

Untold secrets: EXERCISING DURING RAMADAN



New Year's resolutions. We all make them. Every single year. We're guessing that for most people, this resolution revolves around a fitness goal of some sort.

However, as we inch closer to the mid-way point of 2019, we seem to have stumbled upon a major hurdle. But is that really the case?

We are, of course, talking about **Ramadan**. In case you didn't know (seriously?), this is the month where Muslims fast throughout the day. No food means no energy for exercising, right? At least from a conventional way of thinking, that's how things are supposed to go.

Well, we're ready to **bust this long-standing fitness dogma**. We're here to show that not only can workouts be done while fasting, but it may also be more beneficial.

The Impact Of Fasting On Our Bodies

When you deprive your body of food for a few hours, it enters what is known as a fasted state. This absence of food causes the level of insulin in your body to drop. In the meantime, the amount of glycogen also gets depleted. If you have no idea what that last few sentences meant, do not be discouraged. We'll break things down into much simpler terms.

Insulin is a hormone which regulates the levels of sugar in our blood. Whenever levels of insulin in our bodies are high, fat burning is not possible. Glycogen, on the other hand, is a form of stored carbohydrates. They are mainly found in the liver and

muscles. They provide our bodies with a quick source of energy whenever our blood sugar levels decrease.

With low levels of both insulin and glycogen, our bodies will then be forced to use a different energy source – body fat. However, fat loss isn't the only benefit you'll reap. Research has suggested that fasting lowers cholesterol and triglyceride levels while at the same time increasing the amount of HDL (good) cholesterol in our bodies. Studies have also shown that levels of red blood cells, haemoglobin, and autophagy are elevated when the human body is in a fasted state.



But how does all this make exercise while fasting beneficial?



Working Out Without Food

The most obvious benefit to exercising in a fasted state is fat loss. The body is already forced to use body fat as a source of energy during fasting. Exercise further accelerates this process. One study discovered that fasting before aerobic training led to reductions in both body weight AND body fat. The same study found that eating before a workout decreased only body weight.

But how does fasting impact the actual performance of exercise?

We've already mentioned the study which shows that

red blood cells and haemoglobin increase in the human body when fasting. Haemoglobin is the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen in the bloodstream to the muscles. Increasing red blood cells and haemoglobin levels is what endurance athletes like cyclists are trying to increase when they illegally "dope" with EPO (erythropoietin). Fasting already does this naturally!

Exercise and fasting together also yields acute oxidative stress. According to acclaimed health and fitness author Ori Hofmaker, this is essential for keeping our muscle machinery tuned. This will increase our muscular capacity to utilize energy, generate force, and resist fatigue. When combined, exercise and fasting help counteract all the main determinants of muscle ageing. Together, they trigger a mechanism that recycles and rejuvenates your brain and muscle tissues.

Another study looked at the effects of a 3.5 day fast on all different measures of athletic performance. They measured strength, anaerobic capacity, and aerobic endurance. All of these measures did not decrease during the fasting period.



The Best Ways To Exercise During Ramadan



Despite the many proven benefits, our bodies still need a period of adapting to exercising without food. Start your first few workouts with low intensity and have it gradually increase as the days go by.



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Remember to stay hydrated and drink plenty of food between Iftar and Suhur. Avoid unhealthy or junk food. You already have a limited eating window and your body is exhausted from exercise. This is the time to consume high-quality food.