

Resource

Fasting with Rheumatoid Arthritis: part 2

In this blog PT Ayesha Ahmad shares her experience on fasting with RA during Ramadan this year.

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Many of us with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) face unique challenges in maintaining a healthy diet while managing our condition. In this post, I'll share my personal experience on how I managed fasting with RA this year.

I've lived with rheumatoid arthritis for 14 years now, my symptoms began soon after having my 2nd child in 2009.

My RA was sero-positive and my disease was very active at the time with joint pain and swelling in hands and feet, muscle loss in right quadricep and high levels of fatigue. I was started on DMARD's and they certainly helped. Alongside the medication, I took up regular resistance training. Some years later, I began to address my nutrition.

Living with arthritis now is manageable and on a whole, my disease activity is in a medically-controlled remission.

Understanding Rheumatoid Arthritis and Fasting

This year, my RA symptoms were minimal and I chose to fast during this holy month. There have been years where I've chosen to give charity and partake in Ramadan in other ways such as increasing prayer, opening fasts for others etc.

I fasted and continue with my day to day activities as a Personal Trainer and Nutrition Coach. This included 45 minute morning resistance training sessions while in a fasted state.

Overall, I felt very good fasting with rheumatoid arthritis and continuing to work in a physically demanding job. From around day 20, I began to feel some mild fatigue set in.

Every day, I scheduled in naps around 60 minutes in length daily.

With regards to dietary habits I prioritised consumption of adequate protein, spread over the 2 meals at Suhoor and Iftaar. Complex carbohydrates and a good amount of dietary fat was included with my meals.

I had coconut water daily to keep up electrolyte balance.

I made sure to include fermented foods daily such as sauerkraut and kimchi for gut health. These are higher histamine foods and over peak hayfever season I tend to reduce these slightly.

Supplements I used while fasting included, a daily vitamin d3 plus k2 spray, an iron spray as my iron levels tend to be on the lower side and marine collagen peptides. I take magnesium bisglycinate some days of the week also.

At Suhoor I used calorie dense foods such as avocado, peanut butter, extra virgin olive oil because a goal was to preserve my body weight and ideally my muscle mass over the month too.

Personal reflection

I really enjoyed my fasting experience but in hindsight I could have rested more than I did and lowered intensity of my workouts, which this year, I didn't do.

After Eid, I wasn't feeling optimal in my health for around 10 days. My body and health did bounce

back really well after this period. Energy levels soared again, and I to my regular sleep and eating routine.

There were clear physical benefits during fasting such as increased mental clarity, lowered inflammation that I could see in my finger joints – my wedding ring fit comfortably again.

I was happy to give my gut a daily rest of around 14 hours plus, where it wasn't trying to digest a regular influx of food. Instead the gut had a chance to resart.

My RA Diet Plan

I am a meat eater so my diet focused on high quality protein sources.

2 portions of salmon weekly (the best quality within budget,) for omega 3's.

Chicken breast for its lower fat, higher protein profile.

Red meat once a week for heme iron. Other white fish such as sea bass. All meats in their natural form so not breaded etc.

I'm a big fan of vegetables and ensured I had a full range including, asparagus, beetroot, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, parsnips, peas, edamame, artichoke, mushrooms, sweet potato.

Lots of salads were made throughout Ramadan and the same is true for my everyday life.

I don't follow a ketogenic diet but I do eat a higher fat diet including eggs (natures multivitamin,) unsalted natural nuts including cashews, almonds, walnuts, a brazil nut daily for selenium, pistachios, macadamias. Pumpkin seeds and sunflower seeds were added to my meals for their fibre content and ability to help lower blood cholesterol. 90% dark chocolate for polyphenol and flavonoid content.

Foods I avoided in Ramadan and I avoid in general – anything fried, because I consider the negative health consequences associated with this way of preparing food over the long term, it being high in trans fat and contributing to high blood pressure over time.

I tried to limit my free sugars, fruit juices and dried fruits count as free sugar so I had a maximum of 1 date daily. I chose fresh fruit instead for its micronutrients and fibre content. If I did have a sweet treat some days eg a slice of cake or perhaps biscuits, I'd have it straight after my protein and vegetable rich meal thus dampening down the insulin spike from the free sugar intake.

Hydration – I used coconut water mixing collagen peptides in there plus plenty of tap water between Iftaar and Suhoor.

If you'd like to know more about my meal plan or would like to reach out to me with regards to health and fitness goals, you can find me on:

[Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) or contact me via my [website](#)

Feel free to drop me a message or reach out to me on any of these platforms.

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[Navigating Ramadan with Rheumatoid Arthritis: Part 1](#)

[This year, Ramadan is expected to begin on 11th March 2024 and due to finish on 10th April 2024 with Eid-ul-Fitr. As we look forward to the holy month of Ramadan, some of you will be wondering whether you should fast or not.](#)

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