



A BRIEF

RAMADAN

study guide



Including:



HOW TO STAY PRODUCTIVE



ADVICE FROM POSTGRAD STUDENTS



DUAS AND HEALTHY RECIPES

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Who we are



Somali Academics is a student-led, non-profit organisation that focuses on bridging the access gap between the Somali community and academia. Our mission is to create a platform focused on empowering our youth through organising events, seminars and workshops in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas and help fulfil our community's academic and career aspirations.



SOMALI
ACADEMICS



Introduction



As-salaamu alaikum,

During the blessed month of Ramadan, we have decided to publish this short pamphlet detailing how current postgraduate students are preparing to stay on top of their studies/research.

For many of us, the last year has brought about an abrupt change to a routine we've spent the best part of our young adulthood perfecting. Waking up early seems a distant thing of the past; lecture halls have been replaced by breakout rooms; procrastination has taken on the form of baking and our web browsers are littered with "how to" searches (cutting your own hair is a lot harder than it seems!). These are but a few examples, which taken together, make it incredibly hard to navigate through your degree, and it is precisely for this reason that we have decided to make this short pamphlet.

Somali Academics




Keeping productive



Ramadan is arguably one of the most difficult months to be a student, particularly when it falls during an exam season. Juggling the time, energy and effort to study whilst fasting and remaining spiritually active can be exhausting and can quickly lead to a burnout.

We've compiled the most common productivity challenges* and some tips to overcome them to help you get the best out of both your deen and studies this Ramadan.



*(Adapted from 'The Productive Muslim' by Mohammed Faris)



Managing Sleep

Many of us find ourselves staying up for longer than usual during the month of Ramadan doing additional acts of worship (i.e. taraweeh).

These extra acts of worship mean expending more energy and staying up for longer, which could impact the regular schedule of energy we usually maintain throughout our day. Here are a few ways to stay energised:



Taking a short nap during the day - This helps overcome the inevitable mid afternoon productivity dip and helps us maintain alertness throughout our day.






Managing focus

Fasting can also make us extremely fatigued and impede our ability to concentrate on any given task. This essentially happens because we're on a low glucose diet and therefore have to utilise the stored quantity of glucose very wisely in order for our brains to function at our typical baseline. Here are a few ways help do so:

Streamlining our commitments - picking which crucial concepts and areas to focus, and prioritising the most essential tasks will help to get the best out of our energy and concentration.



Studying in shorter bursts - The Pomodoro technique of studying for 25 minutes and following it up with a short break is an excellent way to maintain focus for short periods of time.



Going for a walk - Brief bouts of aerobic exercise help to clear brain fog. However, to avoid depleting our energy reserves, make sure to keep this short.

Managing time

Spending more time in acts of worship during Ramadan often means we need to get the very best out of the time we dedicate to our work and studies. Here are a few ways to achieve that:



Working within our productive heat-map -

Understanding when we have the most energy allows us to maximise how productive we are during study periods. For a morning person, this might mean doing the heaviest and most crucial tasks straight after suhoor - and for evening person, directly after taraweeh.





Creating a 30 day schedule - Sticking to a feasible revision schedule well in advance will help avoid the stress of cramming last minute and gives you the flexibility to focus primarily on acts of worships during the last ten nights of Ramadan.





Q & A WITH POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS



We interviewed 4 postgraduate students asking them a series of questions to gauge how fasting during a pandemic has affected them during their studies/research. We decided to ask the same questions for each interview in order to get a range of perspective in the hopes that at least one of them will be applicable to you.

Here are some of their responses...

AIDA HASSAN

MRes and PhD studentship in Global Public Health



In two to three lines can you summarise what your research project is about?

My research focuses on the impact of conflict and civil war on public health security. I am mostly focusing on Somalia as a case study.

What is your preferred study technique/routine?

I am not sure if I have a technique, but I found waking up early or staying awake after Fajr prayer helps me focus on my work, especially while the house is quiet.

Has your study routine changed in response to COVID-19? If so, how?

