

Can eye drops be used during fasting?

Ejaz Ansari FRCOphth MD¹, Asim Yusuf OBE MRCPsych², Abdul-Jabbar Ghauri FRCOphth³, Mohammed Zubair Butt MA⁴

¹Professor, Maidstone & Tunbridge Wells Hospitals, Hermitage Lane, Maidstone ME16 9QQ & Institute of Medical Sciences, Canterbury Christ Church University, Kent ME4 4UF, United Kingdom

²Consultant, Penn Hospital, Black Country Partnership Foundation Trust, Penn Road, Wolverhampton, WV4 5HN, United Kingdom

³Consultant, Birmingham and Midland Eye Centre, Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, Dudley Road, Birmingham, B18 7QH United Kingdom

⁴Mufti & Chaplin, The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, St James's University Hospital, Beckett Street, Leeds, LS9 7TF, United Kingdom.

Correspondence: Ejaz Ansari, e.ansari@nhs.net

Introduction

Whilst we know about the restrictions around food and drink and oral medication during the month of Ramadan, there is still much confusion about whether eye drops are also prohibited. The importance of taking eye drops, for example, to prevent blindness from glaucoma cannot be overemphasised¹. Therefore, it is of prime importance to seek to address the question of permissibility of eye drops during Ramadan from an Islamic jurisprudence perspective in order to mollify patients' concerns, thereby helping to reduce non-compliance in a chronic progressive disorder.

Methods:

We have consulted Islamic scholars and the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) with expertise in jurisprudence who have confirmed that, in the most widely observed Sunni and Shia legal schools, eye drops are not considered to be a cause of breaking the fast (*mufdir*) even if traces of taste or colour reach the back of the throat. According to the traditional Hanafi and Shafi'i Sunni positions, eye drops entering the gastro-intestinal tract (*jawf*) via the puncta, and nasolacrimal ducts does not constitute a route of entry which will break a fast [5,6]. The traditional Twelve Shia position is that eye drops are not termed 'food' or 'drink' [7].

However, it is also important to recognise that there are valid religious positions, albeit relatively less observed in the UK, which prohibit the use of eye drops whilst fasting. For those patients who would still be wary of using eye drops during the hours of fasting, we suggested using the morning drops at the time of the pre-dawn repast (*Suhoor*) and the evening drops at the time of breaking the fast (*Iftaar*).

We thought that this would be an acceptable compromise to avoid non-compliance throughout the 1-month period.

Results:

Once we had confirmation from the relevant legal sources about the permissibility of eye drops whilst fasting, we undertook a wide-ranging awareness campaign delivering information to the public through various channels (table 1).

This included press releases, radio broadcasts, social media and mailshots to hospitals and opticians. Also included were monograms and patient information posters to be displayed at hospitals, opticians, mosques, and community centres (figure 1).

Table 1 summarises the outlets used for the awareness campaign. Full data were available from 2018, although the campaign was initiated in 2016.

Year	Press release	Radio day	Poster(s)	Other assets	Social media content	Partners	Mailing to hospitals etc
2018	y	y	Y?	None	none	MCB	y
2019	y	y	Y in multiple languages	Fasting calendar with HAREF, info postcards (similar to poster)	minimal	MCB, MDA, BIMA	y
2020	y	y	Y in English	Fasting calendar with HAREF, film	Film and other posts	MCB, MDA, Specsavers	n
2021	y	y	Re-used from prev year	HAREF calendar, film recycled from prev year, digital glaucoma support group in Urdu	Similar to previous year	Specsavers, MCB	n
2022	y	y	Re-used from previous year			Optometry today, Specsavers	n

HAREF: Health equality for ethnically minoritised communities **MCB:** Muslim Council of Britain **MDA:** Muslim Doctors Association

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION:

Studies surveying beliefs of Muslims have shown that between 45.5%-63.7% of Muslims believe that eye drops invalidate a fast [2,3]. This can lead to cancelled clinical visits, insufficient clinical examination, and the potential complications from non-compliance with treatment [4]. Kumar et al. have advised warning patients of potential long-term damaging consequences of not using eye drops to improve compliance [2], however, it is important to recognise that many individuals avoiding eye drops are motivated by what are for most, perceived religious concerns. There is much confusion about this issue amongst Muslims as evidenced by the multitude of questions posed to scholars on on-line Q&A forums such as www.seekershub.com and www.islamqa.info. A strategy to improve eye drop compliance in Ramadan must therefore be based on a strong religious foundation.

