

Fasting and MS

Several religions have times of fasting – when followers go without food, drink or both. The Muslim time of Ramadan includes 30 days of fasting from sunrise to sunset. Some religions also encourage periods of ‘partial fasting’ – not eating certain foods at certain times.

Whatever your reasons for fasting, if you have MS (multiple sclerosis), there are certain things you’ll want to consider.

Is it safe to fast?

Although fasting is generally considered safe, if you have MS, you might want to ask yourself the following questions and seek advice:

- Am I well enough to fast?
- Do I know what my religion says about fasting during ill health?
- Will fasting affect how I take medications?

Will fasting affect my MS?

If you decide to fast, you might notice some of the effects of MS feel worse, such as:

- fatigue
- memory and concentration
- balance
- weakness
- speech
- vision

This doesn’t necessarily mean that a relapse or progression is occurring. Things should gradually return to their usual level once fasting stops. Talk to a health care professional if you have any concerns.

Partial fasting

If you’re cutting out certain types of food, be sure you still get the nutrition you need. A healthy diet generally has a balance of different food types. If you cut out one or more of these, you might need to find alternatives for the nutrients they contain.

The UK Government’s Food Standards Agency has produced a booklet on food types and getting a balanced, nutritious diet. You can read and download it at tinyurl.com/ow23bpw

The MS Society booklet *Diet and nutrition* has information on diet and MS. You can download or order it at www.mssociety.org.uk/publications or call 020 8438 0999.

Taking medicines

When fasting, some people change or adapt their daily routine of taking medication. Some people believe that taking medicines breaks a fast.

But before you stop taking any prescribed medicine, it’s very important that you speak to a health care professional. You might risk damaging your health if you stop taking a medicine. With some treatments, it’s dangerous to stop them suddenly.

Another thing to consider is how the medicine is taken. Should it be taken with food or water? What would happen if you took it on an empty stomach? Check with a health care professional.

Should I speak to a health care professional?

MS affects people in different ways. Fasting might be no problem for some, but harmful for others.

Your religious leader can advise you on many aspects of fasting – including what the religion says about fasting when you have a health condition. A health care professional will be able to give vital information about your health, medicines and MS.

Speak to a health care professional before you fast, or if you have any concerns during a fast.

Other sources of information

NHS Choices has information about fasting during Ramadan. Go to www.nhs.uk and search 'Ramadan fasting'.

Reasonable adjustments for Ramadan - is an article by Sarvat Khan, who has MS. You can read it at tinyurl.com/plmqan2

References

A list of references is available on request, and all cited articles are available to borrow from the MS Society library (there may be a small charge). Contact the librarian on 020 8438 0900, or visit www.mssociety.org.uk/library

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The Multiple Sclerosis Society

More than 100,000 people live with multiple sclerosis in the UK. Every one of them shares the uncertainty of life with MS. We're funding research and fighting for better treatment and care to help people with MS take control of their lives. With your support, we will beat MS.

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This title will be reviewed within three years of publication.

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