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A fresh approach to life with Type 2 diabetes



Ramadan & Type 2 diabetes

A practical guide

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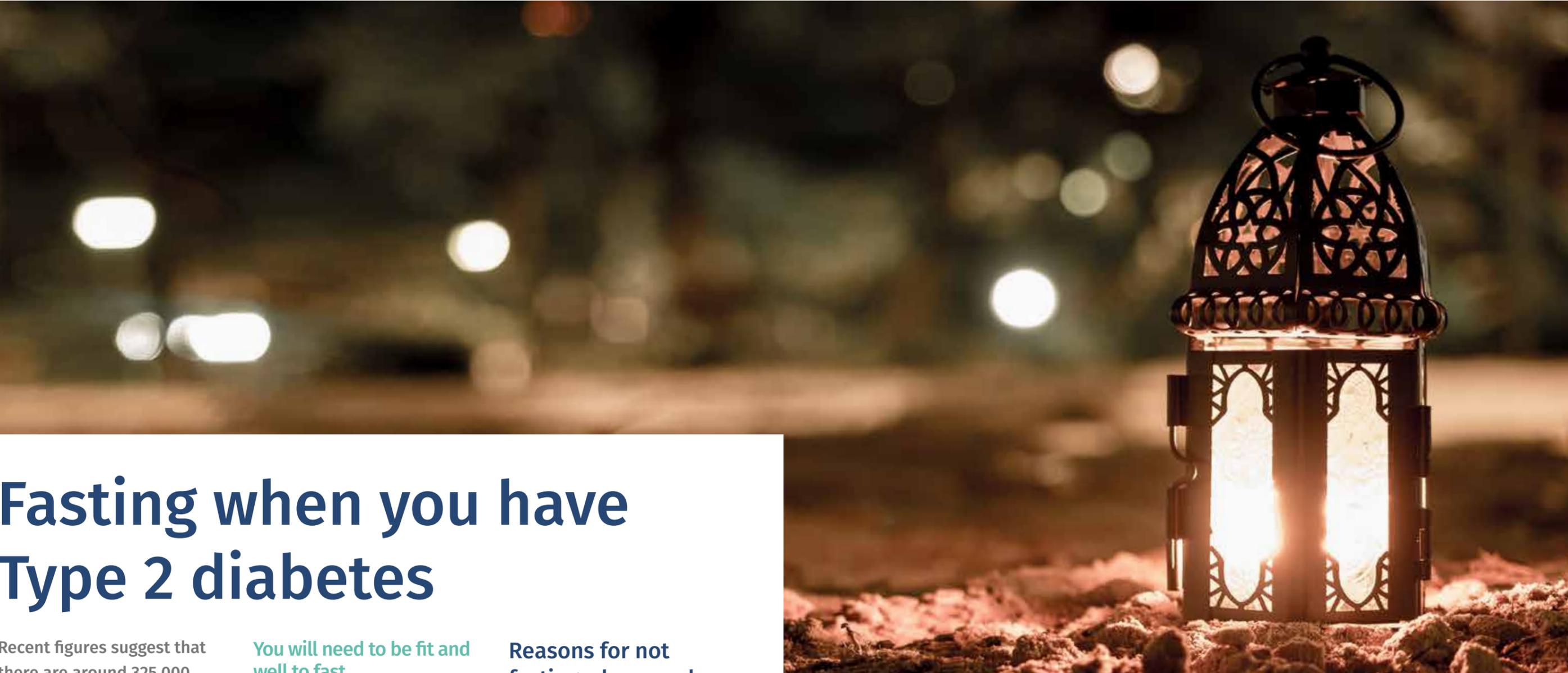
This booklet is for Muslims who are considering fasting for Ramadan, and who have Type 2 diabetes.

We'll cover some of the health issues around fasting when you have Type 2 diabetes, and offer practical tips and advice to help you stay well throughout Ramadan and beyond.



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Fasting when you have Type 2 diabetes

Recent figures suggest that there are around 325,000 Muslims in the UK who have diabetes (Types 1 and 2). During Ramadan, restricted food and water intake can make fasting a health issue for people with Type 2 diabetes – in this booklet we'll look into some of the health issues you may face, and look into the possibility of choosing not to fast for health reasons.

