

■ HEALTH

How sleep, eating patterns change over Ramadaan

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MUSLIMS across the world have started fasting from dawn until dusk during Ramadaan, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar.

The fast involves abstaining from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset in the hopes it will lead to greater "taqwa", or consciousness of God.

Muslims were commanded to fast during Ramadaan more than 1 400 years ago, the ancient Greeks recommended fasting to heal the body and today some scientists advocate a modified fast for mental and physical benefits.

While there is no danger for healthy people, initially some might feel sluggish and struggle to sleep without eating regular food.

Max Lowery, author of *The 2 Meal Day*, explains, specifically, with inter-

mittent fasting there was a transition period where you go from using carbohydrates (from food) to fuel your body, to using stored body fat for fuel.

"The transition period can last anywhere between two to seven days for the average person. During that time, you might feel a little more hungry, tired, lethargic, irritable and sometimes you can get headaches, mainly due to dehydration," said Lowery.

Nasreen Jaffer, a spokesperson for the Association for Dietetics in SA and a registered dietitian, said fasting during Ramadaan has a number of physiological effects on homeostatic and endocrine processes. In patients with diabetes, these changes and the type of medication being taken to treat the condition could be associated with the development of complications such as hypoglycaemia and hyperglycaemia.

With Covid-19 on the rise in the country, the elderly are vulnerable dur-

ing the fast and have been identified by health officials as high-risk.

Jaffer said the process of normal ageing caused a weakened immune system. She added, coupled with any clinical condition, a compromised immune system was less capable of fighting off attacks from bacteria and viruses. It is therefore of utmost importance that diabetics and older people follow a healthy meal plan and continue taking their medications.

For many others, she said, Ramadaan fasting would not only alter mealtimes, but might also disturb sleep patterns and circadian rhythms, which can affect a person's metabolic state.

Sleeping patterns are often altered during Ramadaan. Typically, sleep is broken before dawn to enable Muslims to eat before fasting begins (suhoor).

"Many will return to sleep afterwards and wake for a second time to start the day. Some fasting Muslims

may sleep in the afternoon. Following the evening meal (iftar), many will stay awake until midnight, or later.

The impact of Ramadaan on sleep includes decreased sleep time, delayed sleep, decreased deep sleep duration. Sleep deprivation has been associated with metabolic changes such as decreased glucose tolerance.

"Sleep deprivation in itself can lead to fatigue which then further impacts negatively on the immune system," said Jaffer.

Health specialists have said unhealthy eating habits during the fast, such as eating leftover food or cakes for breakfast, was ill-advised.

Jaffer said the Ramadaan principles should be based on healthy eating.

◆ Try to avoid overeating, especially in the evening.

Here are some additional tips to keeping healthy during fasting:

◆ When breaking the fast have a

date/fruit and water, vegetable soup, followed by a healthy meal. Drink enough water.

◆ Try to avoid high-fat snacks or only have one.

◆ Multivitamins might be recommended.

◆ Bake instead of frying samoosas, spring rolls and half-moons.

◆ Make a fresh fruit salad with a variety of fruit each night as part of "boeka", which will make you eat fewer savouries.

◆ After Maghrieab (sunset prayer), have a cooked meal as per normal which includes lean proteins, whole-grain complex carbohydrates, healthy fats and vegetables.

◆ Make sure you have a protein serving for breakfast such as leftover fish, meat or chicken, egg, milk, yoghurt, legumes, split peas, dhal, sugar beans or lentils.

◆ Watch your salt intake.