

RAMADAN & FITNESS 101

A GUIDE TO NUTRITION AND
EXERCISE DURING RAMADAN



A person in a gym is lifting a barbell. The barbell has two large black weights on each side, both labeled 'RED FITNESS' and '10LB'. The person is wearing a black tank top and black leggings. The background is a gym with other people and equipment.

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INTRODUCTION

Our core intention should be spiritual discipline and deep reflection.

We have all made it to another Ramadan which is a blessing within itself. The time of fasting between Suhoor (Sunrise) to Iftar (Sunset) is upon us once again. Our core intention should be spiritual discipline and deep reflection of our relationship with Allah (swt). But also, a closer look at our health and food choices despite the difficulties of fasting through the day.

Ramadan is notorious for causing weight gain when we don't watch what we eat. It's so important to eat right and move well during this time. Therefore, Sabah Hamed, L4 Strength & Conditioning Coach has put together this guide to cover all the basics, backed up by science from our elite teams' Performance Nutritionist and Strength and Conditioning Coach to help you stay fitter, stronger and healthier this Ramadan

BEFORE YOU START:

Now before we get into what to eat and when we need to eat, bear in mind the main goal in Ramadan should be to maintain lean mass and strength and not to try to add muscle mass.



Everyone's body is different, and it takes some trial and error to find what works best for you. For some, training before Iftar is better and for others after Suhoor. Either way, aim to hit a protein goal with your meals rather than calorie count. Ideally speaking you want to have at least 1.5-2g per kg bodyweight daily.



Aim for calorie dense food and stay away from any foods that might upset your gut usually or bloat you. Use this guide to help you prepare and to eliminate any moments of weakness or indecision.



Try to keep your calories and protein relatively consistent day by day and week by week to get the best form of strength and muscle mass maintenance.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF RAMADAN?

Ramadan fasting can cause many physiological, biochemical, metabolic and spiritual changes in the body, including:

LOWER CHOLESTEROL:

Although weight loss can be one of the physical outcomes of fasting, it can also improve your lipid (blood) profile meaning it could improve cholesterol. By not eating throughout the day your metabolism can also change, meaning your body could also become more efficient at utilising fuel.

LOWER TRIGLYCERIDES

Triglycerides are a type of fat found within the blood. Too high triglycerides in the blood can result in increased thickening of the artery walls, which can increase your risk of stroke, heart attacks and heart disease.

WEIGHT LOSS:

Reduces the risk of suffering from heart disease, heart attack or stroke.

STABILISE INSULIN LEVELS:

May prevent or reverse diabetes.

INCREASING RED BLOOD CELLS, WHITE BLOOD CELLS & PLATELET COUNT:

Which can support our ability to fight infection and keep us healthy.

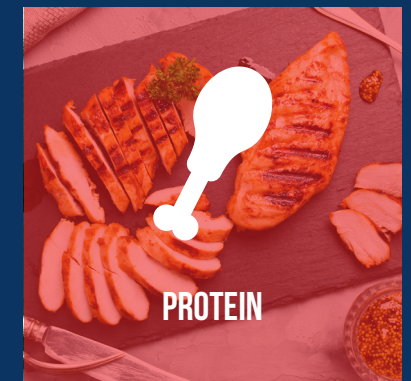
BLOOD PRESSURE: Better blood pressure can reduce our risk of heart disease and other health implications.

WHAT TO EAT AT SUHOOR



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

THIS IS BY FAR THE MOST IMPORTANT MEAL OF THE DAY, ITS WHAT WILL GIVE YOU ENOUGH ENERGY TO LAST THROUGH THE DAY AND YOUR WORKOUT IF YOU TRAIN BEFORE IFTAR.



WHY?

Complex carbs are rich in energy, and they release energy slowly through the day. This is what will provide your body with energy through the day. High fibre foods are also digested slowly thereby drip feeding your body energy throughout the day.

EXAMPLES

Oats, rice, potatoes, sweet potato, bulgur wheat, wholemeal pasta, wholegrain bread

WHAT TO EAT AT SUHOOR



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

PROTEIN

Protein is going to make you feel fuller and satiated for longer, it digests slowly and helps to stabilise your blood sugar levels. It helps contribute to your overall daily protein requirements which is important for muscle mass maintenance.

