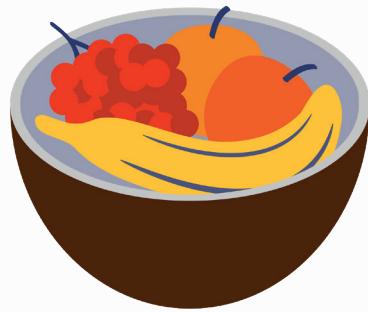


Fasting and MS

In this factsheet:

- What does my religion or philosophy say? 1
- Is it safe for me to fast? 2
- Partial fasting 2
- Can I fast and take my medications? 2
- Vaccines 3
- Will fasting make my MS worse? 3
- Can fasting help my MS? 3
- Find out more 3
- About this resource 4
- Contact us 4



If you've got MS (multiple sclerosis) and you're thinking of fasting for religious reasons, you might find this factsheet useful.

It could help you discuss things with your religious leader, your doctor or MS nurse, your family and friends. We've also got information explaining MS in a number of languages.

Several religions and philosophies have times of fasting. Lots of people with MS observe these fasts when they feel well enough. But if you've got MS, there could be times when fasting is not advised.

MS affects people in different ways, so there's no simple advice for everyone with MS. The choice to fast or not will be a personal one.

What does my religion or philosophy say?

You know what's usually expected in your belief during a time of fasting – whether that means avoiding all food and drink, or cutting out certain things.

But if you have MS, speak to your religious leader about it. They might have specific advice about how to observe the fasting period.

Lots of people with MS are fine to fast. Some are advised not to – or to keep an eye out for symptoms and stop if they get worse. Your decision will partly depend on how your MS is at the time.

Is it safe for me to fast?

There's no simple answer that fits everyone. With your doctor or MS nurse, you might want to think about:

- How do I feel – am I well enough to fast?
- How would it be if any symptoms got worse during the fast?
- Will my fast affect any medications?

One particular fast has been studied more than others for people with MS: the month of Ramadan. For 30 days, Muslims go without food and water during daylight hours.

A group of neurologists, nutritionists and pharmacists looked at the research and shared their professional experiences. They concluded that the effect of fasting on MS is not clear, but that most people with MS could fast for Ramadan safely.

They also recommended that some people with MS should be advised not to fast for Ramadan:

- People who get severe flu-like symptoms after taking the MS drugs beta interferon or glatiramer acetate
- People who use a wheelchair most of the time
- People taking corticosteroids for a relapse
- People who are having a lot of relapses or whose symptoms are developing quickly

But even if this describes how your MS affects you, speak to your doctor or nurse. It's such an individual thing. They might also recommend you don't fast if you're taking regular medication for certain symptoms.

And remember, what they say might not apply in the same way if you're doing a different kind of fast.

Get all the information you can from your health care team and religious leader, so you can make the right decisions for you.

Partial fasting

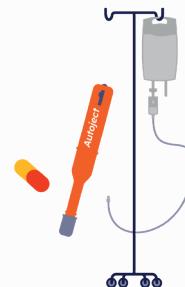
Some religions include partial fasts – eating much less, or cutting out certain foods or drinks.

If you cut something out, don't forget to find alternatives so you get the nutrients you need. The NHS has information on alternative sources of foods: [nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well)

Can I fast and take my medications?

You might find your fast includes the times you normally take a medication. Your religious leader can clarify what your faith says about this.

But before you stop taking any prescribed medicine, or change the routine, check things out with a health care professional. Changes could alter how they work, or even be dangerous.



And if you plan to stick to your usual medicine routine, still speak to a pharmacist, doctor or nurse about anything you should be aware of.

For example, some common treatments need to be taken with food – to work properly or to protect the lining of the stomach.

You might be able to plan ahead with your health care team to might find a schedule which is safe, effective and works for you.

Vaccines

The British Islamic Medical Association says that taking any of the available COVID-19 vaccines does not invalidate a fast, in the opinion of Islamic scholars. They have more information about this, other vaccines and managing any side effects when you're fasting at britishima.org



Will fasting make my MS worse?

Keep an eye on your symptoms while you're fasting, but changes don't necessarily mean that you're having a relapse or that your MS is progressing.

There isn't research to show if there are any long-term effects on MS. But two research studies have looked at the short-term effects of fasting for Ramadan. They both involved people with MS who were able to walk without difficulty.

The authors say this kind of fast doesn't make relapses more or less likely, and it doesn't make short-term progression worse.

Some of the effects of your MS might feel worse while you're fasting, including:

- fatigue
- dizziness
- muscle spasms or stiffness
- problems with memory or thinking
- weakness
- eyesight changes
- balance difficulties

It's quite a list! But you might not notice all of these things – and they should gradually go back to how they usually are, once you're eating and drinking again.

If you're thinking of fasting for Ramadan, remember to think about how you'd manage any other changes in your routine too. For example, if you're getting up very early, or getting less sleep.

If you're worried about anything before, during or after a fast, let your doctor or nurse know.

Can fasting help my MS?

Fasting for health reasons has been in the news in recent years. Early research suggests that limiting calories might have a positive impact on MS.

But there have only been a few small studies and it's too soon to advise for or against fasting for MS. Search 'fasting' on our website to find out more about this research.

Find out more

Our information resources cover every aspect of living with MS. And our booklets *Just diagnosed* and *What is MS?* are available to download in a number of languages.

You can read them online or download at mssociety.org.uk/publications

You can order printed resources from onlineshop.mssociety.org.uk or call **0300 500 8084**, select option 4

MS Helpline

Our MS Helpline **0808 800 8000** gives emotional support and information to anyone living with MS. We can provide information in different languages through an interpreter service.

Email helpline@mssociety.org.uk

Find out more at mssociety.org.uk/helpline

About this resource

With thanks to all the people affected by MS and professionals who contributed to this booklet.

Email us if you'd like to know the scientific and medical references for this information at supportercare@mssociety.org.uk

We'd love to hear what you think about this information at mssociety.org.uk/yourviews



This resource is also available in large print.

**Call 0300 500 8084
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This title will be reviewed within three years of publication (January 2029).

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