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Fasting during COVID-19 Pandemic



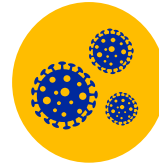
COVID-19 virus infection is transmitted from a person to another through sprayed virus-infested droplets when coughing or sneezing, or by touching contaminated surfaces and then touching eyes, mouth and nose.

Many countries including Saudi Arabia have imposed strict precautionary measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 virus infection by applying the concept of social distancing which is key to control the spread of the virus. Containment measures include mass prayers, Umrah and Hajj.



Social Distancing Regulations:

- Keep a distance of at least 2 meters between you and others.
- Avoid crowds as much as possible.
- Refrain from handshaking, hugging and kissing to greet others and instead use culturally sensitive non-physical gestures like waving or placing hand on chest.



Fasting and COVID-19 Virus Infection:

No studies or researches have been done about the fasting and COVID-19 virus infection, therefore, there is no reason why healthy people cannot safely perform this religious ritual during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, people who are infected with COVID-19 virus are religiously and medically permitted to break there fasting.



Fasting for People who are at High-risk:

People with chronic diseases like respiratory diseases, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, deficient immune system and people over the age of 60, such categories are considered high-risk for respiratory infections including COVID-19 virus infection. Moreover, scientific studies have shown that such categories of people are more severely affected if they get infected with COVID-19 virus.

The above-mentioned categories are advised to do the following before fasting:

- Consult with your doctor before deciding to fast.
- It is important to discuss the treatment plan with your doctor, this involves frequency and doses of your medications, attending your hospital or virtual appointments (video calls, phone calls) with your doctor or healthcare provider whenever possible.
- Discuss your nutrition plans during fasting with your dietitian like meal types, portions and times as well as interchangeable foods.
- Follow instructions given by your doctor or healthcare provider.



Healthy Diet:

Fasting brings changes to dietary habits like meal times and food types. Therefore, it is vital to follow health, balanced and complete diet in order to boost the immune system especially during COVID-19 pandemic. Healthy foods like fruits, vegies and healthy fats. It also important to keep your body hydrated by drinking sufficient amounts of water. Dehydration has negative impact on the body like dizziness, headache and feeling lethargic not to mention dry skin and constipation.

To achieve a health and balanced diet during Ramadan do the following:

- Break your fasting immediately after hearing the call for Dusk prayers and have your Sahour as late as possible in compliance of the teachings of Prophet Mohammed (PBUH).
- Break your fast with dates and simple sugars that are easily absorbed by the body therefore reducing the sense of hunger and fatigue caused by fasting.
- It is recommended that Iftar and Sahour meals contain essential dietary elements like proteins; poultry or meats. Complex carbohydrates; whole grains and Oats. Legumes; lintel, flour, brown rice in addition to healthy fats like olive oil.
- Healthy cooking using steam, grill or fry using air fryers.
- Eat fresh or dried fruits instead of sweets.
- Reduce salt and salty foods that cause you to be thirsty during fasting.

Excess intake of food between Iftar and Sahour will lead to weight gain therefore causing diabetes, hypercholesterolemia and other chronic diseases.



Physical Activity:

It is important to have a healthy lifestyle during fasting in order to boost the immune system in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. This can be achieved by engaging in physical activity keeping in mind social distancing taking into consideration the following:

- Do mild to moderate workouts like walking and avoid intense workouts that may affect the immune system negatively.
- Do workouts in the evening at least 2 hours after Iftar or shortly before Iftar. Do not work out during the day.
- Use apps available on the electronic and social platforms. Allocate a space at home for exercise equipment and enjoy watching shows while working out.
- Engage in household activities like gardening, cleaning and other activities.



Quit Smoking:

It is well known that all types of smoking have negative effects on health. Smokers are considered high-risk for developing respiratory diseases in general especially COVID-19 virus infection. They are also more prone to be infected than others are.

When smoking cigarettes, the hand, fingertips and even a COVID-19 virus-polluted cigarette might will transmit the infection when touching the lips and mouth, which might increase the chance of the virus sneaking into the respiratory system. Hookah smokers usually share the same hose increasing the likelihood of spreading the infection. In addition, hookah itself and its accessories may harbor all types of germs and viruses.

Fasting especially during the COVID-19 pandemic is an excellent opportunity to quit smoking. It is important to utilize the fasting periods to quit all types of smoking.

References:

<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/331767/WHO-2019-nCoV-Ramadan-2020.1-eng.pdf>