

Health and Safety Briefing Note

HSBN Number 0063: Fasting

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Distribution: Thames Water Managers & Contractors

Ramadan commences this year on Monday 6 June in 2016. It lasts for 30 days and ends with the celebration of Eid-UI-Fitr. The Islamic calendar is lunar, which means that days start at sunset. Ramadan is a time of prayer and self-reflection. Many people will fast each day from sunrise to sunset. This includes not eating food, drinking liquids or smoking. It is common to have one meal known as the suhoor just before sunrise and an evening meal known as Iftar after sunset.

- Observing Ramadan may be noticeable (for example not eating at lunchtime) and so it is often sensible for employees to inform their managers of the fact they are fasting.
- Fasting may affect people in different ways (for example some people may understandably become a little irritable or slightly tired at times) and some understanding from managers and colleagues can be helpful.
- The effects of fasting may be felt most strongly in the afternoon so it can help to use the morning for meetings and intellectually challenging work, and perform routine tasks later. Also when Ramadan falls in the summer months it can be particularly challenging as the days are longer.
- Although breaks should be kept, a shorter lunch may make it easier for an employee to manage their workload if they wish to take time off to carry out additional prayer or worship.
- Colleagues may want to avoid offering food and drink to those who fast if sharing food with other colleagues, or eating during meetings.

The fast of Ramadan is rigorous, particularly during long summer days when it may be required to resist all food and drink for as many as sixteen hours at a time.

The following advice has been provided by the NHS following consultation with medical experts and Islamic scholars. Prior to Ramadan, you should always consult with a doctor about the safety of fasting for your individual circumstances.

Dehydration

Dehydration is common during a fast. The body continues to lose water and salts through breathing, perspiring and urinating.

If you don't drink sufficiently before a fast, your risk of dehydration increases. This risk is higher in older people and in those taking tablets, such as diuretics.

In order to avoid this problem at workplace, employees need to stay in cool areas (indoors or in shade) during the hottest part of the day and limit their physical activities

Headache

This common problem has many causes. Headaches during a fast could be due to dehydration or hunger, poor rest, or the absence of addictive substances, such as caffeine or nicotine.

A moderate and balanced diet, especially not missing the pre-dawn meal, taking in enough fluids and, if necessary, some painkillers such as paracetamol, can help prevent or reduce the risk of getting a headache.

Headaches can also be prevented by not exposing yourself to direct sunlight. When working outdoors wearing a hat and use sunglasses to reduce the effect of glare from the sun and relieving any tense muscles with a short, gentle massage.

Low Blood Sugar

Fasting can cause hypoglycemia with symptoms of confusion, slurred speech and fainting during work. For avoiding this problem during fast, follow the instructions mentioned hereunder.

- Eat a healthy diet with two or three smaller meals during the non-fasting period to prevent after meal hyperglycemia.
- Avoid large amounts of foods rich in carbohydrate and saturated fat at the sunset meal and eat more simple carbohydrates.
- Eat more “complex” carbohydrates at the predawn meal, which should be taken as late as possible before the start of the daily fast in order to avoid hypoglycemia. Increase your fluid intake (water) in order to prevent dehydration
- Exercise but modify intensity and timing of exercise to avoid hypoglycemia. The best time for exercise is 2 hours after the sunset meal. Excessive physical activity may lead to higher risk of hypoglycemia and should be avoided during Ramadan.

People who regularly inject insulin are advised not to fast, as the potential risk to health – both in the short and long term – of not taking insulin is too great. People who have their diabetes under control using tablets should seek careful advice from their GP before starting a fast.

Stress

Lack of food and water, changes of routine and shorter periods of sleep can cause stress. It's important to deal with any potential sources of stress to stop any harmful effects. This can be helped by not taking on more than you can handle, not playing sports in the hot sun, controlling your anger and not smoking.

Fatigue

Evening prayer, social activities and less eating/drinking habits associated with Ramadan contribute to fatigue during working hours. The most important way to prepare yourself for the fast is to make sure that you are well hydrated. Drink at least 3 liters of water between Iftar and Sehri. This is one of the best things you can do for your body to help avoid fatigue or feeling sick during the fast. Studies have also shown that taken a short nap of 20 minutes, during normal breaks, can re-energize a person fasting both mentally and physically.

Action required

Ensure all employees are briefed on the above risks and measures to take for those that are fasting during Ramadan. For further information or guidance contact Occupational Health on 020 7713 3570 or Employee Assistance on 0800 1116 387



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Briefing to all employees

Ramadan commences this year on Monday 6 June in 2016. It lasts for 30 days and ends with the celebration of Eid-UI-Fitr. The Islamic calendar is lunar, which means that days start at sunset. Ramadan is a time of prayer and self-reflection. Many people will fast each day from sunrise to sunset. This includes not eating food, drinking liquids or smoking. It is common to have one meal known as the suhoor just before sunrise and an evening meal known as Iftar after sunset.

- Observing Ramadan may be noticeable (for example not eating at lunchtime) and please inform your managers of the fact they are fasting.
- Fasting may affect people in different ways (for example some people may understandably become a little irritable or slightly tired at times) and understanding from everyone is helpful.
- The effects of fasting may be felt most strongly in the afternoon so it can help to use the morning for meetings and intellectually challenging work, and perform routine tasks later. Also when Ramadan falls in the summer months it can be particularly challenging as the days are longer.
- Although breaks should be kept, a shorter lunch may make it easier for an employee to manage their workload if they wish to take time off to carry out additional prayer or worship. Please speak with your manager.
- Colleagues may want to avoid offering food and drink to those who fast if sharing food with other colleagues, or eating during meetings.

We the undersigned have been made aware of the contents of this briefing. If we are unable to carry out the work safely, we agree that we must immediately stop work and inform our manager/supervisor.

Date	Name	Signature

Manager/supervisor's signature:		Date:	
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Please continue on another copy for additional employee