list of activities to do to help you pass this temporary feeling will help.

If purging does happen, try to draw a line under it and carry on with your next meal as usual. Your fast will be broken, so you can hydrate and have dates to help you rebalance your blood sugar. Try to reflect on what you could do different next time if this urge to binge or purge rises again and what you could put in place that will help. It may be useful to think back on the day and notice triggers and reflect on what you could have done different that would have helped the day flow different. This may be eating smaller meals at iftar or more carbs with sehri to feel fuller for longer. You can speak with your therapist/clinician to help you make positive changes to your eating pattern if needed.

"I'm finding the food focus difficult"

It's a good idea to think about how you deal with this during other months of the year. You could implement strategies like switching the conversation to other topics (have some prepped and ready), practice some mindfulness techniques to help keep you grounded and focused, or say you have somewhere to be and excuse yourself if the conversation becomes overwhelming. If possible, share with those close to you that you struggle with the food-focused talk, and they can help support you further.

Dietetic advice and meal planning

from Dietician Fareeha Jay

Meal planning will be crucial if you decide to fast. This may be your first Ramadan after recovering so it's worth planning what you will eat for suhoor and iftar weekly for the whole of Ramadan. Give yourself a few choices so that you can alternate and ensure that you are having a good variety of food.

Suhoor and Iftar

It is extremely important to have a well-balanced diet at suhoor and iftar. Making the right choice will help you feel energetic throughout Ramadan.

Apart from including fluid, the following food groups should be included at suhoor and iftar.



Fruit and Vegetables:

Not only are fruit and vegetables a source of vitamins, mineral and phytochemicals but they also contain fibre, which will keep you energised and fuller for longer.



Complex Carbohydrates:

Making sure to include one form of starchy carbohydrates and to choose whole grain options. They are released slower in your body and will help you to sustain energy throughout the day.



Protein:

Combine the whole grain carbs with any source of protein. It will help you maintain your muscles and keep you functioning during the day.

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Healthy Fats:

Including healthy fats will help absorb the vitamins and minerals from the other foods and you will feel satisfied all day. All our body cells have membranes made from fats, and many substances such as hormones are also made from fats, so we need the right kind of fats and oils from our foods. These come from oily fish, and also from nut and seed oils and olive oil. Use olive oil, and oils such as nut oils and rapeseed oil for cooking, dressings and sauces. Fat-soluble vitamins (vitamins A, D, E and K) are present in the fatty elements of foods such as cheese, eggs, milk, butter and spreads, oily fish, nuts and seeds.

Complex Carbohydrates

Whole grain bread
Whole grain (roti/chapatti/paratha)
Oats
Whole grain barley
Bulgar wheat
Buckwheat
Couscous
Quinoa
Rice (Brown/Basmati)
Brown pasta
Potatoes

Fruit & Vegetables

Fruits
Dates
Prunes
Grapes
Apples
Bananas
Watermelon
Mango
Pomegranate
Or any fruit of your choice

Vegetables
Squash
Aubergine
Cucumber
Cauliflower
Cabbage
Lettuce
Courgette
Or any vegetable of your choice

Protein

Eggs
Chicken
Fish
Turkey
Lentils
Beans
Milk
Yoghurt
Cheese

Healthy Fats

Nuts and seeds
Nut butters
Olive oil
Coconut oil
Rapeseed oil used in cooking
Olives
Avocado
Spreads

