

Fasting for diabetics

Muscat Daily · 3 Mar 2026 · 15 · NUTRITION YOU (Vandana Chawla is an Online Nutrition Expert and a Registered Nutritionist-ukvrn Visit: <https://thenutribaby.com>)

Diabetes is a chronic metabolic condition characterised by elevated blood glucose levels due to problems with insulin production, insulin action, or both. It is one of the fastest-growing health concerns worldwide. The prevalence continues to rise due to urbanisation, sedentary lifestyles, unhealthy dietary patterns, obesity, and aging populations.

While fasting is safe for people with well-controlled diabetes, it still requires careful planning, medical guidance, and mindful nutrition.

From a nutritional perspective, let's understand how fasting affects blood sugar levels and ways to prevent complications such as hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), hyperglycemia (high blood sugar), dehydration, and fluctuations in energy.

The science behind fasting

When one fasts from dawn to sunset, the body shifts from using immediate glucose as fuel to taking energy from its storehouses. For non-diabetics, this transition is usually smooth. However, for individuals with diabetes, especially those on insulin or certain medications, this change can increase the risk of blood sugar instability. Long hours without food may lead to low blood sugar during the day, while overeating at Iftar can cause significant spikes afterward.

The healthy way out

Before deciding to fast, individuals with diabetes should consult their doctor. For those who are medically cleared to fast, meal composition becomes critically important.

Suhoor (pre-dawn meal) should focus on slow-digesting carbohydrates, protein, and healthy fats. Complex carbohydrates such as whole grains, oats, lentils, and beans release glucose gradually, helping maintain stable blood sugar levels throughout the day. Pairing these with protein sources like eggs, Greek yogurt, cottage cheese, or nuts enhances satiety and reduces sharp glucose fluctuations. Avoid sugary foods or refined carbohydrates at Suhoor, as they may cause rapid spikes followed by early-day crashes.

Hydration is also essential. Drink adequate water between Iftar and Suhoor to reduce the risk of dehydration, which can worsen blood sugar control.

Iftar, should begin gently. Traditionally, breaking the fast with 1–2 dates and water is common, but individuals with diabetes should monitor portion size carefully, as dates contain natural sugars. Following this with vegetable or lentil soup or salad can help control appetite before the main meal.

The main Iftar meal should be balanced. Lean protein (such as grilled fish or chicken), moderate portions of complex carbohydrates (brown rice or whole wheat bread), and plenty of vegetables. Fried foods, sweets, and sugary beverages should be limited, as they cause rapid blood sugar spikes and increase overall calorie intake.

Blood glucose monitoring is crucial during Ramadan. Checking blood sugar helps detect dangerous lows or highs early. If blood sugar drops too low or rises excessively, a doctor should be consulted immediately.

Physical activity should remain light to moderate. Gentle walking after Iftar is beneficial, but intense exercise during fasting hours may increase the risk of hypoglycemia.

To conclude, fasting during Ramadan with diabetes is possible but it must be approached responsibly. Balanced meal planning, portion control, medication adjustments under medical supervision, hydration, and regular blood sugar monitoring are key to safe fasting. Emphasising mindfulness and self-care and prioritising health will ensure that fasting remains an enriching and safe experience.