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Rugby Nutrition:

Ramadan

Fasting (*sawm*) during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of the Muslim faith and it happens in the ninth month of the lunar calendar. It involves abstaining from all food and fluid from sunrise to sunset and when breaking the fast there are certain rituals and prayers that may continue throughout the night.^[1]

The length of the daily fast varies as the actual date of Ramadan changes every year and depends on the actual geographical location. Ramadan during the summer at high latitudes is more challenging than fasting during winter months at lower latitudes.^[1,2]

Generally daily meals are consumed at two main sittings i.e. the first meal of the day (*Sahur* meal) before the day's fast and the second meal at the break of the day's fast (*Iftar* meal).

If fasting has been delayed due to professional athletic commitments or health issues, the missed days should be made up as soon as possible.^[2]



HOW RAMADAN FASTING MAY IMPACT ON YOUR NUTRITION PERFORMANCE GOALS

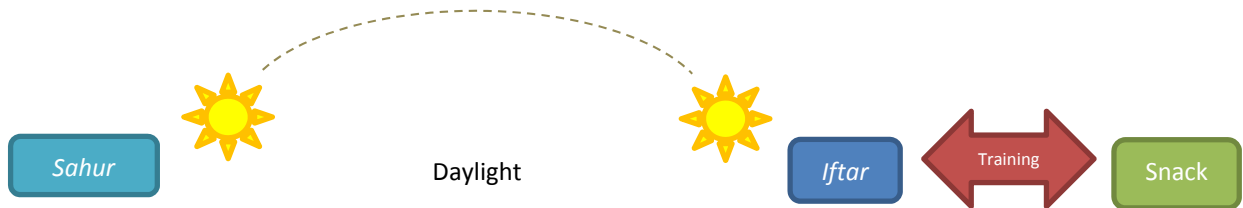
The effect of Ramadan on your performance will largely depend on the strategies that you put into place.

- **If you don't plan your diet well** → you may find it difficult to consume enough energy and to meet your nutrient requirements, as the period for eating is limited. There may be no time to make up sleep hours during a day filled with work or school commitments, so you either lose eating time or sleeping time during the night.^[2]
- **If you are training in the heat, without enough fuel or fluid** → training sessions will feel much harder, your recovery and training adaptations will be less and the likelihood of getting sick increases. This in turn can result in poor quality training sessions and/or training sessions or competitions being missed, thereby negatively affecting performance during this time.^[2] Also consider other cooling strategies such as pre-cooling when training in the heat.^[1]
- **If you miss sleep because of the change in routine and don't catch up during the day** → your recovery and energy levels will be negatively affected.^[1]
- **If you eat completely differently because of availability of certain traditional high fat foods** → your body fat may increase.^[3]

PRACTICAL NUTRITION STRATEGIES TO OPTIMIZE PERFORMANCE IN RUGBY DURING RAMADAN

1. To meet your energy requirement, aim to consume the same **total** amount of food and fluid in a 24-hour period as when you are not fasting. For example align the Ramadan *Sahur* meal with your normal lunch that you would have outside of the Ramadan period; the *Iftar* meal with your normal dinner and the Ramadan night snack with your normal breakfast meal.^[3] With these few eating opportunities, you may need to increase your portion sizes of these meals.
2. Where possible, move your heavy training sessions to a time of the day that best provides the appropriate nutrition support. For example, a good strategy is to delay training or competition to the evening after the breaking of the fast. *Iftar* can be used as a pre-exercise meal, and the main evening meal can be delayed until after the exercise.^[1,2,3]

Suggested timing of meals and training sessions during Ramadan:



3. Guidelines for *Sahur* meal:^[1,2,3]
 - ✓ Consume this as late as possible within the rules of fasting. This ensures that the body is fasted for the shortest period of time during the day.
 - ✓ For sustained energy try incorporating low glycaemic index (GI) carbohydrate-rich foods e.g. Low GI bread, legumes, basmati rice, bulgur wheat and sweet potato. Add protein to this.
 - ✓ Incorporating fluid will help maintain fluid balance throughout the day.^[2]
4. Guidelines for *Iftar* meal:^[1,2,3]
 - ✓ If you are training shortly after this meal, choose easily digestible carbohydrate such as fruit loaf, chiffon cakes, fresh or dried fruit e.g. dates, yoghurt or milk drinks, pancakes, fruit puree or baked vegetable fritters. To minimize gastro-intestinal discomfort, allow an hour break before training.
 - ✓ Additional salt or foods high in salt e.g. stock or soy sauce can be added to this meal.
5. Include a recovery meal or snack directly after training that contains both carbohydrate and high quality protein. Depending on what was eaten before training, this can either be a light recovery snack or a main meal. Examples include chicken and lentil biryani, chicken and corn soup and bread, sandwiches or roti with low fat filling such as egg or tuna or lean meat curry with rice and flatbread.^[1,2]
6. If you have high energy requirements include a light bed-time snack such as low fat milk, yoghurt, cereal or cereal bars, fresh or dried fruit e.g. dates, rice puddings or a low risk liquid meal replacement.^[3] ***Don't add this or any special supplements without first checking with your sports dietitian or sports physician.***

