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 Halal 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


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