Yes! When I was doing my masters a few years ago, the daily walk to the library and back was a really refreshing break but now I barely leave my house and it hinders my ability to focus. I've been trying to change that by going on long walks every 2-3 days.



How do you stay on top of your studies/research during Ramadan?

I was actually writing my MSc dissertation during Ramadan a few years ago but also working during the day, so it was really challenging but staying organised was imperative and knowing what I have to cover for my research was more important than the number of hours spent. And it really helped me to organise my workload around prayers and Iftar preparation.

How did you manage to balance your work/research last Ramadan?



I was WFH last Ramadan but my workload was light last year, Alhamdulillah. So I was able to dedicate more time to reading the Quran, listening to Islamic lectures while working on my daily tasks and once it was 5pm, log off and prepare iftar.

What is your favourite iftar meal and why is it samosas?

This might be controversial but I really like tuna samosas!



IBRAHIM FARAH

PhD Psychiatry



In two to three lines can you summarise what your research project is about?

My research project is to understand how much of an effect genetics play in intellectual disability but also other psychiatric diseases. The goal is to try diagnose these disease early and to try and understand the mechanism by which these disorders occur.

What is your preferred study technique/routine?

I have a pretty tough schedule at the moment where I'm (unsuccessfully) attempting to balance full time work and studying. My weekdays consists of work and I try get in some studying in the evenings or weekends. My technique depends on the task, which is mostly reading or writing and data analysis. I try print papers off or read them on my phone which prevents me from wasting valuable time doing that during deep focus work. My data analysis work is mostly designing programming solutions to analyse my data which requires a lot reading, documentation of packages, writing code and debugging/testing. I tend to do this in slots of 4-5 hours straight before I take a break.





Has your study routine changed in response to COVID-19? If so, how?

Alhamdulillah my routine hasn't changed since pandemic. Since my research is data and computational driven, I've been working from home before lockdown - the only difference is that I would work in coffee shops more often back then.

How do you stay on top of your studies/research during Ramadan?

My biggest hack during Ramadan is that my research work tends to be at night. There's something about writing code straight after breaking my fast with coffee that makes me super productive and focused. I mostly work at night during this month, taking breaks at Isha/taraweeh and suhoor/fajr.





How did you manage to balance your work/research last Ramadan?

I prioritised my work based on the deadline. Similar to sitting loads of exams, I'd set myself some goals and expectations each week making sure that I'd get a good balance between work and research. Luckily the two involve programming and so there wasn't a huge switch in thinking which saved me time.

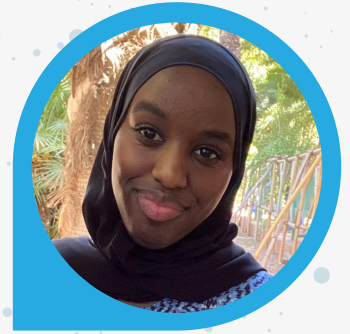
What is your favourite Iftar meal and why is it samosas?

No, It's Shurbad! Nothing beats it.



IMAN ABDI-IBRAHIM

MSc Women's Health



In two to three lines can you summarise what your research project is about?

I'm looking into the factors that influence a higher maternal mortality rate for black women giving birth in the UK.

What is your preferred study technique/routine?

I love the Pomodoro technique as my attention wanes after a while, so the short bursts of concentration work well for me. I try and actively take breaks away from screens (including my phone!).

Has your study routine changed in response to COVID-19? If so, how?

Yes! I've had to remind myself to leave the house! I found that I could easily stay at home for a few days on end when I don't have work, so I've had to slot a walk into my schedule (very new for me).



How do you stay on top of your studies/research during Ramadan?

I try and do as much as I can early in the morning, then take a nap after Dhuhr and wake up at Asr to help prepare for Iftar. I try and get my Quran done in small sections, usually reading around 5 pages after each prayer. Then I sit with my family and enjoy my evenings.

How did you manage to balance your work/research last Ramadan?

I was working during a pandemic last Ramadan so I booked as much annual leave as I could 😊

What is your favourite iftar meal and why is it samosas?

