# EXERCISE DURING RAMADHAN (FASTING MONTH); IS IT A GOOD IDEA TO DO EXERCISE DURING THIS HOLY MONTH?

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**Abstract**

*Till today, most people are very scepticle when performing exercise during Ramadhan month. They are thinking that this holy month we should only rest and perform ibada. One should not perform any exercise because it will affect the health condition and also the fasting performance as well. The researcher could recall when were in school day when running around the neighbourhood before iftar (breaking fast) when people in the neighbourhood started teasing the researcher outloud whether fasting or not because too much of energy to run during fasting. Taboo saying exercise is not good during fasting month has been around among mostly Muslim people in Malaysia. However, sports scientists and other health scientists have discovered the other way around that exercise during fasting month is beneficial to everyone generally. This study is using current and past literatures to identify the benefits of exercise during fasting month. The intention of this study also to debunk the taboo saying exercise is not good during fasting month. Instead of just going to Bazar Ramadhan during the holy month, why not at the same time performing exercise because it is also considered as ibada.*

Keywords: *Exercise, fasting month, taboo, benefits, and ibada.*

## INTRODUCTION

Every year all Muslim adults must perform the third pillar of Islam in Ramadhan month by fasting from sunrise till sunset where they are obliged to refrain from eating, drinking, smoking, oral drug intake and having intercourse with their marital partner at that period (Chtourou et al., 2012). Muslims utilise the Hijri calendar to calculate the dates of religious events like fasting and Eid celebration, which is completely independent from astronomical seasons, which indicated by the equinoxes and solstices (Parise, 2002).

All Muslims are encouraged to enhance their ibada during this month because all the heaven's gates are opened to accept all good deeds performed by them and the rewards are enourmous. Fasting also is one of the gateways to be closed to Allah SWT and to abolish the sins that were done previously (Abdul, 2015).

However, one should not neglect the health during this Ramadhan month. Even though fasting is said to be beneficial for health, it does not mean that the individual just need not to do any physical activity and stay unproductive and hoping that only fasting will do the miracle for the health's sake. It must come along with physical activity such as exercise because if 30 consecutive days without exercise in Ramadhan, it equivalents to losing four months of exercise (Noorbhai, 2013).

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, references from the reputable sources from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Science Direct, MyCite and reliable books and websites are used to recognize the health benefits to debunk the taboo when performing exercise during fasting month. Keywords from the abstract; exercise, fasting month, taboo, benefits, and are the key points in searching the relevant references.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Performing exercise in the Ramadhan month has beneficial effects on body composition where it able to increase lipolysis in adipose and muscle tissue, thus it reduces the amount of body fat mass (Bassuk & Manson, 2005; Donnelly et al., 2009; Zouhal et al., 2020).

While the amount of insulin decreases and hepatic glycogen breakdown increases during fasting, it is recommended that endurance training during this condition leads to more fat consumption than the absorbtive state (De Bock et al., 2005; Horowitz et al., 1997; Maughan et al., 2010).

Another study found that cardio-respiratory responses to sub-maximal exercise were small during Ramadhan, with no significant changes in maximal exercise capacity, percentage of VO2 max, treadmill walking efficiency, body weight, or body composition (skinfolds) associated with Ramadhan fasting for sedentary people who engage in heavy aerobic exercise (Ramadan & Barac-Nieto, 2000).

For the appropriate time to perform the exercise, (Aziz et al., 2012) had underlined that the best time to exercise throughout Ramadhan is at 9:00 p.m. Since fasting athletes were able to refuel and rehydrate by eating their pre-prepared iftar (breaking fast) meals at approximately at 7.15 p.m. Meanwhile, (Bouguerra et al., 2017) concluded that training in the afternoon between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m. during Ramadhan can be more effectively to improve aerobic performance compared to morning or evening training due to the normal day-to-day of sport performance, improvement in blood flow, a greater broken down of glycogen and more free fatty acids are used as a fuel substance during afternoon exercise sessions.

