



**GUIDANCE
NOTES**

**FAITH AND FOOTBALL
RAMADAN 2021**

FOR ALL

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Hamza Choudhury, Leicester City and former England men's under-21 international, seen here during an England training camp.

RAMADAN 2021

The Islamic calendar is based on the lunar cycle, and as a result, the Holy month of Ramadan starts earlier by approximately 10 days every year.

This year's Ramadan start date is expected to be **Monday 12 April**, subject to the sighting of the moon, and the expected end date is **Tuesday 11 May**.

Please note that there are also cultural differences in the start and end dates.

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FOOTBALL AND RAMADAN

THE MAIN QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Q: WHAT IS RAMADAN AND WHAT DOES IT INVOLVE?

A: Ramadan is the holiest month in the Muslim calendar. It is observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting to commemorate the first revelation of the Quran¹ to the Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him) according to Islamic belief.

Fasting during this holy month is one of the five pillars of Islam, which also include prayer and charity. Ramadan lasts for one lunar month which is a maximum of 30 days and its start and ending dates are determined by the sighting of the moon. Practically this means it occurs around 10 days earlier each year.

Ramadan is the most important and spiritual time of year for many Muslims and people may well change their routine, activities and life/work balance for this period. Fasting is the focus of the month, but people's mindsets and the way they interact with others may also vary due to their focus on faith at this time.

During daylight hours adult Muslims and those who have reached puberty are required to abstain from eating, drinking (including water) and smoking. The obligation of fasting does not apply to those who are physically or mentally unwell, travelling or pregnant. If any individual has not been able to observe a specific day's fast,

they may need to make up for this later on by either fasting for a day after Ramadan or giving a meal to someone more in need or donating the value of that meal to charity.

Islam is not the only religion which prescribes fasting as an act of worship. Almost all major religions have periods of fasting within the practice of their faith.

¹ Organised in 114 chapters, the Quran is the central religious text of Islam. It is believed by Muslims to be a revelation from God and is widely regarded as the finest work in classical Arabic literature.

Q: WHAT FOOTBALL RULES COVER RAMADAN?

A: FA Rules make it clear that all faiths can be observed and will be respected within football. This is covered in FA Rule B5: Football & Religious Observance, which is on page 101 of the [2020/21 FA Handbook](#).

In practice, it means no-one can be compelled to play on a religious holiday unless they've consented, or are a professional player under contract.

As far as **grassroots football** is concerned, the rule means that any fixtures that fall within Ramadan can be played either after sunset or delayed until after Eid ul-Fitr (the celebration at the end of Ramadan).



FOOTBALL AND RAMADAN

THE MAIN QUESTIONS ANSWERED

Different Muslims will have different interpretations and observance of Islam and therefore it is always advisable to consult in advance with anyone affected.

Q: CAN FIXTURES BE POSTPONED BECAUSE OF RAMADAN?

A: Yes, but this should be avoided by leagues compiling Ramadan-sensitive fixture lists. If it is known that a team has a significant number of Muslim players, it is best practice to ask any predominantly Muslim clubs/teams about their plans to fast and play and then plan fixtures accordingly.

It is always important to take note of any important religious dates when planning fixtures. To help this, The FA produces a calendar of religious dates. You can find the latest one [here](#). The calendar also contains information on the most significant religious dates across all major faith groups.

Q: CAN REFEREES DECLINE TO OFFICIATE DURING RAMADAN?

A: Yes, but again this should be avoided by leagues knowing which referees are Muslim and their plans to fast and pray during Ramadan.

Q: WHAT EFFECT, IF ANY, WILL THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAVE ON RAMADAN?

A: The Covid-19 pandemic has no direct effect on Ramadan this year. Grassroots football returned on **Monday 29 March** in line with the UK Government's roadmap out of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. Therefore Ramadan will happen before the current season is concluded for most clubs. With this in mind and if you are a Muslim player, please read the 'Tips for Muslim participants' overleaf, which covers suggested exercise times and dietary recommendations. To read The FA's latest guidance for grassroots football, [click here](#).

