

## - Fasting

### Best foods to break fast with

After an extended period of fasting, Muslims should pick foods which nourish the body and are easy to digest, writes Meera

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FASTING is encouraged in many cultures and religions. It's a way to get our bodies back in balance and re-evaluate our relationship with food. For Muslims, Ramadan means a month of fasting between dawn and sunset.



Universiti Malaya Specialist Centre head of dietetic services and clinical dietitian Rozanna M. Rosly says Islam emphasises moderation in every aspect of life and it is essential that this concept is applied to food intake as well.

The most common complaints during Ramadan include constipation, indigestion and headaches. A balanced meal during both sahur and iftar is vital to not experience any of these.

During sahur, one should eat nutrient-dense foods which will keep one feeling full and energised throughout the day, while for iftar, it's best that meals are light and easily digested as the body has been without food throughout the day.

One should not burden the digestive system with dishes that are overly spicy, oily or heavy on the stomach during iftar.

Here are some foods which are ideal for breaking of fast:

#### FRUITS OR DRIED FRUITS

Rozanna says fruits and fruit juices (with no added sugar) are sufficient to bring low blood sugar to normal levels, making them ideal for iftar and to be taken with one's main meal.

Dates, in particular, are often a choice as they contain carbohydrate, fibre, iron, potassium, phosphorus, vitamin C and magnesium. They are an ideal food which are easy to digest and within half an hour, the tired body regains a renewed vigour.

Bananas too, are recommended. They are easily available and a good source of carbohydrate, potassium and magnesium.

#### SOUP

Soups are easy to prepare and one can make a portion large enough to feed the entire family.

By adding meat and vegetables to soups, you have a balanced, one-dish meal that's easy to digest yet nutritious. Rozanna says soups prepared for iftar should be light and low in fat to aid digestion. "Soups are a good way to maintain water and mineral balance in the body," she adds.

Soups also keep one feeling full and this means you are likely to eat smaller, healthier portions of other dishes during iftar.

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### PORRIDGE

Just like soup, preparing porridge for iftar ensures one's family gets a light, easily digestible yet nourishing meal. Whether made of rice or wheat, a porridge can become a complete meal if one adds a source of protein (such as chicken or seafood) and root vegetables like carrots or celery for fibre and vitamins.

### SALAD

A healthy, balanced meal should always include vegetables and iftar meals are no different. Salads are an essential part of Ramadan cuisine, especially in the Middle East.

The fattoush salad, for example, traditionally prepared by Arabs, contains plenty of cool, hydrating vegetables, such as cucumber and tomato, making it an ideal addition to iftar meals.

### WHOLEGRAINS

Rozanna says in view of the long hours of fasting, Muslims should consume foods rich in complex carbohydrates (slow digesting foods), especially high fibre options (wholegrain/wholemeal), such as brown rice, noodles, barley, oats, bread, capati and starchy vegetables (lentils, baked beans, potatoes) rather than refined carbohydrates or high sugar food and drinks (fast-digesting foods).

Oats, for example, are easily available and can be quickly prepared, making them an ideal option for busy working individuals.

According to a review published in the British Journal of Nutrition in October 2015, wholegrain oats can help to control blood glucose. Oats also contain significant amounts of a type of dietary fibre known as beta-glucan, which slows digestion and increases satiety.

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