



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

RAMADAN IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION

WHAT IS RAMADAN?

The word 'Ramadan' refers to the name of the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. It is a month of fasting, introspection and reflection as well as a time to focus on spirituality and charity.

During the holy month of Ramadan, it is estimated that more than 1.6 billion Muslims observe in fasting as an act of worship, a chance to be closer to God, and a way to become more compassionate to those in need.

In 2022, the holy month of Ramadan is recognized from April 2 to May 2 (dates may vary according to lunar calendar).

HOW IS IT OBSERVED?

The basic requirement during the month of Ramadan for Muslims is to fast from sunrise to sunset every day for the month, meaning no food, water or anything else past the lips. The meal eaten each evening or night to break the fast is called "iftar" and is often taken with family and friends and "suhoor" is a meal taken just before sunrise, before the day of fasting begins. Some Muslims may not be able to fast (e.g. due to health reasons) or choose not to but might still observe other aspects of Ramadan.

The end of the fasting month is marked by the sighting of the new moon which is called "Eid al-Fitr" – 'festival of breaking the fast'. This is a holiday (ranging from 1 to 3 days) where Muslims gather with family, visit and exchange gifts with friends, and give to charity. Charity, or "zakat", is one of the five pillars of Islam, and particularly significant during Ramadan.

HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

- 1** **Get Educated.** Ensure staff who supervise self-identified Muslim colleagues are aware of Ramadan, what fasting entails and how they can be supportive.
- 2** **Intentional Planning.** To be more inclusive, try to be mindful of your language to avoid terms like “Lunch and Learn” or “Coffee Chats” when scheduling remote meetings. Avoid booking meetings for the afternoon or evenings.
- 3** **Be Flexible.** Accommodate the employee if they prefer to alter their 9-5 work hours, consider flex time options. If shift work is the norm, they may want to swap shifts or alter their hours. Look for solutions that suits all parties. Make special allowances for Muslim colleagues to take a break at sunset if still on shift, to break their fast, pray and eat. During fasting, Muslim colleagues are not allowed to have water. If colleagues are required to deliver lengthy presentations, please be considerate about this.
- 4** **Be Thoughtful.** Common greetings for Ramadan and Eid include “Ramadan Mubarak” [RUHM-ah-DAAN MOO-bar-UHK], meaning “Blessed Ramadan” or “Ramadan Kareem” [RUHM-ah-DAAN CAAR-eem], meaning “Happy Ramadan”. You can also say “Eid Mubarak” [EED MOO-bar-UHK], meaning “Blessed Eid” or “Happy Eid”.
- 5** **Don't make assumptions.** For personal reasons, not all Muslim colleagues will take the time off or fast, but they may still observe in various ways.