Q: HOW DOES RAMADAN AFFECT YOUTH FOOTBALL?

A: There is no set age when Muslims start fasting, but it is generally post-puberty which can vary from between eight and 16 years old. This will usually affect Muslim participation in youth football during Ramadan, especially in the older age groups.

As above, it is best practice for leagues to ask Muslim clubs/teams in advance about their plans to fast and play youth matches during Ramadan.

“

It is advised that those players planning on fasting while training and playing during Ramadan discuss with their medical, sports science and coaching staff to ensure they get the most appropriate support.”

Dr. Zaf Iqbal
Head of Sports Medicine,
Crystal Palace FC



TIPS FOR MUSLIM COLLEAGUES AND PARTICIPANTS IN FOOTBALL

With this in mind and if you are a Muslim member of staff, player, coach, referee or other football participant, Ramadan may have an effect on you, particularly physically.

This is mainly due to the fasting required, so maintaining good physical health requires additional thought and preparation. Fasting is difficult because the body has to adapt to not receiving food and fluids throughout the day.

Not having regular quick energy provided by frequent meals during the day means the body has to rely on what it can store and then change the way it works. Dehydration is the biggest issue. It causes fatigue which slows down many of our bodily organ functions.

Here are tips we hope you'll find useful and at the foot of this page are some links to more detailed information.

EXERCISE TIMES

The best times to exercise are in periods that limit losses in fitness or strength. With daylight fasting in mind, the ideal exercise time is therefore around midnight. That's because it's a few hours after you have broken your fast in the evening meal (iftar) and allows enough time thereafter for your body to digest any food, clear the stomach and direct blood to the exercising muscles.

In addition, after you've exercised around midnight and before you go to bed, you also have time to consume sufficient fluid and glucose to enable you to replenish muscle glycogen¹ stores after exercise.

¹ Glycogen is an energy-giver made from glucose in the food you eat. It is mainly stored in your liver and muscles. From these storage sites, your muscles can quickly mobilise stored glycogen as fuel.

SUGGESTED RAMADAN DIET

The dietary suggestions below are aimed at active football participants. If you have, or are likely to have, any health issues during fasting, you should seek appropriate medical advice before starting any major dietary changes.

After sunset meal (iftar):

DO:

- Eat a small amount of quick-release carbohydrates (e.g. dates, fruit, smoothies and pasta);
- Drink a whey protein shake to help with muscle regeneration and recovery.

DON'T:

- Eat big meals at this time, or the body goes into 'storage mode' and will make you feel lethargic and not want to exercise later.

Before dawn meal (suhour):

DO:

- Focus on carbohydrates that release energy slowly (e.g. non-starchy vegetables like spinach and kale; sweet potato, pasta, nuts, fruit, oats and porridge) combined with foods that will release energy in the short/medium-term (e.g. bananas, eggs and apples);
- Drink plenty of isotonic fluids as opposed to water – ideally between two and four litres;
- Gain extra electrolytes from a soluble tablet to help with the water absorption.

DON'T:

- Skip suhour. Getting more sleep might sound appealing, but breakfast really is the most important meal of the day and is even more important during Ramadan to get you through the fasting period;
- Eat rich, greasy, fried and sugary dishes. Aside from the unhealthy weight gain, consuming fatty and sugary foods also cause sluggishness and fatigue;
- Add too much salt, as it will increase your thirst during the day.

THE PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF FASTING

Fasting poses a challenge to your body, but it can have the following benefits:

- Weight loss;
- Improved blood sugar control;
- Improved cholesterol levels;
- Reduced inflammation within the body, leading to reduced risk factors for diabetes and cardiovascular disease;
- On a personal level, it teaches you control and self-restraint.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND READING:

- Much of the advice above is drawn from an article by Dr. Zafar Iqbal, Head of Sports Medicine at Crystal Palace FC. You can read the full article [here](#).
- Strategies for maintaining fitness and performance during Ramadan, [Journal of Sports Sciences](#)
- Ramadan fasting and the goals of sports nutrition around exercise, [Journal of Sports Sciences](#)
- [A healthy Ramadan](#), the British Nutrition Foundation.