Yep it's Samosas. Because why not? Also stuffed medjool dates

LADAN OSMAN

PhD Student



In two to three lines can you summarise what your research project is about?

“A mixed method evaluation of the Mental Health System (MHS) in Somalia” To provide a baseline assessment for monitoring and evaluation of the MHS.

What is your preferred study technique/routine?

Ideally, once a week is spent on organising workload into small manageable daily tasks. A comfortable study area far from the bed and the phone.

Has your study routine changed in response to COVID-19? If so, how?

Most definitely! Change of scenery when studying helps me to concentrate and maintain motivations while also taking breaks by spending time with friends. So, being inside without physical socialising has led me to feeling burnout and my mental distress has exacerbated. To help me I have sought out the necessary support (university staffs and GP), which has been helpful.



How do you stay on top of your studies/research during Ramadan?

It's important for me to be realistic with my work capacity. I know drinking liquids while studying provides me energy therefore I try to schedule my studying time for the night hours, which means eating small portions throughout the night to prevent me feeling drowsy.

How did you manage to balance your work/research last Ramadan?

*Extremely difficult! However, I spent it with my cousins, which meant I had study partners. We managed to create three study places inside the house and tried to hold each other accountable if we were not following our schedules. Please, remember to be kind to yourself and always seek support from loved ones, teachers, GP etc. Check if vitamin levels are normal, make Sadaqah (helps to achieve miracles beyond our imagination) and make duas, lots of duas, including the one for studying:
<https://youtu.be/DyYFSN0pzmA>*

What is your favourite iftar meal and why is it samosas?

Yep it's Samosas. Because why not? Also stuffed medjool dates



Recipes



“The food of Iftar, which is the meal to break the fast, should ideally be slow-releasing carbohydrates and sugars to help the body adjust and come to balance and prepare for the fast the following morning” – Chef Asma Khan

During the month of Ramadan, more often than not, we're inclined to indulge in heavier and greasier foods than we normally would, leading to feelings of sluggishness and lethargy. Given that food is the single most important source of energy driving our productivity, it's vital that our diet is packed with nutrients and slow energy releasing foods.

Here are a few recipe ideas we've compiled to help you get the most out of your diet this holy month:



Suhoor



Overnight oats with blueberries:

- ½ cup oats
- 1 tbsp chia seeds
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup plain, low-fat Greek yogurt
- ½ cup blueberries



1. Combine all the ingredients in a bowl. Cover and leave in the fridge for four hours or more.
2. Remove from fridge and serve hot or cold

Oats Smoothie

- ½ banana
- 1 tsp peanut butter
- ½ cup plain, low-fat Greek yogurt
- ½ cup oats
- ½ cup almond milk
- Maple syrup



1. Mix all ingredients using a blender & fix consistency with water
2. Drizzle with maple syrup and serve in a glass



Iftar

Nutritiously nutty milkshake

- 7-8 unseeded dates
- 2-3 dry figs
- ¼ cup walnuts
- ¼ cup almonds
- 2 ½ cup chilled milk
- 1 tbsp on honey

1. Mix all the ingredients together using a blender and fix to desired consistency with water
2. Pour into a glass and serve



Grilled chicken and veg.

- 500g Chicken Breast
- 150g Low fat Greek Yogurt
- 2 tbsp Olive oil
- 3 tbsp Lemon juice
- 2 tsp Black pepper powder
- 1 tsp Salt
- 1 ½ tsp chopped Garlic cloves
- 1tsp Cajun spice mix
- 1tsp Smoked paprika
- 1 Broccoli floret
- 1 Sweet potato
- 2 Carrots
- 2 Mixed peppers



1. Combine the chicken breast with the greek yoghurt, cajun spice mix, smoked paprika, lemon juice, chopped garlic, a little olive oil and leave to marinate in the fridge.
2. Place on a baking tray and bake in the oven for 35 to 45 minutes at 180°C.
3. Chop all of the vegetables to roughly the same size and place evenly onto a separate baking tray.
4. Drizzle with olive oil, salt and pepper and roast in the oven for 30 minutes, also at 180°C or until the vegetables are tender
5. Serve with your grilled chicken and enjoy!