EXAMPLES

- Cottage cheese
- Peanut butter
- Chickpeas
- Beans
- Lentils
- Almonds
- Turkey meat
- Chicken breast
- Tuna
- Salmon
- Halibut
- Eggs
- Protein powder
- Greek yoghurt



WHAT TO EAT AT SUHOOR



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

FAT

Good fats are essential for health, providing nutrients such as omega 3, and these need to come from your diet. They help the body to absorb nutrients such as vitamins A, D, E and K, so having some walnuts or almonds in your salad can be beneficial. However, consuming fats can leave you feeling very full, so you won't want to consume large amounts at Iftar times.

EXAMPLES

- Avocados
- Avocado oil
- Nuts and nut butters
- Seeds
- Olives
- Coconut and grapeseed oil
- Sardines
- Mackerel
- Wild salmon
- Beef
- Chicken
- Turkey
- Low fat cheeses (part-skim mozzarella, ricotta and cottage cheese)
- Dark chocolate (yes - you read that right)



WHEN YOU ARE FASTING



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

WHAT TO AVOID:



SIMPLE OR REFINED CARBOHYDRATES SUCH AS:

White flour, patties, donuts, croissants, cakes, biscuits, sweets.
These all provide satisfaction for a very small period of time and cause a sugar crash.



CAFFEINATED DRINKS:

Coffee has caffeine which can lead to insomnia and restlessness.



WHAT TO EAT FOR IFTAR



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

Always start with three dates, not just because it's sunnah but also because they are packed with potassium which helps your muscles and nerves function.

Complex carbohydrates to help you recover from training, lean protein and vegetables/fruits.

Drink lots of water as this will curb dehydration and provide your body with essential fluids. Try and drink with your meal rather than all at the start.

Soup is also good - try and have a healthy mix of lentils, grains, beans, pulses and meat packed full of wholesome vegetables.

Protein - try and have some lean protein be it meat or fish to help you feel fuller for longer.

Have any fruit after your main meal.



EXAMPLE MEAL PLAN FOR SUHOOR



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

SUHOOR:

1

Wholegrain toast topped with almond butter and chia seeds with scrambled egg with spinach, mushrooms, onions and peppers.

2

Rye bread with soft cheese and salmon with kale and spinach with a side of oatmeal.

3

Blend frozen banana with nut butter, cacao powder, oats and water with smashed avocado on wholegrain toast.

4

Smoothie: milk, zero fat yoghurt, dry oats, banana, peanut butter, chia seeds and cacao powder with sliced hard boiled egg whites with steamed vegetables.

EXAMPLE MEAL PLAN FOR SUHOOR



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

SUHOOR:

5

Smoked salmon on a stack of avocado, poached egg and a wholegrain English muffin. Plus a side of oatmeal with almonds and chia seeds.

6

Scrambled egg whites with spinach and feta in a wholegrain tortilla and a side of oatmeal.

7

Hard boiled egg salad with quinoa and black kidney beans. Layers of Greek yoghurt with oats, chia seeds and mixed berries. Scrambled eggs on wholegrain bread and almond butter.

8

Kale and egg white omelette with mozzarella cheese, mushrooms, tomatoes, onions and peppers on rye bread with oatmeal and blueberries topped with chia seeds.

EXAMPLE MEAL PLAN FOR IFTAR



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

IFTAR: Three dates, a banana and coconut water then...

SMOOTHIES TO TRY:

1

½ frozen banana, ½ cup of frozen kale and ½ cup of coconut water, watermelon, Greek yoghurt, apples and a banana.

2

Mangoes, oranges, pineapple with coconut water and coconut butter. Pitta bread with chicken, salad and hummus.

3

Chicken with boiled rice, vegetables and mixed salad, baked fish with roasted vegetables and sweet potato mash.

4

Brown pasta with chicken or fish and steamed vegetables.

5

½ cup of wheat pasta with boiled vegetables and turkey meat.



EXAMPLE MEAL PLAN FOR IFTAR



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

IFTAR:

ONE HOUR LATER OR POST WORKOUT:

1

Fruit salad with one glass of warm water with a few drops of lemon juice and chia seeds.

2

Lentil soup with beans, grains and lots of vegetables. Carrot sticks with hummus and a handful of almonds or walnuts.

3

Aim to drink water throughout your meal and if you are able to eat after taraweesh then fuel up on...

