

Your Ramadan GUIDE TO STAYING FIT

WITH RAMADAN JUST AROUND THE CORNER, MANY MUSLIMS CONCERNED ABOUT PHYSICAL HEALTH AND FITNESS

will be thinking of ways to maintain their exercise regime throughout the Holy month. If staying fit while fasting seems tricky to you, our regular contributor and certified Personal Trainer Bernadette Abraham shares her expert advice to help you stay

active without overtaxing your body and jeopardizing your fast.

The fact that Ramadan lands in the middle of the hot summer months this year makes daily tasks, not to mention exercising, even more challenging. So it's important to be mindful not to overexert yourself and use your energy wisely, which means adjusting your goals, timings, intensities, and finding an exercise routine that is sustainable.



TIP 1: *Aim to maintain, not improve*

Whether you train to lose weight, gain muscle mass or improve general fitness, Ramadan is not the time to set and reach new goals. Instead, the focus should be on fitness maintenance and preventing regression and over exhaustion.

Fasting in the heat of the summer is demanding on the body and the added stress of intense exercise can easily tip the scale unfavorably leading to a number of health consequences, such

as fatigue, a weakened immune system, and even weight gain as the body's survival response.

Rather than overworking your body to see physical changes and improvements, aim to maintain your current fitness levels by strength training as little as two to three times per week for 30 minutes at a time, in addition to daily leisure activities. Doing so will allow you to quickly resume your normal training regime after Eid celebrations without major setbacks to your strength or cardiovascular endurance.

TIP 2: *Time it right*

Low intensity exercises such as walking, swimming, pilates, and yoga, are great options right before the call to prayer and iftar. Exercise is known to curb the appetite for a short period of time so it can help hold off cravings and allow you to make healthier food choices later on. However, it is extremely important to keep the intensity low enough to avoid excessive sweating and dehydration.

An ideal time for working out is right after iftar. A light snack like dates and a glass of milk of your choice or a bowl of lentil soup can give you the necessary energy to exercise.

It is also important to drink plenty of water before and during exercise to replenish the body's fluids.

For the early risers, exercising right before suhour is also a good option. Not only does it help you jump start your day, but a light snack, such as a yogurt and fruit, afterwards can help you feel more energized and less sluggish during the day.

The best time to exercise is ultimately the time that works best for you. During the first few days of Ramadan, pay attention to your energy levels and determine the time of day that allows you to exercise without becoming too fatigued.

TIP 3: *Decrease the intensity*

Reducing the intensity of your workouts will allow you to exercise consistently without causing burn out. You can decrease the intensity in a number of ways; shorten the workout duration, lift lighter weights or use no weights at all, and increase the rest periods between sets.

Circuit training is a good training modality during Ramadan because it provides a complete strength and cardiovascular workout in a shorter amount of time. Here is a simple full body circuit workout that can be

done at home. Perform each exercise in succession with just enough rest to catch your breath in between each exercise. Repeat the circuit two to three times or for a set amount of time.

- Squats (sit in chair and stand up for beginners) x 10
- Push-Ups (from knees for beginners) x 10
- Jumping Jacks (walk with high knees or jog in place for beginners) x 60 seconds
- Lunges x 10 each leg
- Elbow Plank (Plank from hands for beginners) x 30 seconds
- Triceps Chair Dips (Bent knees for beginners) x 10

TIP 4: *Something is better than nothing*

When it comes to achieving a fitness goal, the most important factor is consistency – not perfection. To stay fit during Ramadan, it's important to find a routine that can be sustained for the month. Even though it can be difficult to find the time to exercise amidst prayer timings, work, family gatherings and friendly visits, being active every day is the biggest denominator of success.

Walking after iftar is simple to do and can do wonders for your health. Resist the temptation of sitting down after your meal and get into the habit of a nightly stroll instead. If it's too hot and humid outside, then head to a mall or walk on a treadmill if you have one.

A pedometer is a great inexpensive tool to help you keep track of your activity level. Measure your current steps per day and aim to increase that number every day. The general recommendation is to walk 10,000 steps per day but use your current activity level as a baseline measurement and improve upon that.

The point is to do what you can when you can with what you've got and move as much as possible. Whether it's a leisurely walk, an exercise class, or climbing stairs for a few minutes at home, a little goes a long way and being consistent will ensure a successfully fit Ramadan. ☺