

Staying Healthy & Hydrated During Ramadan

During the holy month of Ramadan, it's important to take steps to stay healthy & hydrated, particularly if you're fasting.



Dehydration

Dehydration is mainly caused by lack of sufficient water in body tissues, which takes place when more water is lost from the body than what is consumed.

Children, elderly, diabetic patients and people suffering with kidney ailments or chronic diseases are more prone to dehydration while fasting.

In the UAE last year, hospitals received an average of 15 dehydration cases each day during the month of Ramadan. This is approximately double the amount of dehydration cases received by UAE hospitals on a regular day of the year.

How to Avoid Dehydration

Drink sufficient water

It is recommended by experts that we should drink 8 to 12 cups of water between iftar and suhour. People should break their fast by drinking water at room temperature or water which is slightly warmer (lukewarm) as it gets absorbed by the body faster than cold water, which can cause blood vessels to contract and cause indigestion.

Soup should be consumed regularly as part of Iftar meal

Soup is a good source of fluid. As soup uses many vegetables such as carrots, tomatoes, pumpkins, bell peppers,

spinach, zucchini and eggplants, it can provide vitamins and minerals to the body.

Avoid caffeine & nicotine

Caffeine increases fluid loss and thirst, so it is advisable to avoid caffeinated drinks such as energy and carbonated drinks, tea and coffee. Smoking should also be avoided as it causes dry mouth and thirst.

Limit the use of spices & salt

Foods that are high in spices should be avoided at Iftar as this may increase the body's requirement for water. Excessive salt may increase thirst and should be used sparingly.

Show restraint when consuming sweets

Sugary food increases thirst and should be avoided during the month of Ramadan. Sugary food is also high in fat content and low in nutrients.

Avoid sun exposure & excessive physical activity

With direct sun exposure, the body is more likely to be dehydrated, so being outdoors during sunlight hours should be avoided. Exercising should also be avoided during the daytime due to water loss through perspiration. It is recommended to exercise after Iftar, when the body has received energy from food and drink and will have sufficient time to replenish lost fluids during and after exercise.

Symptoms of Dehydration

Some of the most common symptoms of dehydration in adults include:

-  Increased thirst
-  Light-headedness
-  Headache
-  Dry mouth and tongue
-  Lethargy and tiredness
-  Muscle cramps
-  Confusion
-  Dark coloured or strong smelling urine
-  Urinating less often than normal

Symptoms of severe dehydration may include dry and wrinkled skin, lack of concentration, oversleeping, difficulty urinating, constipation, and cardiac arrhythmia.

Information sources: Hamad Medical Corporation, Khaleej Times, Southern Cross & World Food Programme