4

Sweet potato mash

5

Two tablespoons of brown or wholegrain rice or chicken breast chunks

6

Hydration is key, aim for at least four glasses throughout your meal.

EXERCISE: MAINTENANCE OF PHYSICAL CAPACITIES

1

High load, volume and intense training sessions are advised to be completed after you are able to eat i.e., one to two hours after breaking your fast (Iftar). This ensures you are well fuelled and hydrated for these sessions, resulting in maximal adaptation and importantly, minimising the risk of injury and illness.

2

This time frame also gives you a window to recover optimally afterwards by having time to refuel and rehydrate.

3

If you need to perform two training sessions in the day, it is advised to save the harder, more intense session for when you are able to eat before i.e. after Iftar.

4

Lighter/low intensity conditioning sessions such as an easy run or a cardio session on the bike may be completed early evening before breaking fast, then you can have a meal afterwards to refuel ahead of the second, more difficult session.

5

If you have a preference to train in the morning, you are encouraged to train as soon after Suhoor (final meal before fasting for the day) as possible.

6

When performing gym-based sessions, it is advised not to work to muscular failure.

EXERCISE: GUIDELINES



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

1

Aim to train 3 to 4 times per week.

2

Keep workouts to between 30 and 45 minutes.

3

Perform 3 to 4 sets of 8 to 15 reps. Try and feel each repetition to increase your mind-muscle connection.

4

Rest for 1 to 2 minutes between sets.

5

Be sure to warm up before starting exercising.

EXERCISE: PUSH WORKOUT



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

PUSH DAY : CHEST, TRICEPS AND SHOULDERS

1

Bench press and seated dumbbell shoulder press

2

Cable front raise and dumbbell lat raises

3

Tricep pushdowns

4

Press ups

5

Incline dumbbell press and flat bench dumbbell Flies

6

Tricep dips

EXERCISE: PULL WORKOUT



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

PULL DAY : BACK AND BICEPS

1

Pull ups (assisted or unassisted)

2

Lat pulldown and barbell curls

3

Seated row and hammer curls

4

Face pulls and incline bicep curls

5

Bent over rows and dumbbell pullovers

EXERCISE: LEGS & ABS



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

LOWER BODY

1

Bodyweight squats and leg raises

2

Bodyweight walking lunges and reverse crunches

3

Calf raises and flutter kicks

4

Leg press and KB* sumo squats

5

KB* swings and KB* stiff-legged deadlifts

6

Dumbbell walking lunges and plank

EXERCISE: AT HOME



GOAL:
MAINTENANCE
NOT DEFICIT

Go for a short brisk walk beforehand to warm up or use a skipping rope for 5 to 10 minutes to elevate your heart rate. Perform this workout as a circuit with minimal rest between exercises.

Bodyweight squats

Bodyweight alternating lunges

Mountain climbers

Squat jumps

Chest to floor burpees

Walkouts

Press ups

Alternating side planks

Forward plank

Bicycle crunches

Reverse crunches

Leg raises

Side plank (L)

Flutter kicks

Side plank (R)

Rest for at least 1 minute between sets and keep hydrated after Iftar!



SUPPLEMENTS:

MULTIVITAMINS

WHY?

During Ramadan multivitamins may be of benefit if your dietary intake is going to be adjusted. They may also support your immunity which could be compromised through periods of fasting.

WHEN DO I TAKE THEM?

Because some of the micronutrients are fat soluble you need to take them with a meal so ideally after Suhoor or after Iftar.

PROTEIN SHAKE

WHY?

After resistance training our bodies are very sensitive to any protein in our body, consuming a shake is easily absorbed and can be a good option. Protein helps with repairing of our muscles and aiding our recovering but most importantly they protect our gains!

WHEN TO HAVE ONE?

If you choose to have a protein shake, have one scoop before you open your fast and one after you have worked out. Try and consume your post workout shake within 20-30 minutes of working out.



You made it through the guide! Now it's time to set the wheels in motion to make sure you are fully prepared to take on all that Ramadan brings. As with all things if you ever feel run down, tired or lacking in energy it is better not to push through a workout than risk injury or worse. You may find that you need less/more food so feel free to adjust accordingly but aim to be as consistent as possible with your weekly calorie intake.

We hope you have a happy, healthy Ramadan!



