



Woodside High School

White Hart Lane, Wood Green, London N22 5QJ

Telephone: 020 8889 6761, Fax: 020 8365 8164

Email: mail@woodsidehighschool.co.uk

Website: www.woodsidehighschool.co.uk

Fasting During Examination Period

Information for students who are fasting during public and school examinations. Woodside High School includes students from many different faith backgrounds, and it is very possible that religious practices may influence students' participation in school activities. This year, the main examination period for GCSE exams overlaps with the Islamic month of Ramadan, in which adult Muslims are required to fast from Dawn to Sunset. It is possible that due to prolonged periods of abstinence from eating or drinking during the day, and a lack of sleep due to nightly activities during the month, students' performance in public examinations may be affected. While the School would not wish to dictate to students observing Ramadan how they should approach the month, this document does provide some guidance based upon advice gathered from a number of Islamic organisations and individuals in the United Kingdom.

Effect of fasting on the body

While fasting does have recognised health benefits, such as cleansing the body of toxins, there are some adverse effects of prolonged periods of abstaining from food and water. Fasting may cause hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar); an inadequate supply of glucose in the brain can affect brain function, including concentration, memory, attention and other cognitive processes, plus potential indirect effects on mood, anxiety and fatigue. All of these conditions can directly affect studying, revision and performance during the examinations themselves.

Importance of Sawm and education in Islam

While sawm (fasting during Ramadan) and salah (daily prayers) have been made obligatory on all adult Muslims, great emphasis is placed on education and acquisition of knowledge, as shown by this verse, "O Lord, increase me in knowledge" (Qur'an 20:114). It is up to you to balance the obligation of fasting with the pursuit of education.

Sitting Examinations while fasting

The Joint Council of Qualifications (JCQ) has confirmed that when setting the timetable for 2019 public examinations, the month of Ramadan was taken into account and more large-entry exams have been scheduled before half term, and more will be held in the morning. The Department of Health has produced Healthy Ramadan, a guide to healthy fasting during Ramadan, and warns about the need to drink enough water before fasting to avoid dehydration, which may be exacerbated by hot weather conditions. Dehydration can lead to disorientation, confusion or faintness, all of which may have a serious impact upon your performance in an examination.

Head Teacher: Ms Gerry Robinson



According to unanimous advice received from religious authorities, 'hardship' exemptions from fasting are in place, including exemption for those who are ill and on long term medication, travelling long distances, women on their period, those with mental disabilities, the old and weak, and breastfeeding and pregnant women. Some Muslim jurists consider students revising or sitting examinations an example of 'hardship', and therefore indicate that Islam allows exemption from Sawm if the student fears that fasting will affect his/her performance adversely. "God wishes ease for you, not hardship" (Qur'an 2:185).

Advice to students sitting exams during Ramadan:

According to advice received, the following practical advice is given to all students sitting public examinations this summer:

- Some students are not adversely affected by fasting, and may decide not to take any particular steps, and to continue with their fast as usual.
- Some students may consider that their examinations are sufficient justification to permit them not to fast under the 'hardship' rule, either just on examination days or for the whole examination period.
- Students may feel that they can fast on days where examinations are scheduled in the morning session only, but cannot fast if there is an afternoon paper.
- In each case, where a fast has been missed, adherents could fast at a later date or give charity, in accordance with Islamic teachings on missed fasts.

Sensible steps to follow

Students that choose to continue with fasting during Ramadan during the examination season may wish to follow the advice below:

- Ensure you are well rested overnight, and refrain from attending optional Tarawih prayers (nightly congregational prayers at the mosque).
- Between the hours of Iftar (meal at sunset) and Suhoor (pre-dawn meal), drink plenty of water and eat meals regularly in controlled amounts to keep your metabolic system active, and consume foods that will keep your energy levels up during the day. Examples are:
 - Water melon, banana for immediately raising blood sugar levels.
 - Dates, potato and oats for carbohydrates – avoid pasta and rice as slow release foods cause lethargy and drowsiness.
 - Avocado and brazil nuts for 'healthy' fats.
 - Grilled chicken or red meat steaks for protein.

- Salads containing roughages to enable a healthy digestive system. Avoid fried foods, high sugar drinks (such as cola or lemonade), high energy drinks containing caffeine, sweets or high quantities of chocolate.

What support will the school provide?

During the examination period, the school will provide:

- A quiet area for fasting students to remain over lunch period if they have exams in the morning and afternoon, to allow rest and silent revision.
- A room for students not fasting on the day to eat and drink where they feel comfortable.
- A prayer room for students wishing to perform salah over lunch period, if they have exams in the morning and afternoon.

Students are encouraged to consult their usual Imam or religious adviser to help make a decision about how to approach Ramadan during the examination period. Remember, the Qur'an gives concession to some people who are unable to fast, as long as they keep the fast at a later date, or feed the poor (refer to Surah 2, Ayah 184).

References

- *NHS, Healthy Ramadan – www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthylramadan/Pages/healthylramadhanhome.aspx*
- *List of endorsers:*
- *Imam Muhammad Asad, Association of Muslim Supplementary Schools*
- *Maurice Irfan Coles, Islam and Citizenship Education Project*
- *Rabiha Hannan, New Horizons in British Islam*
- *Kamal Hanif, Principal, Waverley School, Birmingham*
- *Imam Muhammad Sarfraz Madni, Assistant Headteacher, Al-Hijrah School, Birmingham*
- *Dr Muhammad Shahid Raza, Head Imam, Leicester Central Mosque*
- *Maulana Syed Ali Raza Rizvi, Ahlul Bayt Islamic Centre, London*
- *Sir Iqbal Sacranie, Muslim Council of Great Britain*
- *Rukhsana Yaqoob, Muslim Teachers Association*