7. Have a strategic drinking plan.^[3] Prepare and have fluids easily accessible choosing flavours that you like as this promotes further drinking. Examples include water, fresh fruit juice, low fat dairy beverages or sports drinks.
 - ✓ Consume sufficient fluid after the fast has been broken. But avoid drinking excessive volumes of fluid (avoid over hydration). It is better to drink small amounts more frequently to prevent frequent urination during the night.
 - ✓ If training after sunset, consume fluid during training. If training for longer than 1 hour include a sports drink during training.
8. Adapt high fat traditional recipes, if required to do so. Bake fritters, spring rolls or samosas instead of frying. Figs, dates, *laban* yoghurt, flat breads, bulgur wheat salad, vegetable soups and milk-based desserts are nutritious snack options that can help you meet your nutrition goals .^[2]
9. If you have diabetes, you may need to consult your physician who may advise that you test your blood sugar frequently during Ramadan and adjust your medication, training schedule and nutrition strategies to prevent major fluctuations in blood glucose.^[1]

Sample diet for a TRAINING day during Ramadan

SAHUR (BREAKFAST)

Nuts and dried fruit or fresh fruit

With either:

Cooked oats and Low GI breakfast cereals e.g. Low GI Muesli

Low fat milk or yoghurt

OR

Scrambled eggs OR Halaal turkey or chicken OR baked beans OR reduced fat cheese or cottage cheese

Low GI bread

OR

Lentil & rice biryani

Salads, tomato or peppers

AND

Water and 100% fresh fruit juice

IFTAR (BREAKING THE FAST – PRE-TRAINING)

Light vegetable & chicken soup (served with a bread roll)

WITH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

Sandwiches/pita breads/baked potato fritters with Halaal roast beef or turkey and salad

OR Pasta salad with tuna or chicken

WITH: Date or raisin loaf

Milk or soy yoghurt drink or smoothie

AND Fruit salad

Sports drinks, 100% fruit juice and water

DURING TRAINING

Water or sports drink

AFTER TRAINING

Yoghurt or milk drink (directly after training)

ANY ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

Minestrone soup and bread rolls

OR Mild chicken curry with rice and flat bread/roti and sambals

OR Tofu and Vegetable stir-fry with noodles/bulgur wheat and lightly steamed seasonal vegetables

AND

Fruit

Water and 100% fruit juice

BED-TIME SNACK

Fresh fruit e.g. bananas

Choose one of the following:

Low fat cereal bars

High Fibre Muffin

Low fat yoghurt or milk drink

Peanut butter sandwich

Sample diet for a MATCH day during Ramadan

SAHUR (BREAKFAST)

Cooked oats and Low GI breakfast cereals e.g. Low GI Muesli

Low fat milk or yoghurt

Nuts and dried fruit

Boiled eggs

Salads, tomatoes, peppers

Halaal turkey or smoked chicken

Reduced fat cheese or cottage cheese

Low GI bread

Mild chickpea and vegetable curry served with basmati rice

Fruit

Fruit smoothies (fruit and yoghurt)

Water

IFTAR (BREAKING THE FAST – PRE-MATCH)

Chicken & corn soup (non creamy) with bread rolls

Baked pumpkin fritters

Sandwiches/pita breads with tuna mayonnaise or meat and salad

Chicken, mango and couscous salad

Chiffon cake

Energy bars

Fruit e.g. banana

Water, sports drink and 100% fruit juice

DURING MATCH

Sports drink

AFTER MATCH

Yoghurt or milk drink (directly after match)

Red lentil soup with assorted bread rolls

Beef bobotie (OR lean lamb tagine)

Butterbean and potato curry

Rice

Pita breads

Penne, tomato and corn salad

Sambals

Lightly stir-fried vegetables OR Vegetable kebabs

Fruit jelly with low fat custard

BED-TIME SNACK

Fresh fruit e.g. bananas

Choose one of the following:

Baked date pudding with low fat custard

OR Rice pudding OR Boeber

REFERENCES

1. Ronald J. Maughan, Yacine Zerguini , Hakim Chalabi & Jiri Dvorak (2012) Achieving optimum sports performance during Ramadan: Some practical recommendations, Journal of Sports Sciences, 30:sup1, S109-S117.
2. Louise M. Burke & Christine King (2012) Ramadan fasting and the goals of sports nutrition around exercise, Journal of Sports Sciences, 30:sup1, S21-S31.
3. Png W. Chapter 24 Population groups II. Ethnic groups. Sport and Exercise Nutrition. First Edition. 2011. The Nutrition Society. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

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