

A NEW MUSLIM'S GUIDE TO *Fasting*





Definition

Fasting in Islam means to abstain from food, drink and intimacy for the daytime hours from dawn to dusk, as an act of devotion for the sake of God.

What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar. It was the month in which the revelation of the Quran began to the Messenger Muhammad. It is the month in which Muslims fast. Fasting is one of the most significant acts of worship in Islam. Fasting Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam.



What is so special about Ramadan??

Ramadan is the month of the Quran and extra devotion and worship. Night vigil, mosque retreat, charity, feeding people and other communal and individual good deeds are concentrated in Ramadan. Fasting during the month of Ramadan has many virtues and rewards. The Messenger Muhammad told us that fasting this month sincerely and correctly brings about forgiveness for all sins. Ramadan is the month of mercy and great reward from God.



Why do Muslims fast in Ramadan?

Muslims fast in Ramadan because God commanded them to. God consciousness and purification of oneself are some of the objectives. Other wisdoms include using this month to come closer to God through worship and in particular, the study of the Quran. In Ramadan we are reminded of God's favours and blessings and therefore should increase in our thanks and gratitude. Fasting helps us to achieve self-discipline and trains us to control our desires. It also allows us to empathise with those who often go hungry and thirsty.



Virtues of Fasting

There are many virtues of fasting. From them is that it protects a person from the Hellfire. It is a way in which our sins are expiated. The devotion of fasting will intercede on behalf of those who fasted on the Day of Judgement. One of the gates of Paradise is reserved only for those who fasted. The Messenger Muhammad said, "Every good action is multiplied from ten up to seven hundred times for reward. God says, 'Except for fasting for it is for Me alone, and I will reward it accordingly.'"



When does Ramadan begin?

The Islamic calendar is based on a lunar system. Each month begins and ends with the sighting of the new crescent moon. After the eighth month, Shaban, ends, Ramadan begins. Ramadan is never at the same time every year but moves around the different seasons from year to year.

Every lunar month, including Ramadan, is either 29 or 30 days.

Who must fast?

Every sane Muslim over the age of puberty must fast in Ramadan. However, certain people may leave off fasting if they have a valid excuse which grants them an exemption.



How long do Muslims fast each day?

Muslims fast from the hours of dawn until sunset each day of Ramadan. That can be between 12 hours to 20 hours depending on the time of the year wherein Ramadan falls and the person's location on earth.

What must I refrain from while fasting?

Muslims cannot eat, drink, or have sexual relations during the hours of fasting.

Anything which leads to sexual arousal should also be avoided. Moreover, fasting is about refraining from sins and anything displeasing to God. In Ramadan, Muslims should try harder to maintain good character and conduct. Lying, cheating, foul language, immoral and unethical behavior, becoming angry, etc. all go against the spirit of fasting.



Can I eat before dawn?

Yes, it is recommended to do so. This meal is called 'Suhur' [lit. pre-dawn meal] in Arabic. You should ensure you are well hydrated so that you can manage the fast as fasting in Islam is a dry fast.

When and how do I break the fast?

Fasting ends at sunset. As soon as the sun sets, you can eat and drink. It is preferable to break your fast with dates or water. Do not over indulge in eating and drinking as that will shock your body and digestive system and contradicts the spirit of fasting.



What are the valid excuses that grant an exemption from fasting?

Women cannot fast during their menses and post-partum bleeding.

The following categories of people also do not have to fast:

- Anyone too weak to fast
- The sick
- The travelers
- Pregnant and breast-feeding women

All of the above make up the days of fasting missed after Ramadan. For example, if someone was traveling for three days during Ramadan and did not fast for these days. They will then fast three days after the month of Ramadan as make up. Anyone unable to fast permanently such as someone too old or sick indefinitely feeds one poor person instead for each day missed.

