

18 ways to tackle the longest fast

The summer solstice, at the start of Ramadan, is officially the longest day of the year. Stay motivated to eat right and remain healthy throughout the holy month with our expert advice

BY RACHEL MCARTHUR
Special to GN Focus

NUTRITION

Starting next Thursday and continuing for 29-30 days (depending on the moon sighting), this year's Ramadan is set to be the longest in recent years. This is not only because of the long hours – with fasting restricted to last nearly 14 hours a day – but also because of the scorching summer heat.

Even if that isn't enough, June is officially the longest day of the year, here in the northern hemisphere. For the first time in several years, the summer solstice falls in Ramadan. That means 13 hours, 42 minutes and seconds of daylight in the north and a corresponding period of fasting – at least we won't be fasting for nearly 22 hours a day. Fellow Muslims in Denmark and Norway, for instance,

however, to make things easier for you, we've turned to experts in the country for tips on how to survive this year's grueling fast and even make the most of it.

1 Get in the zone

"Ramadan is a month of devotion and self-discipline, which demands a nutrient-rich diet that maintains your health and endurance levels. This is a strenuous fast in the summer months, lasting over 13 hours on the longest days. For an average person, fasting like this would require mental, spiritual and physical preparation.

And although the changes brought about by fasting can cause increased stress and moodiness, the body and the biological clock usually adjust to the worst of the discomforts within a period of 24-48 hours."



Chandy George,
Ayurvedic Lifestyle
Consultant at Balance
Wellbeing 360

2 A word on dates

"Ramadan can be a great time to break habits. Rather than fuelling your body with high-glucose foods, you can

choose healthier foods such as whole grains and high-fibre foods – rich in nutrients and low in calories. At iftar, it is important to bring your fluids and blood sugar levels up slowly. It is customary to break the fast with dates, which give a spike in blood sugar and a burst of energy. Therefore ensure you drink plenty of water before the dates to rehydrate and fill up so



that you don't over-indulge."
Carol Quelch,
Nutritionist, Bespoke
Wellness at Emirates
Golf Club

3 Start with a salad

"After ending the fast with dates and milk, comfort your stomach by eating a fresh salad like humeidi with green mango, and grilled or roasted dishes seasoned with spices such as fennel, cumin, ginger and cardamom to enhance your digestive ability."



Rabah Samra, Execu-
tive Chef, Seven Sands

4 Eat slowly

"Eating your soup and salad slowly at iftar will help ease your digestive system into processing food and prevent you from overeating.

"Make sure your soup includes lots of vegetables such as broccoli, spinach, peas, green beans, squash and carrots. These fibre-rich vegetables add vitamins and minerals to your soup and are essential for a healthy digestive system."



Cedric D'Ambrosio,
Head Chef,
Sofitel Dubai
Downtown

5 Grill, steam, poach

"It is best to avoid hot and spicy dishes as well as high-fat foods, as they increase thirst. So opt for dishes cooked in healthier ways such as grilling, baking, broiling, steaming and poaching."



Nadine Tayara,
Dietitian and
Centre Manager,
Right Bite

6 Carbs need a partner

"Pair carbohydrates with protein. Carbs are converted into sugars and can eventually take their toll on your body once you are done with iftar. Combine them with protein-rich foods like beans, meat or eggs to balance out an iftar or suhour meal and help with your workout efforts."



Maryam Fattahi
Salaam, Owner and
CEO, Physique 57

7 Choose complex carbs

"During suhour, I focus my meal on slow-releasing carbohydrates to stabilise

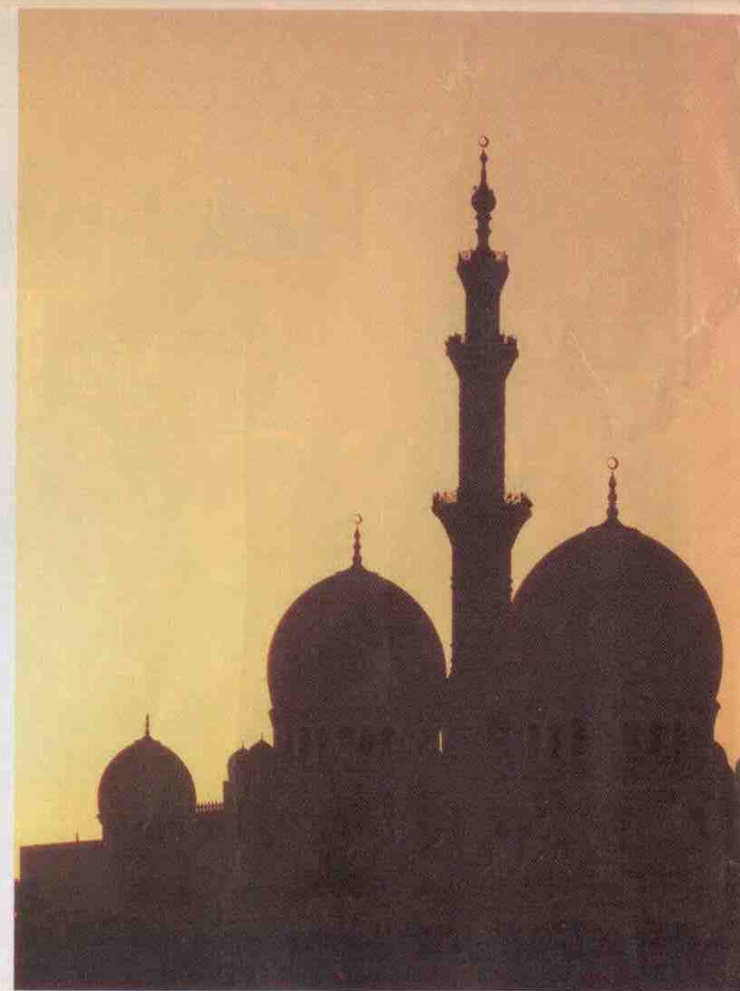
my blood sugar levels, such as sweet potatoes and steel-cut oats, and I also eat lots of nutritious fruits like berries and plenty of vegetables. I tend not to avoid starchy vegetables when fasting as I don't want to deprive myself too much, but I opt for healthier options most of the time – the key is moderation."

