

Policy statement Fasting of pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers May 2019/Ramadan 1440

Ramadan is a holy month during which Muslims fast from eating and drinking from dawn until sunset. The fast of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam. Muslims scholars, or “ulama,” have been discussing breastfeeding while fasting for decades. Many rulings or “fatwas” have been issued to address this issue, enabling women to make wise decisions. Almighty God said in the Quran concerning one who is sick: “and whoever is ill or on a journey, the same number [of days which one did not observe fasts (Sawm) must be made up] from other days” [al-Baqarah 2:185]. Pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers (who don't feel well enough to fast, or are worried about their health or their baby's wellbeing) come under the same category of sick person and hence have permission not to fast. Some Muslim scholars even say that it's wrong to ignore this act of kindness by fasting when they don't have to. Many Muslim women worldwide are pregnant or breastfeeding during Ramadan and though exempted from fasting, still choose to fast during Ramadan.

1. **Pregnant woman should not fast** especially if she has complications (Diabetes Mellitus, Hypertension pre-eclampsia, anemia, bronchial asthma, cardiac problems,). Dehydration may induce premature labor and subsequently preterm births. Pregnant woman should terminate the fast immediately and drink water. She should also contact her Health Care provider immediately if any of these symptoms occur:
 - Extreme thirst, excessively dry mouth, skin, and mucous membranes.
 - Headache or fever.
 - Irritability and confusion.
 - Extreme fatigue, dizziness, fainting, or weakness.
 - Nausea or vomiting.
 - Urinating less frequently or very dark-colored or strong- odor urine.
 - Not gaining enough weight or losing weight.
 - Decrease fetal movements.
 - Painless uterine contractions (premature labor).
2. **Breastfeeding mother should not fast** especially if her baby is less than 6 months old or is exclusively breastfed or depends mainly on breastfeeding. It is important for a mother to carefully consider her condition, as well as her

baby's condition, before deciding to continue the fast. Consult with her Health Care Provider, on how to deal with such situations as fasting may impact a woman's ability to breastfeed effectively by:

1. Effects on breastmilk composition: decreases fat, vitamins and micronutrients (Zinc, Magnesium and Potassium) in breastmilk. Slowing down of milk ejection reflex due to the stress of the fast.
2. Effects on the breastfeeding mother and needed actions:
 - Losing weight rapidly (≥ 0.5 Kgm/week) ----- stop fasting.
 - Signs of dehydration (thirsty, dizzy, weak, tired, fainting, severe headache, dark-colored strong smelling urine) ---- drink water or sweet fruit juice or oral rehydration solution and rest. If she still feels unwell after 30 minutes, she should consult her Health Care Provider.
3. Effects on the baby: breastfeeding mother should stop fasting and immediately contact her Health Care Provider if any of the following symptoms appeared on her baby:
 - Not gaining enough weight or has lost weight.
 - Not satisfied after the feeding possibly crying for another feed soon after.
 - Fewer wet and dirty nappies.
 - Seems generally unsettled, fussy, cries constantly (no tears).
 - Green-colored scanty stool.
 - Sunken anterior fontanelle.
 - Cold, blotchy hands and feet.

IBFAN therefore calls upon :

- **Midwives, physicians and nurses** to recommend against fasting for pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers during Ramadan as it could put the health of their babies at risk.
- **Healthy Pregnant women who are willing to fast**:
 - Should follow up with their Health Care Provider throughout Ramadan to ensure adequate fetal growth.
 - If Ramadan coincides with summer (hot weather and long daytime), pregnant women are advised to hydrate and consume nutritious foods during the predawn and evening meals.
 - Rest during the day.
 - Avoid sweets and other sugary snacks.
- **Healthy breastfeeding mothers who are willing to fast**:
 - Should do assessment of their general medical condition by consulting their Health Care Provider before Ramadan.

- Eat healthy well-balanced predawn (suhoor) and evening (iftar) meal and add up to 500 extra calories in addition to the normal daily recommended amount of 2000 calories for females.
- Emphasize consumption of complex carbohydrates that release energy more slowly while fasting (barley, wheat, oats, millet, semolina, beans, lentils). Lots of fruits, vegetables and foods rich in minerals and calcium are also recommended. Use monounsaturated oils (olive or canola oil) in cooking. Increase fiber-rich foods (bran, whole-grain cereals, whole-grain bread, grains, and fruits) for slow digestion.
- As the fasting day ends, mothers should break their fast as early as possible, by eating natural high-energy foods (black dates) to quickly regain energy.
- Avoid caffeinated drinks, fatty foods, heavily processed foods, and high glycemic carbohydrates (refined flour or sugar, white bread, white rice).
- Keep body well hydrated, drink enough fluids up to three liters of liquids from sunset to early sunrise to avoid dehydration and decrease of breastmilk volume.
- Take rest as much as possible throughout the day.
- Observe Baby's wet diapers and weight gain.
- Stock up on shopping and do chores that require extra energy before starting to fast.
- Fulfill the basis for successful breastfeeding by avoiding stress, proper positioning and attachment. In addition to breast compressions while feeding to drain out milk from the back of the breast.



Prepared by:

Dr Ghada Sayed

Consultant of Pediatrics

International Board Certified Lactation Consultant

IBFAN Arab World Regional Coordinator

Revised by:

Dr Mona Alsumaie

International Board Certified Lactation Consultant

Director of Kuwait Community Nutrition Promotion

Department

Coordinator of Kuwait MIYCN Program

President of IBFAN Arab World

Dr Nivin EssamEldin Youssef

Assistant Professor of Family Medicine,

International Board Certified Lactation Consultant