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Suhoor Meal Ideas

1. Beans on toast (cheese optional), glass of milk, orange, and nuts.
2. Wholemeal tortilla wrap, vegetables of your choice (tomatoes, lettuce), chicken or egg with cheese and avocado.
3. Vegetable omelette with paratha/roti/bread, cheese, and dried figs.
4. Oat porridge with a banana and nuts.
5. Overnight oats with milk or yogurt, fruit, and chia seeds.
6. Talbina with dates and nuts.
7. Brown bagel with zaatar, labneh (type of yogurt) olives and any piece of fruit.
8. Bean stew from fava beans with olive oil, lemon juice and garlic, bread, and grapes.
9. Shami kebab made from chicken and split lentils. Roti, salad, lassi and nuts.
10. Chana masala, roti, yogurt, salad, or any fruit of choice.
11. Granola topped with yogurt, berries, and nuts.
12. Toasted bread with nut butter, sliced banana, topped with chia seeds and a glass of milk.
13. Pancake with fruit, nuts, and natural yogurt.
14. Shakshuka with bread and a glass of milk.
15. Pitta pockets with chicken, vegetables, cheese filling and grapes.

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Iftar Meal Ideas

Option I.

Opt for a two-course iftar. (See page 9 again)

First course followed by dates, fruit, yogurt, lassi, smoothie or soup. After taking a break go for the second course, which will be your main meal.

Option II.

1. Chicken, with sweet potato and roasted vegetables.
2. Fish tagine, vegetables, and rice.
3. Teriyaki chicken, with boiled rice and steamed broccoli.
4. Baked salmon, potatoes, and green beans.
5. Chicken tikka with oven baked chips and steamed vegetables.
6. Roti/chapati with chicken /mutton curry and pea curry.
7. Pitta bread, chicken, yogurt and tomato, cucumber, and lettuce salad.
8. Roti/chapati spiced baked aubergine with mince or lentils.
9. Roti/chapati with lentil and squash/marrow curry.
10. Chicken stir fry with noodles.
11. Roti/chapati with chickpeas and spinach curry.
12. Falafel with bulgur, rocket, cucumber, and tomato salad.
13. Roasted lamb with rice and Greek salad (tomatoes, cucumber,

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onions, and olives).

14. Pasta with chicken mince and vegetables.
15. Rice noodles with chicken/fish and vegetables.
16. Tika marinade with potatoes and steamed vegetables.
17. Roti/Chapati with split pea lentils and aubergine.
18. Chicken Maqluba (chicken, cauliflower, eggplant, potatoes, rice).
19. Roti/chapati with korma and cauliflower bites.
20. Fasolia (Arabic white bean stew) with rice and salad.
21. Flat bread and moussaka.
22. Roti/chapati, aloo cholay with a cucumber salad.
23. Turkey sandwich and avocado salad.
24. Chicken biryani with kachumar salad.
25. Jacket potato with beans or tuna and a side salad.
26. Kebab roll with a tomato salad.

*Can include a portion of milk, cheese, or dairy with all the above meals.

Dessert

Any dessert of your choice, preferably going for milk and starchy carbs-based desserts.



How to provide support to those with an eating disorder this Ramadan?

It is important for carers, parents, loved ones, friends, co-workers and teachers to understand how to support someone with an eating disorder during Ramadan. Here are some top tips.

- Compassionately remind the person that they are exempt from fasting and there is no need to feel guilty. Encourage them to engage in Ramadan in other ways.
- Avoid talking about food, dieting and weight and talk about other topics.
- If possible, provide meal support or helpful prompts to encourage and ensure they are still following their meal plan according to their recovery plan.
- Include them in iftar or if this is overwhelming then in the post-iftar activities to engage in observing Ramadan together.
- Ask the person what they need in terms of support as everyone is individual with a unique set of needs. Knowing the offer is there will be reassuring.

How do I eat after Ramadan?

It is important to remember the intention behind fasting and return to your normal eating pattern after Ramadan with the support of your therapist/clinician. When returning to eating three meals it may be easier to eat small regular meals (even splitting these into two if easier) throughout the day to allow you to get used to eating regularly again.

It is normal to feel some discomfort tolerating regular meal sizes again, which may tempt you into using behaviours to cope. If this happens it's worth remembering that this feeling will soon pass, continue to eat regularly and use your coping strategies (implemented at iftari times).



Dr.
Omara
Naseem

EATING DISORDER
PSYCHOLOGIST