Fasting and epilepsy

There are various reasons why a person may fast. The more common ones are:

- Religious reasons
- Dietary reasons
- Before an anaesthetic

What is the danger of fasting for a person with epilepsy?
Research has shown that fasting can put people with epilepsy at risk of more seizures. So before you fast for any reason, it is important to get advice from your family doctor, epilepsy nurse or epilepsy specialist.

Why can fasting be a problem?

Some research was carried out on people with epilepsy who were fasting during Ramadan. The research showed that some of them had more seizures during this time. This increase was probably due to:

- Changes in the way epilepsy medicines were taken
- Sleep patterns being disturbed
- Going for a long time without food
- Emotional stress and tiredness

These are all things that are known to trigger seizures in some people with epilepsy.

So, whether you are fasting for religious reasons, or you are thinking about doing a diet which involves fasting, you need to be aware of these risks. And it is important to get medical advice before deciding if you are going to fast.

For more information on fasting and health see the NHS Choices website
Website: nhs.uk

Having an anaesthetic

For some types of anaesthetics, people are told not to eat or drink for at least eight hours before surgery. You should, however, be able to take your epilepsy medicines at their usual time, with a sip of water. You can discuss your own personal situation:

- With the consultant referring you for surgery or
- With your epilepsy specialist nurse or
- At your pre-op appointments

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About this information
This information is written by Epilepsy Action’s advice and information team, with guidance and input from people living with epilepsy, and medical experts. If there is anything you would like to say about the information, please contact us at epilepsy.org.uk/feedback

Epilepsy Action makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of information but cannot be held liable for any actions taken based on this information.

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Your support
We hope you have found this information helpful. As a charity, we rely on donations to provide our advice and information. If you would like to make a donation, here are some ways you can do this.

- Visit www.epilepsy.org.uk/donate
- Text ACT NOW to 70700 (This will cost you £5 plus your usual cost of sending a text. Epilepsy Action will receive £5.)
- Send a cheque payable to Epilepsy Action to the address below.

Did you know you can also become a member of Epilepsy Action from as little as £1 a month? To find out more, visit epilepsy.org.uk/join or call 0113 210 8800.

Epilepsy Action Helpline
Freephone 0808 800 5050, text 0753 741 0044, email helpline@epilepsy.org.uk, tweet @epilepsyadvice

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