While clinicians are not qualified to give religious advice, it is important that they are aware of pertinent religious and cultural factors that influence the choices that their patients make. We hope that clinicians can signpost patients to appropriate individuals or organisations of religious authority who are able to address their concerns. By clarifying the permissibility of eye drops in fasting according to the most widely observed Sunni and Shi'i legal schools as well as emphasising the clinical importance of the medication, we hope that patients can be better informed to make decisions about their treatment and improve compliance. A public-awareness programme to disseminate this information in areas with significant Muslim populations should involve public health, chaplaincy, and communications departments as well as engagement with imams in the local mosques and third-sector organisations.

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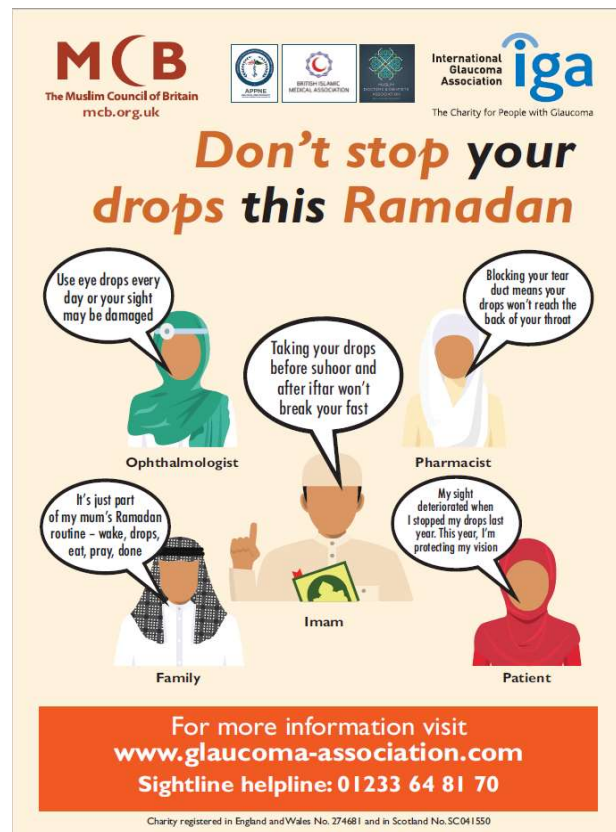
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Acknowledgements: Glaucoma UK; Muslim Council of Britain

Authorship Statement: The corresponding author attests that all listed authors meet authorship criteria and that no others meeting the criteria have been omitted.

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Figure 1: Examples of patient information posters used for the awareness campaign (note that the posters were produced in different languages, an example of one being given here).



Make eye drops part of
your Ramadan routine:



**“ Wake, drops,
eat, pray, done! ”**



**“ If in doubt, use your drops
before suhoor and after iftar. ”**

Imam



**“ Eye drops are not
considered food
or drink, so don't
break your fast. ”**

Patient



**“ Use eye drops
every day or
your sight may
be damaged. ”**

Ophthalmologist



**“ Blocking your tear
duct means the drops
won't reach the back
of your throat. ”**

Family

It's important to keep taking glaucoma eye drops throughout the month of Ramadan. Stopping for even a short period could cause permanent damage to your vision.

For more information, advice and handy tips, visit:
glaucoma.uk/ramadan

Glaucoma UK is the operating name of the International Glaucoma Association, a charity registered in England & Wales no. 274681, in Scotland no. SC041550