Diabetes and fasting

Prof Dr MD Abdul Jalil Ansari

Department of Diabetes and Endocrinology, Medical Sciences Institute, University Malaysia Sabah

The role of Ramadan fasting on all diabetics, especially those with diabetes complications, is widely accepted in the medical fraternity. The aim of this article is to discuss the role of Ramadan fasting on all diabetics, especially those with diabetes complications, and the benefits it brings to them. The scientific evidence proves that fasting during Ramadan has a tremendous effect on diabetes, especially those with diabetes complications.

1. Diabetes with wide complications

The diabetes patients who suffered from dyslipidemia, hyperlipidemia, and a very high blood sugar level in the morning (above 16 mmol/L) are considered to be at high risk during fasting. To increase their chances of success, these patients require careful planning and detailed nutrition and medication regimens.

2. Newly diagnosed diabetes (type-1 and type-2 diabetics)

These diabetics are included in the category of newly diagnosed diabetics. They are at high risk during fasting, and the following regimens are advised:

- Those who are on twice daily insulin injection should change their drug to once a day. Those who are on insulin pump should change their drug at least for the day of fasting.
- Those who are on oral hypoglycemic agents named as iftar, (future, Buka puasa), should take this medication 4 hours before breaking the fast to avoid low blood sugar during the day time. Timing of exercise should be adjusted to match the fasting schedule on the day of fasting.

3. The diabetics who cannot perceive the sensations arising from fasting

These diabetics require special considerations and detailed nutrition and medication regimens. Taking insulin and/or oral hypoglycemic agents should not be delayed if blood sugar level drops below 5 mmol/L. It is advisable to take starchy foods, proteins and some vitamins and minerals that are not universally accepted for the fast. Many of the patients who fast during Ramadan for the first time are confused by the fasting regimens and the physical and mental stress associated with it. The patients who are fasting during Ramadan for the first time are at high risk during fasting, and the following regimens are advised:

- Those who are on twice daily insulin injection should change their drug to once a day. Those who are on insulin pump should change their drug at least for 3 days before fasting.
- Those who are on oral hypoglycemic agents named as iftar, (future, Buka puasa) should take this medication 4 hours before breaking the fast to avoid low blood sugar during the day time. Timing of exercise should be adjusted to match the fasting schedule on the day of fasting.

4. The diabetes with serious complications

These diabetics are at high risk during fasting, and the following regimens are advised:

- Those who are on twice daily insulin injection should change their drug to once a day. Those who are on insulin pump should change their drug at least for 3 days before fasting.
- Those who are on oral hypoglycemic agents named as iftar, (future, Buka puasa) should take this medication 4 hours before breaking the fast to avoid low blood sugar during the day time. Timing of exercise should be adjusted to match the fasting schedule on the day of fasting.

5. Diabetes with pregnancy

Pregnancy is considered to be a medical emergency for diabetics. The diabetics who have gestational diabetes and gestational hypertension are at high risk during fasting. The following regimens are advised:

- Those who are on twice daily insulin injection should change their drug to once a day. Those who are on insulin pump should change their drug at least for 3 days before fasting.
- Those who are on oral hypoglycemic agents named as iftar, (future, Buka puasa) should take this medication 4 hours before breaking the fast to avoid low blood sugar during the day time. Timing of exercise should be adjusted to match the fasting schedule on the day of fasting.

6. Diabetes with serious complications

These diabetics are at high risk during fasting, and the following regimens are advised:

- Those who are on twice daily insulin injection should change their drug to once a day. Those who are on insulin pump should change their drug at least for 3 days before fasting.
- Those who are on oral hypoglycemic agents named as iftar, (future, Buka puasa) should take this medication 4 hours before breaking the fast to avoid low blood sugar during the day time. Timing of exercise should be adjusted to match the fasting schedule on the day of fasting.

In conclusion, the role of Ramadan fasting on all diabetics, especially those with diabetes complications, is widely accepted in the medical fraternity. The scientific evidence proves that fasting during Ramadan has a tremendous effect on diabetes, especially those with diabetes complications.