



## Ramadan Fasting and Breastfeeding



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Pregnant and breastfeeding women are exempt from fasting during the holy month of Ramadan and most Muslims are aware of this stipulation in Islamic law.

However, when you are used to fasting every year and family or friends around you are all fasting, it's understandable for a breastfeeding mother to feel they are missing out! Ramadan is a unique month for Muslim families that observe it and fasting is a large part of people's experiences of it.

Zamzam Elmi states in her [BFN](#) blog: "Every drop of breast milk is reward gained and you can still gain more spiritually by reading the Quran and doing your dhikr whilst breastfeeding or bottle feeding. This is a lovely time to bond with your baby as well as lifting you spiritually and emotionally."

If you are breastfeeding and thinking about fasting during the month of Ramadan it is important to remember that the exemption is there to ensure you and your baby's wellbeing. Breastfeeding itself is an act of worship and therefore missing fasts because your milk supply may be impacted, is also an act of worship.

You can make up for the missed fasting by fasting at a later date or by performing fidyah (a charitable donation) instead. There are still plenty of ways to feel involved in Ramadan - be it spending time on your spirituality or fasting occasionally instead of the whole month.

#### **Breastmilk when fasting**

As described by [Rakicioğlu](#) et al (2006); The intermittent style of fasting during Ramadan can usually provide enough time for a healthy well-nourished mother to eat and drink between dusk and dawn. Intermittent fasting is not thought to be associated with decreasing milk supply or a change in the major nutrient composition (fat, carbohydrate, protein) of breastmilk. However intermittent fasting may affect the micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) in breastmilk.

In that study, “fasting had no significant effect on the macronutrients of the milk and consequently the growth of the infants. There were however, significant differences in some of the micronutrients such as zinc, magnesium and potassium. The nutritional status of lactating women was affected by fasting. All of the nutrient intakes (except vitamins A, C and E) decreased during Ramadan.”

### **What if I decide to fast when breastfeeding/expressing?**

Fasting for Ramadan is a personal decision and if you decide to do so, you should speak to your midwife, health visitor or breastfeeding specialist for advice if you are concerned that your breastfeeding may be affected.

Depending on the age of your baby, the questions to consider and discuss in more detail are how often they are feeding, how long the fasts are and how often you are fasting. If your baby is under 6 months old, then you may find that your breastfeeding is affected - it may be best to wait until baby is older before fasting.

Don't be afraid to ask for advice and help - it is your choice, and it will be respected if you choose to fast. You should be supported in finding ways of fasting that work for you and support your breastfeeding journey.

If you do decide to fast:

- Listen to your body and pace yourself. Stop if you feel unwell or feel it is affecting you or your baby.
- Consider taking a break from fasting every couple of days - it may help avoid your milk supply being affected.
- If you are planning on fasting for the whole month, it would be beneficial to take breastfeeding supportive supplements that contain magnesium, potassium and zinc. It is also beneficial to increase your intake of foods at Iftaar that are rich in these such as dates, nuts and fruits.
- If you are expressing milk to store or donate, consider taking a break if you are fasting.
- Get plenty of rest where possible - your energy levels may be affected, so take it easy when fasting if baby allows! Take this opportunity to cuddle, bond and feed baby.
- Ensure you are eating well at Iftaar and Suhoor. Try to ensure you include plenty of:
  - Foods rich in vitamins and minerals, such as iron and calcium.
  - Slow-release energy foods, such as wholewheat pasta, oat or bran-based cereals, beans and pulses, unsalted nuts and wholemeal bread.
  - Protein-rich foods, like meat, beans and eggs.
  - Make sure to drink plenty of fluids during Suhoor and Iftaar to reduce your risk of dehydration.
  - Try to avoid too much caffeine as it can make you feel more dehydrated - stick to water, fruit juices, smoothies and milk.

**Ramadan Karim from the Hearts Milk Bank team!**

**Links to more information:**

<https://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/breastfeeding-during-ramadan/>

Leicester Mamas is commissioned by Leicester NHS Trust to deliver breastfeeding support across the city. They provide support in a variety of different languages. To find out more about the great work they do, visit their website [mamas.org.uk](https://www.mamas.org.uk).

<https://breastfeeding.support/breastfeeding-during-ramadan/>

Get advice from other breastfeeding mothers in the Muslim Mamas Facebook Community.

<https://www.facebook.com/MuslimMamas/>