

RAMADAN TENT PROJECT

MAINTAINING FITNESS DURING RAMADAN

Fasting during Ramadan is challenging and even more so when trying to maintain fitness or reduce any muscle loss that one may have gained during the rest of the year. So when is the right time to train while fasting?.

I personally feel that it is more difficult to become fitter during Ramadan because of the limitations placed on the body when you are fasting and which are necessary to optimise fitness, such as, hydration, replacing glycogen (muscle energy stores), replacing protein for muscle regeneration/healing, sleep and recovery.

However that doesn't mean that you should stop doing any training at all and the goal should be to try and maintain or limit any losses in fitness or strength by doing some training.

The ideal time to do some form of fitness / strength training, is probably midnight, a few hours after you have broken the fast at Iftar (Sunset). This will allow you to get on board sufficient fluids and glucose to enable you to replenish muscle glycogen stores. By waiting a couple of hours after you have eaten some food, it will mean that you have given time for the food to be digested and cleared from the stomach, allowing blood to be directed to the exercising muscles. Once you have finished the training session, there is still sufficient time to take recovery protein drinks / hydration which will help in optimising muscle building and recovery. The disadvantage is that it may interfere with your sleep patterns training late into the night.

The next most suitable time for training is probably just before Iftar. Advantages are that you can then rehydrate and replace glycogen stores and have protein for muscle synthesis quickly after training on opening the fast. The disadvantage is that you may not be able to have an optimum work out having been dehydrated and depleted glycogen stores having fasted all day.

Training after Suhoor has the advantage that you will be well hydrated and have good glycogen stores but the disadvantage is that these will be depleted quickly after a training session and you

then have to wait the whole day before you can replace. Below is a guideline and suggested diet for anyone who wishes to continue to train.

Suhoor (pre-dawn meal taken to mark the start of a fast)

Main focus should be on carbohydrate foods that will release energy slowly over the day combined with a small amount of foods that will release in the short to medium term. Examples of slow release carbohydrates are non-starchy vegetables such as spinach, kale, tomatoes, broccoli, cauliflower, cucumber, onions and asparagus. Sweet Potato, pasta, Nuts, fresh fruit and oats / porridge also release carbohydrates slowly. A whey protein should be consumed in preparation for the training and muscle repair. As for fluids, plenty of isotonic fluids may be consumed as opposed to water – ideally 2-4 litres during the time when eating and drinking is allowed. This helps with the fluids being retained in the body as opposed to being released quickly through urinating. In addition, some extra electrolytes in a soluble tablet form may also be taken which can help with absorption of water.

Iftar (the meal which marks the opening of the fast at sunset)

A small amount of quick release carbohydrates is good and will make you feel better quickly. Examples of quick release carbohydrates are white rice, white potato, sugary drinks and dates. A whey protein drink should also be consumed to help with the muscle regeneration and recovery. Try and not to eat a large meal immediately on opening the fast as the danger is that the body which will be in 'storage mode' and will then try and store any excess food as fat. Have a small meal and then after a couple of hours have another meal focusing more on protein and slow release carbohydrate foods.

Dr Zafar Iqbal
(Consultant in Sports
& Exercise Medicine)



In 2019, Ramadan starts in early May and finishes in early June and coincides with the last week of the Premier league for footballers or preparations for International games. This is particular challenging for those Footballers who are required to train, play games and wish to fast and especially in the UK, due to the long duration of fasting required in the summer, which may be upto 18/19 hours per day.

For footballers, during training the main issues are, hydration, replacing glycogen (muscle energy stores), replacing protein for muscle regeneration/healing, sleep and recovery.

Normally a footballer would hydrate frequently, as even low levels of dehydration during training can have physiological consequences. A loss of 2% bodyweight (just 1.5kg for a 75kg person) is claimed to reduce performance by 10-20%. A player can easily lose this amount in a training session and even more in hot weather. A fluid loss greater than 3-5% bodyweight, reduces aerobic exercise performance and impairs concentration and reaction time. A fasting footballer therefore needs to try and be well hydrated and energised before training and during the day.

Below is a guideline and suggested diet for footballers who may be fasting. An additional meal is advised during the night, to avoid over consumption at Iftar time.

Suhoor (pre-dawn meal taken to mark the start of a fast)

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to being released quickly through urinating. In addition, some extra electrolytes in a soluble tablet form may also be taken which can help with absorption of water.

Iftar (the meal which marks the opening of the fast at sunset)

A small amount of quick release carbohydrates is good and will make the player feel better quickly. Examples of quick release carbohydrates are white rice, white potato, sugary drinks and dates. A whey protein drink should also be consumed to help with the muscle regeneration and recovery. Try and not to eat a large meal immediately on opening the fast as the danger is that the body which will be in 'storage mode' and will then try and store any excess food as fat. Have a small meal and then after a couple of hours have another meal focusing more on protein and slow release carbohydrate foods.

Managers, Sports Science and Medical team can also help players if they are able to agree on a training program whereby the load is reduced during Ramadan. Some managers allow their players to train in the morning only if there has been a double training scheduled and do some other gym work which is less strenuous in the afternoon. However, this means that it will be a long time before nutrition that helps with recovery can be consumed. Another option is that training can be done just before Iftar to gain the maximum from recovery nutrition. However, training late means you don't maximise the benefits of the nutrition from Suhoor. This is why it is important to discuss with your Medical team the best options for you, the team and how best to optimise recovery.

Dr Zafar Iqbal (Consultant in Sports & Exercise Medicine)

MBBS, BSc, DCH, DRCOG, MRCP, MSc (SEM), FFSEM (UK), Dip PCR

Head of Sports Medicine, Crystal Palace FC

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