

RAMADAN AND SPORT

Strategies for performance & health during Ramadan

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BACKGROUND

For most people, the celebration of Ramadan means a 30-day fast in which they may only consume food and drink between sunset and sunrise. In 2023, this means an daily fasting period of approximately 13-15 hours.

The fasting month can lead to reduced performance and well-being. But with good planning, communication and support, any negative effects can be reduced.

"What can I expect?"

"Can I get advice from someone who has gone through it?"

"How can I prepare myself?"

THE PERSON FASTING

Planning

Communication

Support

THE COACH

"What do I need to know?"

"How do the players handle the training?"

"How do I best support them?"

PLANNING AND PREPARATION

1.

Create routines

Discuss and identify challenges during the fasting month. It can be a good idea to prepare yourself mentally and physically for the fasting month, for example by trying to fast during parts of the day for 1-2 weeks before Ramadan, which means splitting your food intake between fewer occasions during the day. For more information, see [Lis m.fl \(2019\)](#).

2.

Planning your training

For individual athletes, the training can be moved to evening, after sunset. You can then consume a light meal before training, take on fluids while training and then eat after the session. Challenges arise in a team environment, however, when the individual has less opportunity to influence the time when training is to take place.

3.

Coaches – how are your players feeling?

It is the job of the leader to see the individual and help them to perform as well as possible in a safe way. Close communication, knowledge and understanding are always important tools for coaches, especially during Ramadan. “How is the player feeling? Does the athlete need to adapt their training?” A flexible approach can be key to the player’s performance and well-being.

4.

Recovery strategies

Diet, fluids and sleep are central when it comes to sporting performance in general, and recovery from training or matches can also be a key factor when it comes to how well athletes handle Ramadan. In many cases, it can be a good idea to supplement the nutritional intake from both Iftar (the evening meal) and Suhoor (the morning meal) with small portions/supplements of carbohydrates and protein between the two meals.

Many people may feel the need to eat quickly and as much as possible at iftar, but it can be beneficial, where possible, to distribute your food intake over the course of the evening in order to avoid stomach problems. Top up, little but often, with carbs, protein and fluids during your waking hours. Slow-release carbs (such as wholegrain products) before sunrise can provide a better energy supply during the day, while faster-release sources of carbs (such as white bread/ rice) during the evening can replenish your stocks after a day of fasting. Sports drinks. These can be a good alternative if you are having difficulty with more solid food.

TRAINING CONTENT

The goal of training during Ramadan should be to maintain performance, physical and technical/tactical skills. Adapting training content is considered a key strategy for promoting performance and well-being.

Possibly adapted training method (sessions/week or time/session)

A potentially reduced capacity for recovery on the part of the person fasting (linked to nutrition, sleep and mental stress) can mean that maintaining a high volume of training can result in increased risk and impaired well-being (fatigue, mood swings, lack of energy) and injury during the fasting month.

Maintain high-intensity training

Simply training less intensively is not optimal either. Performing high-intensity training in smaller doses (for example at high speed) can reduce the risk of impaired performance and the increased risk of injury. Little but often. Lack of exposure to these actions will have negative effects after Ramadan.

Gradual increase on return

A sudden return to full training and competition can entail a significant increase in load, particularly if explosive and high-speed actions have not been maintained during Ramadan. If this is the case, a gradual increase in the training load is recommended, both in terms of quantity and intensity.

PLAYER QUOTES

"The most important thing is for the coach to understand that the player may not be as fit as usual, and for the coach to take the load into account. Not all players are constantly weak when fasting, however, but it can be very important for them not to be pushed as hard. For my part, the difference may be linked to my recovery between practice/training sessions – on some days I am more worn out and on others I don't feel anything at all."

"As a player, a key element during Ramadan is to get the right things into you when it's time to eat. After the first week, the body will often grow accustomed to only eating food during a limited period of the day, and will cope for longer without food. One tip might be to use fluid replacements when you break your fast, because it can be difficult to catch up with what you need to drink."

References:

- Uefa consensus statement (Collins et al., 2021)
- Ramadan and football (Aspetar Sports Medicine Journal, 2013)
- Dietary Practices Adopted by Track-and-Field Athletes: Gluten-Free, Low FODMAP, Vegetarian, and Fasting (Lis et al., 2019)
- A Practical Guide To Training During Ramadan (Altis, 2019)