

# Fasting in Ramadan as a PE teacher.

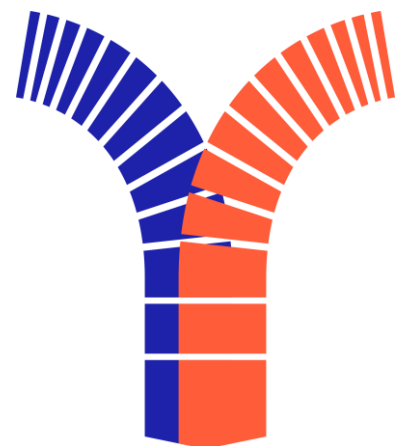
Ramadan is a Holy month for all Muslims around the world. It is a time for Muslims to come together, fasting from dawn to sunset, as an act of worship. Throughout the month we focus on improving our Imaan (belief in Allah - God). This is maintained through spiritual reflection, self-discipline and by resisting the urge to eat or drink through maintaining control of our actions and intentions. Through empathy and compassion, Islam promotes being charitable and compassionate towards others, teaching us to empathise with those less fortunate or people living under grave circumstances.

Ramadan is also a time of community, a time for families and communities to come together for meals, prayers and get together throughout the month.

Ramadan can look and feel different for everyone. Some people use the month to work on their personal goals such as improving their fitness, healthy eating habits and sleep, whilst others may focus on building their relationships and social life. Some individuals may spend it alone due to various circumstances whilst others are surrounded by family and a larger community. We are all living different lives, either working, studying, unemployed or in different places in our lives. This just means that we are all experiencing different types of fasts. Some people around the world are fasting for shorter or longer hours than other parts, meaning some people may find it easier or harder depending on their days, their workload, fasting experience and many other factors.

## Day to day life

As a Muslim I take part in the Holy month of Ramadan whilst also contributing to my life at work. Working as a PE teacher, I already have a demanding schedule that can sometimes be very frantic and lengthy. My days consist of planning and teaching my lessons, running afterschool extracurricular activities, as well as attending fixtures and tournaments outside of school. With the shorter winter days this sometimes means that by the time I get home there is not a lot of time to prepare Iftar (dinner to break our fast) and rest before iftar time.

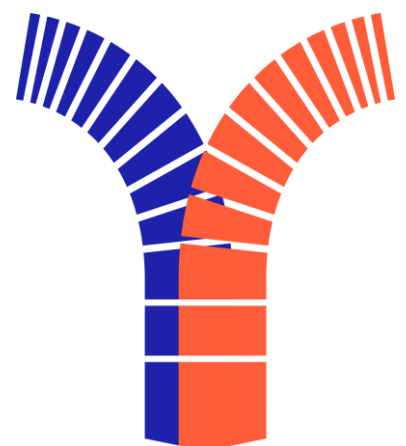


My average fasting day consists of this:

- 1 Wake up at 6:30am
- 2 Travel to school, get there at 8am for an 8:25am start.
- 3 8:25-8:45 form class
- 4 8:45-10:25 teaching
- 5 10:25-10:45 break time
- 6 10:45-12:25 teaching
- 7 12:25-1:05 lunch time
- 8 1:05-2:45 teaching
- 9 2:45-3:45 KS3 afterschool club
- 10 3:45-4:35 KS4 afterschool club
- 11 Travel back home for 5:30pm
- 12 Shower, pray, get ready for iftar.
- 13 Prepare food.
- 14 Break my fast at 6:25pm
- 15 Pray evening prayers.
- 16 Prepare dinner for the next day.
- 17 Down time- do some work, plan lessons, Netflix.
- 18 Go to bed at 12am
- 19 Wake up at 3:30am
- 20 Prepare suhoor (meal eaten before dawn) and eat in time for imsak (time to begin fast) at 4:20am
- 21 Pray morning prayers.
- 22 Go back to bed.
- 23 Wake up at 6:30am

The first couple of days of Ramadan are personally the hardest due to the various changes happening in my body and my life. The sudden effect of not eating or drinking during the day sends our body into a complete frenzy. Some effects that I personally struggle with consist of:

- **Altered hydration status.** Due to the lack of water consumption throughout the day, it can be hard to drink a set amount of water in the time between iftar and imsak, which combined with a hectic workload and hot weather can cause thirst, fatigue, headaches, and dizziness. As a PE teacher, considering I mostly work outdoors I am also constantly shouting to relay instructions and keep students on track. This has felt like the hardest part of my day as by the end of each lesson my throat gets dry and I feel absolutely parched.
- **Change in sleep patterns.** As we sleep late due to night prayers and other commitments and then wake up early for suhoor, it can be hard to get a healthy amount of deep sleep. This change in sleep schedule can impact overall alertness and cognitive function during the day, it has made me feel low on energy, and sleepy a lot of the time. I personally love my sleep; hence it has been extra hard for me to miss out on so much sleep, so I try my best to catch every minute I can.