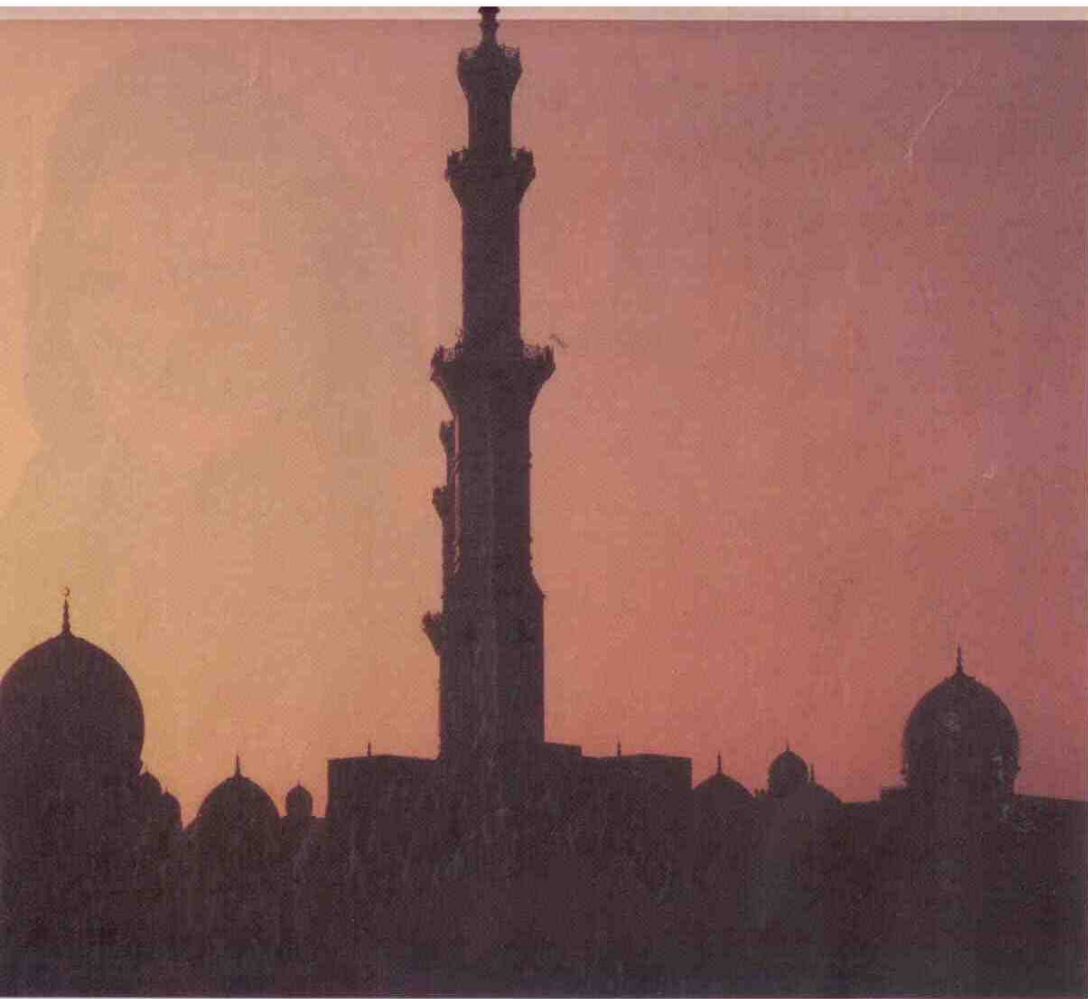


Asma Hilal Lootah, Founder
and Owner, The
Hundred Wellness
Center

8 Shop for fresh produce

"One way to ensure you are well hydrated during the





month is to include a balanced amount of fruits and vegetables in your diet. This needn't be a chore, since healthy, tasty fruits can easily be combined into recipes, or eaten as a light

pre suhour or post iftar snack.”
Ben Hughes,
 Regional Manager,
 Zespri Kiwifruit