Snacks

Energy balls

- 1 cup of dates
- 1/3 cup of any preferred nuts
- ¾ cups of coconut flakes
- 1 ½ tbsp coconut oil
- 2 tbsp cacao powder
- 1/8 tsp salt



1. Place all of the ingredients into a food processor and pulse until mixed well and finely chopped
2. Roll the mixture into small balls and coat each ball with some coconut flakes
3. Allow to refrigerator for at least an hour until they harden. Serve and enjoy!

Du'aa

Studying

اللَّهُمَّ انْفَعْنِي بِمَا عَلَّمْتَنِي وَ عَلَّمْنِي مَا
يَنْفَعُنِي وَ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

Allaahum-manfa'nee bimā 'allamtanee wa 'allimnee
mā yanfa'unee wa zidnee 'ilmā

O Allah, benefit me with what You have taught me,
and teach me that which benefit me, and increase
me in knowledge.

Understanding

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ فَهْمَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَ حِفْظَ
الْمُرْسَلِينَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ

Allahuma inni as'aluka fahman-nabiyyeen wa hifdhal
mursaleen al-muqarrabeen.

Oh Allah! I ask you for the understanding of the
prophets and the memory of the messengers, and
those nearest to you.




Laziness

لِلَّهِمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْهَمِّ وَالْحَزَنِ
وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْعَجْزِ وَالْكَسَلِ
وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْجُبْنِ وَالْبُخْلِ
وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ غَلَبَةِ الدَّيْنِ وَقَهْرِ الرِّجَالِ

Allâhumma innî a'ûdhu bika min al-hammi wa al-hazan. Wa a'ûdhu bika min al-'ajzi wa al-kasal. Wa a'ûdhu bika min al-jubni wa al-bukhl. Wa a'ûdhu bika min ghalabat id-dayni wa qahr ir-rijal.

Oh Allah, I seek refuge in You from worry and grief, from helplessness and laziness, from cowardice and stinginess, and from overpowering of debt and from oppression of men

Difficulty



اللَّهُمَّ لَا سَهْلًا إِلَّا مَا جَعَلْتَهُ سَهْلًا وَأَنْتَ تَجْعَلُ
الْحَزْنَ إِذَا شِئْتَ سَهْلًا

Allâhumma lâ sahlâ illâ mâ ja'altahu sahlâ wa anta taj'alu al-hazana idhâ shi'ta sahlâ.

Oh Allah! Nothing is easy except what You have made easy. If You wish, You can make the difficult easy.





Confidence & ease

رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي
وَاحْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِنْ لِسَانِي يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي



Rabb-ishrah li sadri, wa yassir li 'amri, Wah-lul
'uqdatam-min-li-saani, Yaf-qahuu qawlii

O my Lord! Open for me my chest (grant me self-confidence, contentment, and boldness); Ease my task for me; And remove the impediment from my speech, so they may understand what I say



Closing remarks




The month of Ramadan is one of the great blessings bestowed upon us by Allah (SWT). It is a month that requires preparation, especially when this coincides with other commitments such as exams.

We have compiled a list of answers from current postgraduate students and a common theme across the board is the need to prepare for Ramadan. This is not an easy feat and often requires a process of trial and error before we find a routine that works best for us. It often helps to ponder over the verse shown below when searching for this routine.

The month of Ramaḍān [is that] in which was revealed the Qur'ān, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion. So whoever sights [the crescent of] the month, let him fast it; and whoever is ill or on a journey - then an equal number of other days. Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship and [wants] for you to complete the period and to glorify Allah for that [to] which He has guided you; and perhaps you will be grateful.

al-Baqarah 2:185



We hope that the contents within this booklet provide you with the inspiration that you need to make the most out of the month of Ramadan.

Jazakum Allahu Khayran



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