Fasting for 30 days without exercise results in a loss of strength and fitness regardless of whether they train at least three days a week for the previous 11 months, but skipping exercise during Ramadhan will put them at a disadvantage in terms of cardiovascular and resistance adaptations (Noorbhai, 2013).

People with chronic diseases such as diebetes should take caution when planning to perform exercise during fasting month. They should first consult with their respective medical officer to determine whether they are capable to do exercise or vice versa (Lim, 2021). This is because those with type 1 diabetes are not encouraged to exercise at all as this can hinder their glucose levels profusely where the blood sugar (glucose) level is lower than the standard range, which is known as hypoglycemia (Siahkolah & Azizi, 2003). But for those who have diabetes type 2, they still can perform the exercise at low intensity for 35 minutes focusing more on aerobic and strength training (Noorbhai, 2013). Yet, they are still required to get advice from their respective medical officer.

During the month of Ramadhan, Muslim athletes reportedly experience an increase in subjective symptoms of malaise, lethargy, and exhaustion, which impairs their ability to perform at their peak, particularly in high-intensity exercise due to dehydration, daily food restriction consumption, and the change of the sleep-wake cycle (Kaarud et al., 2016; Roky et al., 2004).

## CONCLUSION

Even though most research have highlighted the benefits of exercise during Ramadhan, it does not mean during iftar (breaking fast) we should eat a lot. We should eat moderately and take only balance and nutrious food during iftar. As mentioned in Al-Quran chapter Al-Baqarah verse 168 and 172 say as follows:

*"O mankind, eat from whatever is on earth [that is] lawful and good and do not follow the footsteps of Satan. Indeed, he is to you a clear enemy."*

*(Al-Baqarah: verse 168)*

*"O you who have Faith! Eat of the good things We have provided you with, and be grateful to Allah, if Him it is you worship."*

*(Al-Baqarah: verse 172)*

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in his teaching also mentioned about against overeating:

*The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: The son of Adam does not fill any vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to eat a few mouthfuls to keep him going. If he must do that (fill his stomach), then let him fill one third with food, one third with drink, and one third with air".*

*(At-Tirmidhi 2380)*

Exercise during Ramadhan month enhances lipolysis in adipose tissue while simultaneously boosting peripheral fat oxidation, resulting in greater fat usage and reductions in body weight, lean body mass, and fat content in both trained and untrained people (Zouhal et al., 2020).

However, there are several disputes over research study results continues to grow due to a variety of factors such as diversity in Ramadhan culture, dietary composition, daily lifestyle, atmospheric conditions, altitude, length of day, and performance test selection. As mentioned earlier by (Aziz et al., 2012) and (Bouguerra et al., 2017), where there are differences in the best time to perform the exercise for maximum performance. More indepth research needs to be done to understand more about these phenomena such as the appropriate time, effects or impacts relating to age or gender or diseases, type of exercise performed, and on cognitive and affective functions. Furthermore, there seems to be a lacking of detailed understanding relating physiological and performance effects of athletes fasting throughout Ramadhan (Fallah, 2010).

People with chronic diseases must take cautious care when planning to perform exercise during Ramadhan month and must consult with their medical officer to determine the appropriate exercise that can be done by them. This is because they are the expert about the level of health of their patients and know what the best for them.

General guidelines can be followed when performing exercise during Ramadhan and are as stated below:

i. Stay rehydrated
ii. Do not overtrain/less intensity
iii. Switch from cardio to strength training
iv. Increase rest period
v. Shorter length of exercise
vi. Sufficient nutrition intake (pre-fasting meal/suhoor)
vii. Stop when feeling exhausted

Finally, the prevalent of saying that exercise is not good during Ramadhan is absolutely a taboo. Except for those who are suffering chronic diseases or other factors that would stop them from doing exercise, the general population may find that there are so many benefits performing exercise during Ramadhan. Of course, it would be very challenging to exercise during Ramadhan. However, one must understand that this holy month is not only holding us from eating or drinking, but also an ibada that teaches us to be patience, sacrifice, and exercise during Ramadhan is the willpower to overcome the challenges given to us by Allah SWT.

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