

# Ramadan 101

## Practices, Allyship and Accommodation

Centre for Human  
Rights, Equity and  
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### What is Ramadan?

Ramadan is considered one of the holiest months for Muslims. Ramadan is observed to commemorate the revelation of the Islamic holy book of the Quran.

Sawm is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and the Arabic word for 'fasting'. Although fasting occurs elsewhere in the Islamic calendar, it is primarily associated with the month of Ramadan for the month-long fast.

Fasting is a key part of Ramadan and, among other religious activities Muslims around the world abstain from food and water from sunrise to sunset for 29 or 30 consecutive days.

### The Islamic Calendar

Ramadan is not during a fixed time each year. This is because Ramadan is the 9th month of the Islamic calendar, which is based on a 12-month lunar year of approximately 354 days and is shorter than the solar calendar (the standard calendar followed by many countries, including Canada).

This means that the timing of Ramadan shifts between 10-12 days earlier each year.

### When is Ramadan?

In 2023, the month of Ramadan will likely begin in Canada on **Wednesday, March 22nd** and will end on **Thursday, April 20th**. Due to the diversity within the Muslim community, some individuals may begin marking and ending Ramadan, including fasting, a day before or after their peers.

The exact beginning and ending times of the month of Ramadan are based on the sighting of the first crescent Moon on the last night of the eighth month (Sha'ban). Specifically, Ramadan is said to begin at the first observance of the crescent Moon over Mecca, Saudi Arabia (or on a date pre-determined by astronomical calculation). Because of this, start and end dates are not set in stone and may vary by a day.

It is always good practice to confirm the start and end dates (if you need to know) when speaking with someone who will be observing Ramadan.

**Be understanding and flexible knowing that there is some variability in the timing.**

### What do those observing Ramadan do?

**For Ramadan, Muslims are encouraged to focus on improving qualities of cultivating self-control, gratitude, and compassion for those less fortunate through acts of charity.**

- Muslims will abstain from eating and drinking from dawn (i.e. the first appearance of light on the horizon) to sunset. Muslims will have a pre-dawn meal and then an evening meal to break the fast.
- This year, for most Sunni Muslims, sunset during Ramadan will range from 7:11 PM at the beginning of the month, to 7:41 PM at the end of the month. Shia Muslims generally observe their break of the fast about 10-15 minutes after the given sunset times.
- Many Muslims use Ramadan as an opportunity to focus on spiritual growth and introspection.
- In addition to fasting, most Muslims observing Ramadan will have other commitments and abstentions. As part of Ramadan, many practicing Muslims observe additional nightly prayers (*Taraweh*), which are usually done at the Mosque and last for a duration of one hour. The Taraweh prayers are generally considered to be highly recommended rather than mandatory.
- Many Muslims also commemorate certain special nights in this month.

### Does every Muslim observe Ramadan?

Not everyone observes Ramadan in the same way and not all Muslims fast. Some may choose not to fast for personal reasons. Others may not fast if they are ill, menstruating, pregnant, breastfeeding, or have health issues.

If someone tells you, or you observe, that they are not fasting respect their privacy and do not ask them why.

### What happens at the end of Ramadan?

**The end of Ramadan is known as Eid**

Eid al-Fitr is celebrated at the end of Ramadan and is one of the most significant Islamic holidays. In 2023, Muslims who mark Eid will celebrate on either **April 21st or 22nd**. To celebrate Eid, Muslims may attend a special prayer early in the day. It is also a day where many Muslims get together with family and friends and may involve children receiving pocket money or gifts.

### Some special greetings during Ramadan that you may hear

- "Ramadan mubarak (*mo-bar-ak*)" which means blessed Ramadan or happy Ramadan.
- "Ramadan kareem (*ka-reem*)" which means a generous Ramadan.
- In celebration of Eid al-Fitr, the greeting is "Eid Mubarak"

### How can I be supportive of a student or colleague who is observing Ramadan?

There are many ways that you can be supportive to a Muslim community member during Ramadan. We all play a part in creating an inclusive learning and work environment for everyone in the York Community. The following are some suggestions on how to be a supportive community member:

- Learn more about Ramadan and its importance by doing additional reading
- Be sensitive to the needs of those who are fasting and recognize that they may not join you during coffee, lunch or meal breaks during this time
- Do not offer those observing Ramadan food or water during the fasting hours
- Do not plan team lunches, "lunch and learns" or working lunches or other food centered events during the month of Ramadan
- Respect people's privacy and do not ask them why they are not fasting. If they want you to know they will tell you.
- Refrain from repeatedly talking about the fasting, how difficult it must be (or how easy it looks) or your own views about the purpose or practice of fasting.
- Check in to see how they are doing and if any adjustments need to be made. Remember everyone is different and respect people's ability or limits to engage in conversation about Ramadan and fasting.
- Avoid afternoon or evening meetings/events, if possible, as that can be a difficult time for those who have been fasting for the day.
- Remember that fasting while working and studying can be challenging. Some Muslims stay up later for nightly prayers and wake up before sunrise for a meal before their fast (suhur); therefore, they may become fatigued towards the later part of the working day.
- Be mindful that making lengthy presentations, without the opportunity to drink water, may be difficult during Ramadan
- The ability to work overtime may prove difficult for some during Ramadan. Never assume an answer – check in and ask.
- Allow for breaks for prayer and for eating if the class or work extends over sunset
- Be flexible and accommodate time off requests when possible.
- Be flexible and look for solutions.
- Avoid making assumptions about needs - make sure you speak to individuals and include them in the planning and discussion.
- Do ask, before the start of Ramadan if you can, if there is anything you can do (or not do) to be supportive.

### Requests for Academic Accommodation

- Due to fasting practices, some Muslim students may request religious accommodations or alternative exam times.
- Eid al-Fitr, the celebration at the end of Ramadan, falls during the York exam period. Students may need to request alternative exam times.
- If a student requires religious accommodations they must follow the procedures outlined in York's Academic Accommodations for Students' Religious Observances (Policy, Guidelines and Procedures), which can be found here: <https://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/policies/academic-accommodation-for-students-religious-observances-policy-guidelines-and-procedures/>
- Students should be mindful of the timelines for requests set out in the above procedures. Students seeking accommodations during Ramadan should make their requests as soon as possible to avoid delays.

York University also has a legal duty to accommodate religious needs under the Ontario Human Rights Code. Ask for a consultation at the Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion ("CHREI") to understand your rights and obligations.

### Questions?

REI offers confidential support to any YorkU faculty, staff, or student. Send your questions related to creed/religious accommodation requests to: [rights@yorku.ca](mailto:rights@yorku.ca).