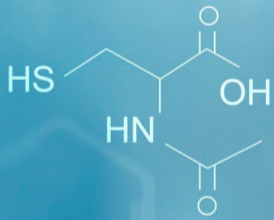




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# Health Issues & Fasting in Ramadan

**Fasting Ramadan** is one of the five pillars of Islam. However, God has given concessions to certain categories of people with valid excuses not to fast. There are some Muslims who cannot fast due to genuine health conditions. God has given such people a concession as mentioned in 2:184, **“You are ordered to fast for a small number of days in the year. Yet whoever of you is ill, with an illness that makes fasting difficult, or traveling, then they do not need to fast; but they can make up for these days by fasting the same number of other days.”**

Therefore, people with an illness that prevents them from fasting or that will exacerbate with fasting, are allowed to miss those days and make them up at a later time after Ramadan. For each day missed in Ramadan, they would make up a day after Ramadan, as will be detailed below.

It is important to note that each person is left to determine their own health status in terms of their ability to be able to fast or not. This does not need a medical diagnosis or an imam to issue a verdict. It is left to each person's conscience and piety. Therefore, if someone doesn't need to break the fast, to do so would be sinful.

There are different types of people who would fall under this ruling:

### 1. A Small Illness

This includes your usual, everyday type of illnesses which last for a day or more. If a person feels that they cannot fast with this illness or that fasting would make the illness worse, it is permissible to break the fast and make up the days after Ramadan. If a person wishes to fast in this condition, it is permissible to do so, so long as it will not harm them.



## 2. A Major/Chronic Illness

This is when someone is suffering from a major health condition such as undergoing major surgery, a chronic or terminal illness such as cancer, or a major bout of illness that is lasting days or weeks. Such people should not fast as most likely fasting will weaken them. Islam commands us not to do harm to ourselves. People in this category are one of two types:

- i. Will recover over time – this may take some weeks or months but they will recover their full strength over time. In this case, they should wait until their full recovery and then make up for their missed fasts.
- ii. Will not recover – such as someone with the latter stages of cancer. Such people are unlikely to make a full recovery, and even if they do, will probably need their strength. These people do not need to make up their fasts. Instead, they feed one poor person a meal for each day missed.

### 3. On-going Medical Treatments

These are people who are not ill in that sense and are able to function normally on a daily basis. However, they are on regular medication due to a health condition. Such people will usually fall into one of two categories:

- i. Those who need to take tablets and other oral swallowed medication. If they can work their doses around the fasting hours, such as before dawn and after sunset, then they should fast. If they cannot, then such medicines would break the fast and they make up the fast at a later time. If they cannot fast at all due to their medication, they feed a poor person for each day missed.
- ii. Those who require other medicine such as inhalers for asthmatics, injections, patches, and ear and eye drops. These medications do not break the fast and can be taken while fasting.

#### 4. Very Elderly and Infirm

This category is for those people who are physically unable to fast due to their advanced age and/or their general state of weakness. Such people do not need to fast. Instead, they feed one poor person a meal for each day missed.



## 5. Pregnant/Breastfeeding Women

Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding do not need to fast if they think it will harm or weaken them or their babies. In such cases, they miss these fasts even if it requires missing the full month of Ramadan, and make up those days at a later time when they are able to. It is important to remember that in all cases in which you are making up fasts, you should hasten to do so. The sooner it is completed, the better, as these outstanding fasts are similar to debts owed to God. Therefore, unless there is a valid reason to delay making up the fasts such as a woman breastfeeding a newborn or someone who is slowly recovering from a major illness, you should make up the fasts as soon as you can. The time window for making up the fasts lasts all the way until the next Ramadan.

From the above, we can see an aspect of the beauty and mercy of Islam. God is merciful to His servants, accounting for their circumstances and conditions, allowing them to take concessions, and providing alternative means for such people to fulfil their religious obligations and devotional duties.

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