You will need to be fit and well to fast

While diabetes is a chronic and potentially serious health condition, if you look after your health you might feel perfectly well for much of the time, and not consider yourself as an 'ill person'. It can be tough to work out whether you qualify for exemption from fasting for this reason or not. Bear in mind that if fasting would cause you to fall ill, it should probably be avoided from a health point of view. Also, the Quran says that our bodies are an amanah, so we have a duty to take care of our health from a religious point of view.

Reasons for not fasting when you have Type 2 diabetes

You are ill, or might become ill if you fast

The Quran makes it clear that if fasting will damage your health then it should be avoided, in verse 184, chapter 2:

"So whoever among you is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of days [are to be made up]. And upon those who are able [to fast, but with hardship] - a ransom [as substitute] of feeding a poor person

[each day]. And whoever volunteers excess - it is better for him." (Sahih International interpretation)

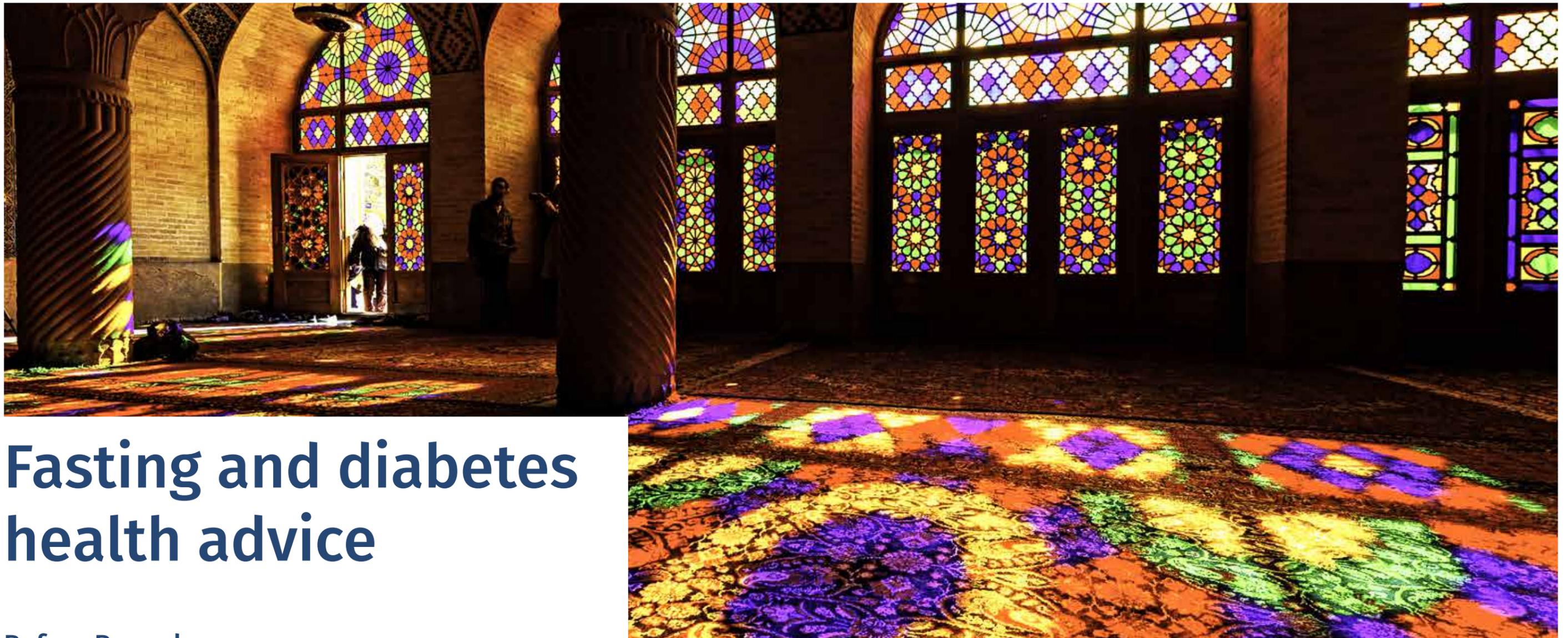
People with Type 1 diabetes should definitely not fast, as they would soon become hypoglycaemic and could become extremely ill very quickly. When you have Type 2 diabetes, though, the situation is not as clear. Only you and your Diabetes Specialist Nurse (DSN) or doctor know whether you would be OK to fast – it's a good idea to talk to a healthcare professional well before Ramadan, so you can work

towards a plan together. There is more information about this later in this booklet in the "Fasting and diabetes health advice" section.

