

Fasting with chronic ailments? Do it right

PERSONALISED MEDICAL ADVICE AND HEALTHY LIFESTYLE KEY TO PREVENTING COMPLICATIONS

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With the start of Ramadan, Muslims begin a journey of spiritual contemplation, strengthening the faith, and living the values and lessons of fasting during this sacred season.



While fasting has many known benefits — such as improved circulation, enhanced immune function, and improved cardiovascular health, not everyone can participate in this religious observance without careful considerations.

Personalised advice

Individuals with pre-existing medical conditions or chronic illnesses may face unique challenges in adhering to fasting traditions due to their ongoing treatment.

However, with careful planning and guidance from healthcare professionals, it is possible for those with medical conditions to fast — such as those with colorectal cancer and multiple sclerosis (MS).

Dr Riyaz Thottakurichi, Staff Physician, Primary Care Medicine, Medical Subspecialties Institute at Cleveland Clinic, Abu Dhabi, emphasises the importance of personalised medical advice for patients choosing to fast during Ramadan.

“While fasting may be possible for many patients with chronic conditions, every individual’s health needs are unique,” said Dr Thottakurichi.

“For instance, individuals with colorectal cancer may need to adjust their dietary intake and medication schedule, while those with MS should be mindful of managing fatigue and hydration levels,” he said.

He also added that fasting can pose greater challenges for MS patients with higher levels of physical impairment, as immobility and other related issues may make them more prone to conditions such as constipation and urinary tract infections.

Considering factors such as medication and metabolism are crucial in determining whether individuals with chronic medical conditions can fast,” Dr Thottakurichi explained.

To help individuals with chronic medical conditions navigate Ramadan fasting safely, here are some tips and healthy habits to consider:

Consult your physician

It is advisable to consult a physician and nutritionist before deciding to fast. It is crucial for patients to assess their health status and understand the proper way to practise fasting. Failure to adopt healthy habits during Ramadan fasting can lead to aggravation of preexisting medical conditions, exposure to health problems, or excess weight gain.

Plan your meals wisely

Focus on consuming nutrient-dense foods during suhoor (pre-dawn meal) and iftar (evening meal) to support your health and energy levels throughout the day.

Avoid diets high in sodium and fried or processed food. Additionally, for diabetic patients, it's crucial to cut down on foods and drinks rich in sugar during iftar.

Listen to your body

Pay attention to how your body responds to fasting and adjust your routine accordingly. If you experience significant discomfort or worsening symptoms, consider modifying your fasting practices by seeking medical advice.

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Exercise moderately

It is important to exercise moderately to stay functional and healthy. Remaining active helps reduce fatigue, gives your body the strength to keep going and is a good opportunity to lose weight, if needed. It's best to exercise just before suhoor or a few hours after iftar.

Dr Riyaz Thottakurichi | Cleveland Clinic, Abu Dhabi