



UNIVERSITY OF
TORONTO

RAMADAN IN THE WORKPLACE

Inclusive Employer Guide

EQUITY · DIVERSITY · INCLUSION

WHAT IS RAMADAN?

The word 'Ramadan' simply refers to the name of the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar. In 2020, the holy month is recognized from April 23rd to May 23rd (approximately), during which fasting is observed by some 1.6 billion Muslims all over the world.

The basic requirement is for Muslims to fast from sunrise to sunset, meaning no food, water or anything else past the lips. The fasting period is 17 hours every day for the month.

Ramadan is a month of introspection and reflection, as well as, a time to focus on spirituality and charity. These are very general guidelines and practices of the faith differ by culture and interpretation. Some Muslims may not be able to fast (e.g. due to health reasons) or choose not to, but might still be reflective on other aspects of the month.

The end of the fasting month is marked by the sighting of the new moon which is called Eid al-Fitr. This is a holiday (ranging from 1 to 3 days) where Muslims gather with family and friends. Please be flexible for time off schedules for your colleagues, as it is difficult to know the exact dates for Eid ahead of time.

Common greetings to mark this occasion include "Eid Mubarak", meaning "Blessed Eid", or "Happy Eid".

HOW CAN WE CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT?

- 1 Get Educated.** Ensure staff who supervise self-identified Muslim colleagues are aware of 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 ways 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.
- 4 Be Thoughtful.** During fasting, Muslim colleagues are not allowed to have water. If colleagues are required to deliver lengthy presentations, please be considerate about this.
- 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.

Use Ramadan as a platform for greater understanding and creating an environment where all staff feel they are supported and belong.