A large study in 2004 of over 12,000 people across 13 countries found that there was a high rate of medical complications in people with diabetes who fasted during Ramadan, so if you were to become ill you would be far from being the only one.

You can take part in other ways

Remember that fasting can be carried out another time if your health improves. Also, the Quran makes provision for people who can't fast "without hardship", Fidyah can be given instead. This charitable gift is intended to provide enough food for two meals for one person or one meal for two people. It amounts to around £5 per day – although this is only a rough figure and might change for different areas.



Fasting and diabetes health advice

Before Ramadan

Talk to your doctor or nurse before you start

You should always get advice from a medical professional before deciding whether or not to fast. They are experts in health, and have your best interests at heart. It's really important to be as honest as you can with your medical team, so that they can make the most accurate assessment of your state of health and whether fasting would be dangerous for you or not.

It might also be useful to work with your doctor or nurse to come up

with a plan for how you will manage your diabetes during Ramadan if you do choose to fast after all. This could include things like:

- exercise, including taraweeh prayers
- coping with heat
- meal planning
- glucose monitoring
- dose and timing of any medications you may take

Check your medications

Most medications for Type 2 diabetes aim to bring your blood sugar

levels down. Certain medications you may take for Type 2 diabetes are more likely to cause your blood sugar levels to drop too low (hypoglycaemia), while others are less likely to cause hypoglycaemia.

You should discuss your medications with your doctor or nurse before Ramadan begins, as they may have a strong effect on whether you should fast. Be sure to tell your doctor or nurse openly and honestly which medications you currently take, so they can advise you properly.

If you are fasting, you will of course not be able to take medications during daylight hours. If this covers the time when you would have your normal dose, talk to your doctor or diabetes nurse to see if your dose can be split or re-arranged temporarily. Bear in mind that if you are not taking your usual dose of glucose-lowering tablets, your blood sugar may be higher than normal.

It's not a good idea to change the time you take a regular medicine or the dose, without speaking to a

healthcare professional. You should not stop taking any medicines without your doctor's knowledge.

Remember the calendar

For a number of years, Ramadan has taken place over British summer and will move backwards to spring in the coming decade. This means that the hours of darkness are extremely short: at midsummer (around 21st June) there can be as much as 16-17 hours of daylight every day, meaning that fasting is particularly

difficult – especially for people with type 2 diabetes. The decision to fast in winter, with only 8 hours of daylight, is a much less risky choice for people with type 2 diabetes. The decision to fast in summer with twice the length of a fast every day is one that needs to be thought about much more carefully.

During Ramadan

Continue to check your blood sugar

If you have a blood glucose meter, you should carry on using it throughout the fasting period to keep an eye on how your body is doing. If your blood sugar drops to 4 mmol/L or below, you are hypoglycaemic and you will need to break your fast.

Pricking your finger to test your blood glucose has no nutritional value, and does not mean you have broken your fast.

Take care with taraweeh prayers

Taraweeh prayers can be quite strenuous and may last for up to 2 hours, so they can really take their toll on your energy levels and your health. These extended prayer sessions could affect your body like any other exercise movement, so stay hydrated, and if you monitor your blood glucose check it beforehand and afterwards.

As with any exercise, if you start to feel dizzy, faint or unwell in any way you should stop until you feel better.

Get hydrated

Going for long periods without water, especially when the weather is warm, can make you dehydrated. Remember to have plenty of water as soon as you can, and for as long as you can, to keep you going during the day.

Stay cool

Ramadan no longer happens over the height of the British summer in July and August, and won't again until around the year 2041, but there can still be unseasonable weather in the UK in spring and early summer. Going without water in the heat can make you feel very unwell. It's worth remembering that signs of heat exhaustion are quite like the signs of unstable blood glucose, so if in doubt it might be a good idea to check your blood sugar levels (if you have a monitor).

Signs of heat exhaustion include:

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Tiredness
- Muscle cramps
- Stomach cramps
- Pale skin

Keep track of the dates you eat

Dates are a traditional part of the iftar meal but bear in mind that an average medjool date contains around 18g of carbohydrate, of which 16g is sugar.