TIPS FOR NON-MUSLIM COLLEAGUES AND PARTICIPANTS IN FOOTBALL

If you're a non-Muslim club official, member of staff, manager or coach, who either has peers, colleagues or players who are Muslim, it's good to acquaint yourself with what Ramadan involves. That way you can ensure your club or team is inclusive and welcoming, which also supports The FA's For All ethos.

It is important to note that Ramadan is the holiest month of the Muslim calendar, and it is a month where many Muslims will be immersing themselves in extra worship and a deep reflective period of introspection and mindfulness. The holy month of Ramadan is not only fasting from all foods and drinks, but also fasting from desires, foul language, bad behaviour and distractions.

Here are some tips:

WHO'S WHO

Ensure you know which of your colleagues or players are Muslims and the degree to which they will observe Ramadan.

Without invading anyone's privacy, it's good to find this out. Then you're in a good position to inform your colleagues, other team members, leagues and organisers to make provision around fixture planning for example. Clearly, it also helps to get to know your colleagues and players better and to build stronger relationships.

ACKNOWLEDGE ANYONE OBSERVING RAMADAN

As with any religion, showing your Muslim colleagues or team members that you know it is a special time for them is likely to be appreciated.

Acknowledging Ramadan on your website (internal and external), within your team settings or on social media could be well received. For example, this could say:

'Ramadan Mubarak' to all our Muslim colleagues, friends and participants. Best wishes for the holy month of Ramadan'

You should also consider flexi-working for Muslim staff during Ramadan and accommodating leave for Eid.

¹ 'Happy' or 'blessed' Ramadan.

APPLY COURTESY AROUND FASTING TIMES

Unless there are specific reasons (e.g. pregnancy), Muslims are required to abstain from eating, drinking and smoking during the daylight hours of Ramadan. The fast is broken after sunset with the evening meal known as 'Iftar'.

Muslims who are fasting do not expect you to stop eating or drinking, although it would be polite not to eat, drink or smoke in front of them. They may also enjoy sitting together and sharing food when they break their fast at Iftar and will welcome non-Muslims to join in. To fast with Muslim friends, even for part of the day, is a good way of building strong bonds.

You should be aware that fasting, combined with extra prayers (see below) and a lack of sleep may result in more tiredness and dehydration than normal. Many Muslims will find it harder to play football or concentrate on their work normally so please be sensitive to this.

APPLY COURTESY AROUND PRAYING TIMES

Muslims may practise their faith more during Ramadan and offer prayers during the day. This will normally be two to three times a day (during working hours) for a few minutes at a time when they will require a small, clean and private area.

Muslims may also attend extra prayers, known as 'Tarawih', during the night.

Whilst neither of the above may affect your footballing or meeting schedule, it's good to be aware, in case you need to make alternative arrangements.

MARKING THE END OF RAMADAN

The end of Ramadan is marked by Eid ul-Fitr, also known as the 'Festival of Breaking the Fast'. The day on which Eid falls will depend on the sighting of the moon therefore flexibility is necessary. Traditionally, Muslims will take time off for Eid, in the same way Christians would for Easter.

The appropriate way to express best wishes to a Muslim at Eid is to say 'Eid Mubarak'.

“

Muslims must be able to practise Ramadan safely and it is vital that those within football understand the importance of this holy month. Ramadan is a big part of my life as a footballer”

15-year-old Layla Banaras,
Birmingham City FC

THE FA, FAITH AND FOOTBALL: A GAME FOR ALL

Ensuring our national sport can be played by everyone is an immutable part of The FA's ethos. The game should always be For All.

To ensure this ethos applies to those with devout religious beliefs, The FA has a 'Faith and Football Group' comprising members of all the main world religions. It exists to advise The FA on any barriers to football that people of faith may experience – or perceive.

You can find out more about The FA's work in this area [here](#), where you will also find useful resources related to the faith spectrum.



THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS FOR THEIR SUPPORT AND CONTRIBUTION TO THIS YEAR'S RAMADAN GUIDANCE NOTES:





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