



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 2023, the holy month of Ramadan is recognized from March 22 to April 20 (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. "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 and accommodations.** To be more inclusive, try to be mindful of your language to avoid terms like “Lunch and Learn” or “Coffee Chats” when scheduling meetings. Consider booking meetings earlier in the day and avoid evenings. Update your scheduling tools to reflect religious observance dates and to support the planning activities.

The University of Toronto recognizes its obligation to prevent discriminatory impacts on members of its community that arise from the failure to accommodate based on religion or creed. It is the responsibility of both the Manager and the individual seeking accommodation to work cooperatively and respectfully to explore and implement appropriate accommodation options. Please consider the following for the duration of Ramadan:

- Accommodate the employee if they prefer to alter their 9-5 work hours and consider flex time options.
- If shift work is the norm, employees may want to swap shifts or alter their hours. Look for solutions that suit 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.

3

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”.

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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.