9 Don't skip suhour
 “An essential meal, suhour helps in preventing tissue breakdown, while offering the strength needed to last the long Ramadan days. Your suhour should consist of foods that are rich in fibre and complex

carbohydrates that slowly release nutrients throughout the day, while avoiding foods that may dehydrate your body. It is advisable to eat slowly for better digestion and drink enough

water as well.”
Dalya Tabari,
 Director, Al Ittihad
 Drug Store

10 Exit survival mode
 “If you are thinking of surviving in Ramadan, then you've got it all wrong. Get your basics right by understanding the true spirit and in-

tenion of fasting. Once you get that in place you will look forward to it, be happy with it and cherish every day. I am from Pakistan and I grew up with kids begging their parents to allow them to fast. It was considered a matter of pride. I go into the month without thinking of it as a burden in my life; I think of it as a blessing and that changes almost everything.”
Yusuf Pingar,
 Managing Director,
 Spark

11 When to exercise
 “One of the most commonly asked questions

in the lead-up to Ramadan is ‘Should I be exercising or not?’ My answer is always the same – with adequate thought, planning and preparation, exercising and fasting will keep your goals on track and could even give your results a boost. If your goal is fat loss, then the best time to train is before suhour and it should be 30-45 minutes, moderate intensity.”

Charlotte Stebbing,
 Area
 Fitness Manager, Fitness First Abu Dhabi Clubs

12 Try working out before iftar

“Generally, I tend to feel more productive and focused during Ramadan – the key is to maintain a well-balanced life, specifically in terms of diet, sleep, work and even exercise. In the past couple of years, for example, I discovered working out before iftar is not at all as challenging as I thought it would be. This had a positive impact on my productivity at work and my overall well-being.”

Hassan Al Hazeem, Managing Director,
 Intercoil International and Sleep Matters Ambassador

13 Relax, reflect, reboot

“Use this time of the year to reflect on the things in your life that you are appreciative of and the things you want to change. I tend to keep myself busy, cleanse the mind and body, and exercise just before ending the fast at iftar, when I'm able to burn most calories.”

Sudqi Naddaf,
 Executive Chef,
 Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates

14 Load up on supplements

“During Ramadan, your face doesn't need to suf-

fer. Skin supplements are usually a group of several vitamins and antioxidants that can enhance its well-being. Examples of the most important antioxidants are vitamin C, E, A, selenium and zinc. Antioxidants reduce the harmful effect of the sun and reduce the process of releasing free radicals that usually harm skin cells. It is always recommended to choose a skin supplement from a well-known scientific pharmaceutical laboratory. We recommend taking these during suhour, as you are able to get the benefits of these supplements during fasting hours, which are usually when our skin is exposed to all environmental factors.”

Dr Shadan Naji,
 Dermatologist &
 Aesthetic, Obagi
 Medispa

15 Shine on

“Haircare is a key part of your beauty routine. I am obsessed with hair products, but of course with such an abundance of great products to choose from, you need to consider different products for different uses. For Ramadan, since the weather is dry and humid, my top pick is argan oil. Not only does it offer complete hydration to the hair, resulting in softer, silkier and shinier locks, but with its healing properties it can also treat split ends. Especially, with all the outings in Ramadan, applying argan oil can protect the hair from the heat coming from the use of straighteners and curlers.”

Huda Kattan,
 Partner and Founder,
 Huda Beauty

16 Brush and floss regularly

“It is imperative to maintain healthy oral hygiene even during Ramadan. There are some simple ways to ensure our teeth, gums and mouths

remain unaffected while ing. This includes drinking plenty of water from iftar suhour. Brush teeth and gums twice for two minutes use dental floss to avoid the accumulation of bacteria, and a tongue scraper as [it helps]

Dr Soraya Al M Cosmetics,
 Cosmetic Dentist
 Sansaya Clinic

17 Spa rules

“Ramadan is a time of reflection, spiritual engagement and to focus on improving the body and mind. Relaxation is extremely important, so if you are heading to the spa during the holy month, we recommend treatment that can help to clear the mind, keep it focused, while ensuring only the most natural products are used. Any heat-based treatments should be avoided

that you do not get [dehydrated].”
Lea Cordon Ru,
 Managing Director,
 Spa Cordon

18 Stay hydrated

“Hydration is the most important aspect of Ramadan, particularly so when Ramadan takes place in the summer months. The body can handle long periods without food. In fact, studies have shown that fasting can be a very healthy activity to regulate body weight – but it can't last long without water.

“With this in mind, you should be drinking plenty of water between iftar and suhour to stay adequately hydrated during the holy month.

“Don't drink large volumes over a short period, as this can lead to water intoxication: a small sip of water is what's needed.”
Boyet Balon,
 Personal Trainer,
 Elevation Fitness