

# Ramadan 101

## What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is one of the 12 months of the Islamic calendar, special to Muslims because the Quran was first revealed during this month. As a celebration of this momentous event when we believe God revealed His word, Muslims fast during this month from dawn to dusk. This doesn't mean we fast for 30 days (this is a common, although weird assumption) but rather that we fast every day for 30 days. We wake up before sunrise and eat a meal called *suhoor*, and then fast the entire day until sunset, when the fast is broken by a meal called *iftar*. Repeat for the entire month.

## So it's a complete fast? Not even water?

Yes. It is a complete fast, unlike Lent but not unlike Yom Kippur. And yes, not even water may pass our lips during the hours of the fast. This is in no way unhealthy for our bodies. However, fasting is only mandatory for healthy adults whose bodies are able to endure the strenuous nature of the fast without negative consequences.

## Why do Muslims fast, really?

The real reason for the month of Ramadan is explained beautifully and succinctly in the Quran thus: "O ye who believe, fasting has been prescribed for you even as it was prescribed to those before you, so that you may become righteous (Quran 2:183). During Ramadan one doesn't only abstain from food and drink, but more importantly from bad habits and behaviors. The hunger and thirst one feels is supposed to develop patience, self-restraint and gratitude. Also, while fasting one prays more, gives to charity and otherwise tries to become closer to God through good works.

*Ramadan move up 10  
days every year*

*Fasting is actually  
beneficial to your health*

*After the last day of Ramadan, there is a big celebration with family and friends called "Eid-al-Fitr"*

*The greeting changes to "Eid Mubarak"*

## What can you do?

Just be considerate

You can even participate in interfaith iftar events that may be held at mosques or community centers during this month. These are great opportunities to meet like-minded people and learn about different traditions.

Fasting while working is an even greater endeavor. Make it a little easier on your Muslim colleague by following a couple of simple rules:

### The Greeting

The next time you find yourself in line for the copier with your Muslim colleague, feel free to wish him or her “Ramadan Mubarak” or “Ramadan Kareem” or simply “Happy Ramadan.” We absolutely love it when people acknowledge Ramadan and are happy about it.

### Positive Reinforcement

Keep in mind that we’re fasting voluntarily and, actually, pretty joyously (despite the tired, sad look on our face). We’re not forced to fast. In fact, we wait for this month the whole year, so you don’t have to feel sorry for us. We are not trying to be rescued (other than by that ticking clock taking us closer to sunset!).

### The Lunch Meeting

Most of us understand that life goes on, and so do lunch meetings, and if we are participating in them while fasting, don’t worry about eating in front of us. This is just part of the test. We appreciate your acknowledging our fast, but don’t feel the need to discuss it every time you show up in our line of sight holding food. Please ignore our stomach when it growls at your sandwich.

### No Water

It’s true — we can’t drink water either. Again, this is part of the Ramadan test and our exercise of spiritual discipline. This is probably why you may not find your friend at the water cooler. Try switching the break time conversation to another location in the office. You should probably also let them skip their turn for the coffee run this time.

### Iftar Dinner

Consider holding a Ramadan Iftar dinner . Iftar is the Arabic word for the meal served at sunset when we break the fast (it’s literally our ‘breakfast’). This will be a nice gesture for Muslim coworkers and will give others the opportunity to learn about and partake in Ramadan festivities. Although there is no specific type of meal designated for iftars, it is tradition to break the fast with a sweet and refreshing date before moving to a full-on dinner

### Fasting is not an excuse

Although energy levels might be low, the point of fasting is not to slack off from our other duties and responsibilities. We believe that we are rewarded for continuing to work and produce during our fasts. Fasting is not a reason to push meetings, clear schedules, or take a lighter load on projects.

That said – we don’t mind if you help work in a nap time for us!

Ramadan is a time for community and charity. There are iftar dinners held at mosques every night (you are welcome to join the fun – even if you’re not fasting!) and night time prayer vigils throughout the month. We give charity in abundance and make an extra effort to partake in community service. Throughout it all, we maintain an ambiance of joy and gratitude for all that God has blessed us with, and reflect on those in this world who have been given much less. This is a time for all of us—not just Muslims—to renew our spiritual intentions, increase our knowledge, and change ourselves for the better.