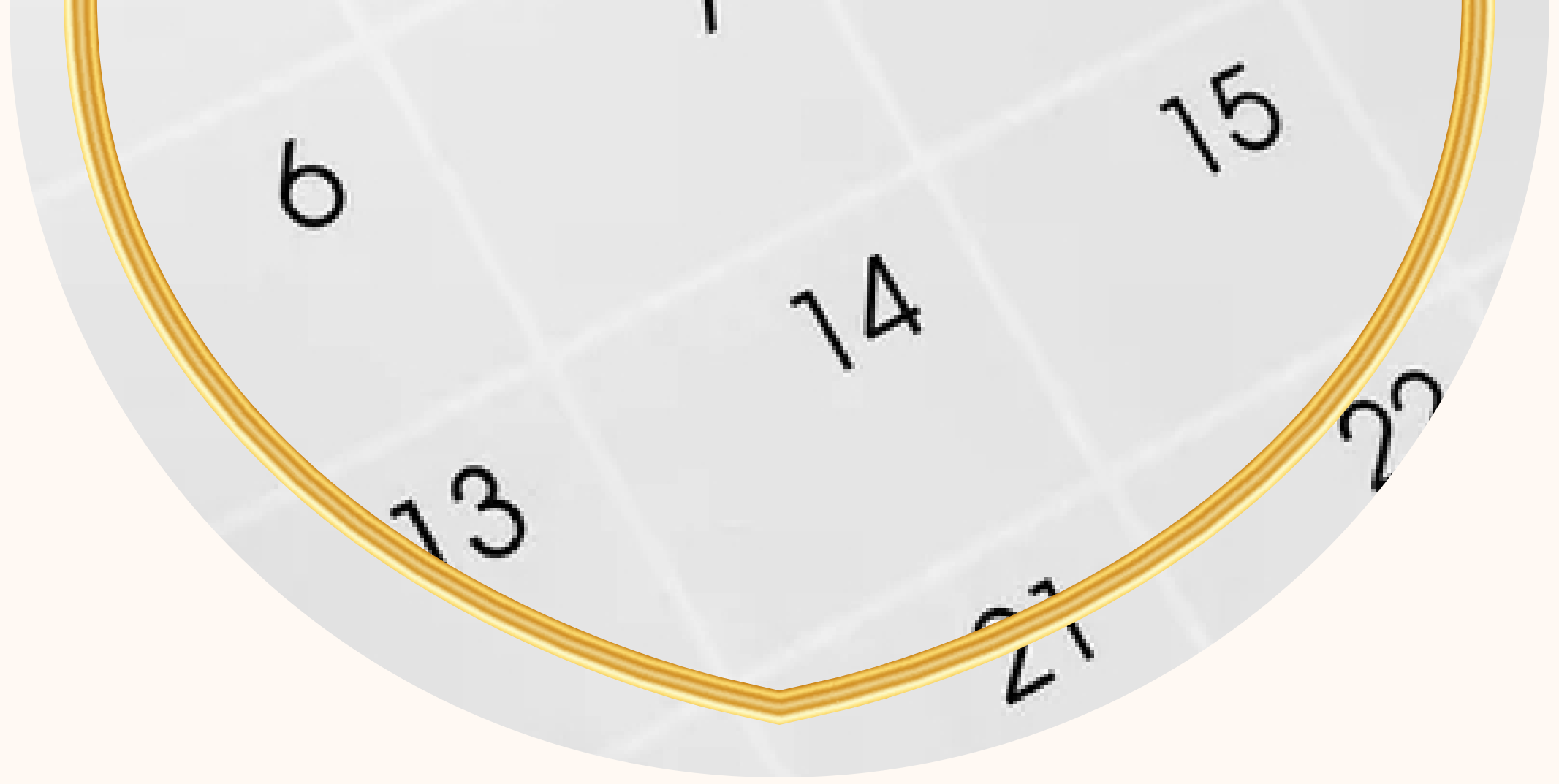


Children and Fasting:

Children are not obligated to fast until they reach the age of puberty and accountability. They may fast if they or their parents wish to train them. If a child does not fast, they do not need to make up the days they miss.

Can I continue to work and do other regular daily tasks?

Yes, everything else can continue on as normal in terms of your daily life. However, you should avoid anything which may weaken you and cause you to break your fast prematurely. You should also refrain from anything which contradicts the objectives of fasting.



Voluntary Fasting

Fasting is not only restricted to the month of Ramadan. The Messenger Muhammad would fast throughout the year. You can fast throughout the year at any time you choose so long as you avoid the two annual Eid days.

There are certain days that are recommended to fast. These include:

- Mondays and Thursdays on a weekly basis
- 13th, 14th and 15th of every Islamic lunar month, which fall on the full moon nights
- 10th of Muharram, the first month of the calendar year, which is the Day of Ashura
- 9th of Thul-Hijjah, the twelfth month of the calendar, which is the Day of Arafah
- Any 6 days from the month of Shawwal, the tenth month of the calendar, which follows Ramadan