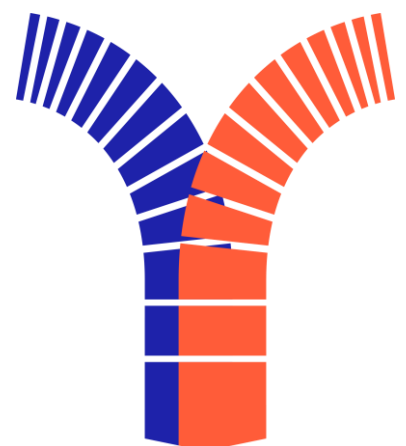
- **Changes in energy levels.** As I said above I generally experience a low amount of energy due to the lack of sleep, although I occasionally get sudden bursts of energy during the day when teaching. However, other people may have different experiences whereas they have an increased level of energy and alertness throughout the day and feel perfectly fine.

Additionally, most people may also experience hormonal, digestive, and metabolic changes which can be normal due to the change in sleep schedules, different eating patterns, as well as lack of food that can affect our bodies. However, after a week to ten days it is common that our bodies adapt to the changes and most people get used to the routine. It is normal that everyone tends to start on an incredible high, waking up every night to eat, going to the mosque for daily prayers, spending a lot of time reading the Quran and expanding their knowledge. Eventually some begin to tire and these routines slowly become harder. Although a lot of people can maintain this high for the whole month, some individuals may see a dip in energy before experiencing another high, and others may completely drift off and struggle. As a teacher it is important to remember this, considering that a lot of our students may be new to fasting so may struggle a bit more.

We may come across students that are very energetic and always want to get involved, whilst others may complain and do whatever it takes to get out of doing PE. This can be slightly controversial as parents may not appreciate encouraging their children to get involved in PE could affect their fasts or their health during the day. Personally I was the student that did not care and got involved in PE until I felt like I was about to pass out. However, this can obviously be very dangerous, and the kids may not always know or understand their limits. As teachers it is our responsibility to ensure that our students are still following the school rules such as changing into PE kit, getting involved in the lesson, and contributing, although, this can look different. Fasting students may do a regressed or slower version of the sport, they can support in umpiring a match, setting up equipment, or playing a position that may not require as much running effort.

## Teaching in PE

Fasting in Ramadan as a teacher can be very difficult. On top of a very hard day with lots of talking, shouting, managing behaviour and socialising with students and colleagues, attempting to do that with no food or water can be very draining. I try to keep that in mind while I teach, considering the students go through their days with very similar experiences. So, if I am tired, they are like to be as well. If I am thirsty and hungry, so are they! And if I am not, they probably are!



There are a few things I like to do to make sure my fasting students are engaged and comfortable:

- **Find out who is fasting.** A simple question to help me understand who I need to specifically look out for or support if needed. The students will also feel a small sense of comfort knowing that I do care, and I am looking out for them.
- **Plan lighter activities.** Energy levels are most likely low, if a large number of students are fasting, it may be easier to plan a lighter lesson and progress students that are not fasting or ones that are more able. Using less strenuous starters/games that are still able to teach what is required whilst also promoting physical activity. If possible, I may switch to low impact sports/exercises that do not require intense exertion such as yoga, Pilates, table tennis or cricket.
- **Allow for regular rest breaks.** Allowing students to take breaks whenever they need to can be essential in ensuring they are not overworking leading to any harmful consequences. Constantly check in with them to see if they are ok if they do not ask for a break themselves. It could also be beneficial to do a whole class break as to not single out the fasting students.
- **Lead by example.** Getting involved in my lessons as much as possible. Creating a sense of camaraderie amongst the students, proving to them that I am fasting too, and I can do it. This can motivate them to get more involved in the lesson.
- **Be flexible and understanding.** I believe this is the most important factor. Having an open mind and understanding that no two students are the same. Some may struggle with their fasts more than others, some may come from harsher circumstances where they are not able to have more than one meal, therefore they are more hungry or thirsty. Some are running on little to no sleep because their families stayed up late for prayers etc. There are so many possibilities and I want to ensure all my students, fasting or not feel comfortable in my lesson.

Overall Ramadan is a beautiful month, and most Muslims will come out of it feeling very fulfilled, happy, faithful and proud. It is a month that can help some change their lives permanently for the better, whilst others may struggle. All in all, as teachers it is essential that our students feel supported and comforted during this time. I also expect the support and respect back from my students and colleagues as well.

For more information about Physical education and Physical Activity during Ramadan, please read the recent [guidance paper](#) written by Dr Irfan Khawaja from Birmingham City University

