

## - Diabetes

# WHAT DIABETICS MUST KNOW ABOUT FASTING

## EXPERTS SUGGEST SUHOOR AND IFTAR DIET OPTIONS THAT WILL HELP KEEP BLOOD SUGAR LEVELS OPTIMAL

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UAE doctors have shared how some people with diabetes can fast under proper medical guidance. Dr Hala Youssef Hamdy, specialist endocrinologist at RAK Hospital, said: “All diabetics who plan to fast during this month must get their health check and observe the fast under the guidance of their endocrinologist.”

He explained: “It is possible for many diabetics to fast depending on their overall HbA1c levels which is easily determined by a simple blood test. HbA1c or glycosylated haemoglobin is an indicator of an individual’s blood-sugar levels for three months. The haemoglobin protein in our red blood cells combines with a molecule of glucose and turns into glycosylated haemoglobin. In nondiabetics, the HbA1c reading is between 5.2 and 5.5, it is about 5.5 and 6 in pre-diabetics and in cases of people with diabetes, the HbA1c reading can be anything beginning from 6 up to 14.”

### Checking HbA1c crucial

Dr Ali Al Diabbiat, consultant endocrinologist and diabetologist from Prime Health Care Group explained why HbA1c was so crucial. “The higher the HbA1c level, the poorer the blood-sugar control. So as per the guidelines from the International Diabetic Federation (IDF), those with very severe insulin dependent diabetics are not advised fasting. These are people with HbA1c higher than 8.5. These patients need to have their blood sugar levels checked before every meal and they are usually insulin injection-dependent.”

He added: “Long hours of fasting could result in hypoglycaemia [which is low sugar in blood and can be fatal] or hyperglycaemia [which is high blood sugar level that can also induce diabetic coma]. Only those patients who have good blood sugar control with pills, and have an HbA1c level between 6.5 up to 8.5 can observe the fast under the supervision of their doctor.”

Dr Diabbiat added: “People with moderate diabetes who take pills for sugar control can fast, provided they eat judiciously during the main two windows [suhoor and iftar]. They must choose the right level of medication prior to the meal; take dense carbohydrates, with lower Glycaemic Index [GI]. GI is an indicator of the rate of release of sugar from the food in the process of digestion.

### Fitness regime vital

Their meals must also include plenty of water and have high fibre. They must also include light physical fitness after they have ended their fast. If they can follow these steps then can easily observe the fast.”

One of the most crucial aspects of fasting for diabetics is the quality and amount of nutrition they take during suhoor and iftar and this holds the key to keeping blood sugar under control.

Advising many diabetics on their nutritional guidelines for Ramadan, Deepshika Agarwal, nutritionist and health coach and Cocoon Aesthetics, said: “Good nutrition is the key to blood sugar control for all diabetics. Diabetics must ensure that about 30-35 per cent of total calories of the day during suhoor and 40-45 per cent during main iftar meal. The remaining 15 per cent can be ingested through a light snack during the eating window [after ending the fast and before the main iftar meal].”

### Right balance

As a thumb rule, diabetics must choose for their suhoor and iftar main meals combinations that are high in fibre and low in GI. Foods that are dense in carbohydrates such as whole foods and high-fibre food are absorbed slowly and do not cause sudden blood sugar spikes.

For suhoor, Agarwal advised diabetics to choose something like steel rolled oats soaked overnight in a plant-based milk such as coconut or almond with nuts, seeds and fruits. “It is also good to make a lentil-quinoa porridge with nuts and seeds accompanied with a salad with fresh vegetables or an omelette with mushroom and vegetables.”

He added: “However, the dose of medicine during meal time must be tweaked by your doctor based on your HbA1C levels.”

For iftar main meal, Agarwal recommended diabetics to choose a brown rice biryani with lots of vegetables and fish or chicken pieces. If not that, a shakshouka with good amount of eggs, more vegetables and minimum cheese could be a good option too. Other alternatives include a good combination of protein with carbohydrates, such as grilled chicken with Arabic bread, chickpea salad with vegetables, and quinoa or barley pilaf with lot of vegetables in it.

“Add a probiotic Laban, flood seeds, probiotic drinks, that can cool you and enrich your gut microbiome and increase the healthy flora in your digestive system,” she recommended.