



Sheraton Kampala Hotel launched special *iftar* area and meal designed to provide a culturally sensitive environment for Muslim guests. PHOTO/SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA.

A little goes a long way during Ramadhan

If someone can go 14 hours without food and drink, they can certainly reduce unhealthy snacking and excessive sugar intake even after Ramadhan.

BY SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA

As the holy month of Ramadhan unfolds, kitchens across Kampala come alive at dawn and sunset. Pots simmer before sunrise for last meal (*suhoor*), and by evening, families gather around carefully prepared meals to break their fast at *iftar*.

But beyond the aroma of spices and the joy of togetherness lies a growing conversation about healthy eating habits during the fasting period.

Ramadhan, observed by Muslims worldwide as a month of fasting, prayer and reflection, requires abstinence from food and drink from dawn to sunset. While the spiritual discipline remains central, health experts say the physical aspect of fasting should not be overlooked.

A SEASON TO RESET

Beyond daily meal planning, health Dr Mansoor Mugenyi says Ramadhan presents an opportunity to reform long-term eating habits. He encourages families to prepare moderate portions and avoid food wastage, noting that empathy for the less privileged is central to the Ramadhan message.

Dr Sarah Nanyonga, a Kampala-based nutritionist and public health specialist, says the way one eats between *iftar* and *suhoor* determines how the body copes during the long hours without food or water.

"Ramadhan is not about depriving the body all day and then overwhelming it with heavy, oily meals at sunset. The key word is balance. How you break your fast and what you choose to eat afterwards will affect your energy levels, digestion and overall wellbeing," she says.

Breaking the fast wisely

She explains that traditionally, Muslims break

their fast with dates and water, a practice rooted in prophetic tradition. Nutritionists say the method remains scientifically sound.

"Dates provide natural sugars that quickly restore energy levels, while water helps rehydrate the body gently. After that, one should have a balanced meal that includes complex carbohydrates, lean protein, vegetables and fruits," she says.

She cautions against the common temptation to indulge in fried snacks, sugary drinks or large portions immediately after sunset.

"When you overload the stomach after months of fasting, you risk bloating, heartburn and extreme fatigue. Some people even become sleepier after *iftar* because of overeating," she notes.

She also revealed that complex carbohydrates such as brown rice, whole grains and chapati made from whole wheat release energy slowly, helping the body sustain itself throughout the following day. Lean proteins such as grilled chicken, beans, lentils and fish support muscle repair and satiety.

"Hydration is equally critical; you have to drink enough water between *iftar* and *suhoor*. Do not wait until you feel thirsty. Avoid too much soda and caffeine because they can worsen dehydration," she advises.

The Suhoor strategy

According to Dr Mansoor Mugenyi, a nutritionist and Muslim scholar, *iftar* reloads the body, *suhoor* prepares it for endurance, recommending fibre-rich and protein-packed foods at the pre-dawn meal.

"Eggs, oats, yoghurt, beans and fruits are excellent choices. Avoid very salty foods because they increase thirst during the day," she says.

He explains that for those with medical conditions such as diabetes, hypertension or asthmas, should consult with health professionals before and during Ramadhan.

"Fasting is spiritually rewarding, but health must be prioritised. Medication schedules may need adjustment. It is important to seek guidance rather than assume the body will cope," he adds.

Dr Mugenyi adds that Islam provides exemptions for the sick, elderly, pregnant women and travellers if fasting poses health risks, a reminder that wellbeing remains central even in religious observance.

Hotels adapt to healthier trends

As families focus on home-cooked meals, hotels and restaurants in Kampala are also responding to the evolving dietary awareness during Ramadhan.

At Sheraton Kampala Hotel, management launched special *iftar* area and meal designed to provide a serene and culturally sensitive environment for Muslim guests.

The General Manager, Jean-Philippe Bitencourt, says the hotel has curated menus that combine tradition with healthy choices.

"We recognise that Ramadhan is both a spiritual and communal experience and this year, we have created dedicated *iftar* spaces that respect the significance of the month while offering a comfortable dining atmosphere," he says.

He adds that the menu includes dates, fresh juices, soups, grilled meats, rice dishes, salads and lighter options for health-conscious guests.