Go easy at suhur and iftar

It's tempting to eat large amounts of sweet, starchy and fatty foods before and after the day's fast. But, just as you wouldn't eat too many of these foods if you're trying to be healthy at any other time, it's still not advisable for Ramadan. Foods that release their energy slowly might be more useful at suhur, to sustain your energy and blood sugar levels throughout the day.

These might include:

Fruit and vegetables

Frozen, canned or fresh veg

Starches

Wholegrain bread, wholewheat pasta, brown or wild rice

Proteins

Meat, fish, eggs, pulses, beans and nuts

Dairy produce

Milk, yoghurt, cheese

Don't forget about the sugar in drinks too

A glass of fruit juice sounds healthy, but contains very little fibre and can contain as much sugar as a fizzy soft drink.

Be sure you know the symptoms of a hypo

If your blood sugar drops too low, it's known as a hypo (short for hypoglycaemia). You may have a blood glucose monitor to check your levels, but you should always try to remember the symptoms of a hypo so that you can take action straight away if it happens – otherwise you could become very ill. The symptoms of a hypo are:



If you feel unwell, stop

If you become unwell during Ramadan, you are not required to fast and may need to break your fast for the good of your health. You can always give Fidyah for days you are unable to fast or add time to the end of Ramadan, and return to fasting when you are completely well. If in any doubt as to whether you should stop your fast or not because of ill health, talk to a healthcare professional straight away for advice tailored to your situation and your exact symptoms. You could contact:

- Your GP during working hours
- Your DSN during working hours
- Your local out-of-hours service
- The national 111 phone service, if available in your area
- **If you become severely unwell, call 999**

After Ramadan

Go easy at Eid ul-Fitr

The festival of Eid is usually marked with festivities, eating and drinking, often with rich dishes high in fat and sugar. Don't forget about the risks of having high blood glucose (sugar), though – over-indulging at this time is tempting, but just as risky for your health as at any other time. Focusing on wholegrains, proteins and vegetables with minimal portions of sweetened, refined or deep-fried foods is more likely to stabilise your blood glucose than sudden, large amounts of sweets.

Get back on track as soon as you can

After Ramadan and Eid are over, it's a good time to have a fresh start with your health. Ideally you will have spoken to your doctor or diabetes nurse well before Ramadan to work out a plan of action for how you will manage over Ramadan and how you will get back to normal afterwards. Generally, you will be aiming to get back to your usual routine, taking your medications at the normal time again. Why not take the opportunity to re-focus on managing your Type 2 diabetes at this time, and make a commitment to living more healthily? You'll find a number of articles to help you get motivated on the accompanying website to this booklet: better-living.co.uk.

Talking to your doctor about fasting

If you have Type 2 diabetes and are thinking about fasting for Ramadan, it's important to keep your doctor or diabetes nurse informed about your plans and your state of health. Some people may feel that if a healthcare professional advises them not to fast, that they should then keep it

a secret if they do decide to fast. It's better to be honest with your doctor or nurse so that they can work with you most effectively to come up with a plan of action that will suit your needs.

Similarly, if you fast and become unwell, don't worry about talking

to your doctor or nurse about it. It's nothing to be ashamed of if you do something according to your conscience and then practicalities get in the way. It will be easier to approach your healthcare team if they know in advance that you are planning to fast.



Talking to your friends and family about diabetes

There are over 4 million people in the UK who have diabetes, most of them with Type 2 diabetes. Of those, a large number (about 325,000) are Muslims, so you are not alone.

However, some people can find that their friends and family don't understand Type 2 diabetes very

well, and put pressure on them to conform to the requirements of Islam when it could potentially put their health at risk. Others might find that well-meaning people try to tempt them with very sugary or fatty indulgent foods at feast times or, say, at iftar – “Just one won't hurt” or “It's not every day you eat like this”.

Only you can decide what's right for you, and what risks you are willing to take. Don't forget that Islam encourages good health, so reducing your intake of unhealthy foods (or avoiding them altogether) is still observing your faith.

About the words used in this booklet

Writing Arabic words in English often leads to different spellings in different communities, so you may not recognise some of the spellings we have used in this booklet. Some of the alternative spellings are laid out in the table to the right:

Spelling used in this book:	Other spellings include...
Amanah	Amana
Fidyah	Fidzah, fidya
Eid ul-Fitr	Eid al-Fitr
Suhur	Suhyr
Taraweeh	Tarawih, tarawi
Iftar	Ifter, iftur
Quran	Qur'an, Koran