

The Healthcare Provider's Guide to Islamic Religious Practices





About CAIR

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is the largest American Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States. Its mission is to enhance understanding of Islam, protect civil rights, promote justice, and empower American Muslims. CAIR-California is the organization's largest and oldest chapter, with offices in the Greater Los Angeles Area, the Sacramento Valley, San Diego, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

According to demographers, Islam is the world's second largest faith, with more than 1.6 billion adherents worldwide. It is the fastest-growing religion in the U.S., with one of the most diverse and dynamic communities, representing a variety of ethnic backgrounds, languages, and nationalities. Muslims are adding a new factor in the increasingly diverse character of patients in the health care system. The information in this booklet is designed to assist health care providers in developing policies and procedures aimed at the delivery of culturally competent patient care and to serve as a guide for the accommodation of the sincerely-held religious beliefs of some Muslim patients. It is intended as a general outline of religious practices and beliefs; individual applications of these observances may vary.

Disclaimer: The materials contained herein are not intended to, and do not constitute legal advice. Readers should not act on the information provided without seeking professional legal counsel. Neither transmission nor receipt of these materials creates an attorney-client relationship between the author and the receiver. The information contained in this booklet is designed to educate healthcare providers about the sincerely-held and/or religiously mandated practices/beliefs of Muslim patients, which will assist providers in delivering culturally competent and effective patient care.

Glossary of Islamic Terms

Adhan (ad-HAN): Call to prayer

Allah (al-AH): Arabic word for God

Eid (EED): A major religious holiday

Halal (Hah-LAAL): Permissible by Islamic law

Hijab (Hee-JAAB): Clothing Muslim women wear in public; generally loose fitting and includes a head covering

Imam (ee-MAAM): Religious leader of a Muslim community

Janazah (jeh-NAA-sah): Funeral

Jum'ah (JOO-mah): Weekly congregational prayer on Fridays

Kufi (KOO-fee): Cap worn by some Muslim men

Qur'an(Qur-AAN): Islam's revealed scripture, sometimes spelled Koran

Ramadan (RAHM-a-daan): The month of fasting; period marked by abstaining from consumption of food and drink from sunrise to sunset and by increased prayer and charity

Tayammum (tey-UHM-mum): Ritual cleansing before prayer that does not require water

Wudu (WOO-doo): Ritual ablution or washing before daily prayer

Islamic View of Illness and Treatment

Muslims consider illness, like other life events, as a test from God, and often respond with patience and prayers. Death is seen as part of every human's ultimate journey to the next life. However, the Qur'an urges Muslims not to have a fatalistic attitude towards life. The Prophet Muhammad taught that maintaining a healthy body is an individual's duty, and he urged Muslims to seek treatment when it was needed. According to one saying of the Prophet, disease is part of fate, and so is its cure. Generally, Muslims understand the preservation of life to be the supreme objective of Sharia, or Islamic law. Caring for the weak and sick is a collective, societal responsibility, and providers of care are honored.

U.S. Legal Protections of Religious Rights

Prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, religious celebrations, dietary and clothing requirements are practices of Islam. They are considered *bona fide* religious beliefs, and those who practice them regard them as compulsory religious duties. These are protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which enshrines the freedom to practice one's religion. Federal and state laws prohibit discriminatory practices on the basis of sex, race, religion, and national origin.

Families or patients may wish to consult with religious leaders in their community when dealing with particular medical conditions. Imams will provide moral and spiritual support, based on the individual circumstances of the situation. Encouraging access to such counsel is invaluable to Muslim patients and families and should be considered a best practice for medical providers.



Daily Prayer

Islam urges “God consciousness” in each individual’s life. To that end, Islam prescribes that believers perform prayer five times each day. Each prayer takes five to ten minutes and is offered any time during the following periods, based on the position of the sun:

Fajr: Dawn, before sunrise

Zuhr: Midday, after the sun passes its highest point, until afternoon

Asr: Late afternoon until just before sunset

Magrib: Sunset until full darkness

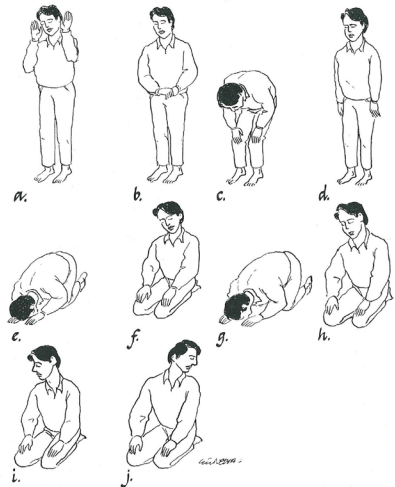
Isha: Darkness until midnight

The prayer itself includes specific recitations from the Qur'an and physical components of standing, bowing, and touching one's forehead to the ground - all performed while facing toward Mecca. Prayers are generally performed on a prayer rug or mat. During prayers, patients cannot respond to questions and will wait to respond until prayer is finished. Individuals with limited mobility may use a chair to complete some of the physical components of prayer. Patients who cannot stand or kneel may pray using head motions or eye motions in their beds. Also exempt are women immediately following childbirth and during menstruation. In the event of an emergency, Muslims will of course stop their prayer to respond.

In the United States, Mecca, located in Saudi Arabia, is in the general direction of northeast. Health care providers may assist a patient in finding Mecca with the use of a compass or smartphone app.

Hospitalized patients and individuals in nursing homes may ask to be alerted in order to fulfill this religious duty on time. Patients may choose to bring a prayer rug and/or a Qur'an to the hospital. As an expression of respect, caregivers should avoid stepping on the prayer rug or placing anything on top of the Qur'an and refrain from interrupting the worshiper during times of prayer.

Relatives and friends who visit patients at prayer times would appreciate if health care providers could inform them about the nearest chapel or other appropriate space where prayer can be offered. These spaces should be clean, quiet, and dry, and should preferably offer some privacy and, if possible, be free from images of people or religious icons. It should be large enough for Muslim worshipers to stand, bow, kneel, and touch their forehead to the ground.



Some facilities store religious icons, images, or texts in a separate location for the use of individuals at prayer; a local interfaith organization may be able to assist in providing such tools.

Ritual Washing

Before prayer, Muslims rinse their mouth and nose and wash their hands, face, arms and feet with water. This is called wudu, or ablution, and it is intended to physically cleanse the person before prayers are performed. It is performed in a restroom sink or other facility with running water and takes about two minutes.

In hospital settings, some patients may require assistance with washing. The procedure may also take longer according to mobility restraints. Patients with severely limited mobility may perform tayammum, or a symbolic ablution, if no one is available to assist. Tayammum can also apply to areas of the body that cannot come into contact with water for medical reasons, such as a cast or bandage.



Tayammum is a practice of using dry earth as a substitute for water in order to perform prayers. Acceptable substances are sand, a small rock, or anything else earth-related.



Jum'ah Prayer

Friday is the day for congregational prayer, or Jum'ah. It is customarily understood to be mandatory for men and highly encouraged for women to attend. Jum'ah lasts around one hour and takes place at the mosque during the midday prayer. The service is similar to a Sunday church service, with a khutbah, or sermon, delivered by the spiritual leader. After prayer is complete, the worshiper will return to work or home and complete the rest of the day. For exact timing of Friday prayer, contact a local mosque or Islamic center for details.

Sick persons are not required to attend congregational prayer. However, many Muslim patients may still wish to attend Jum'ah in order to benefit from the khutbah and to connect with their spiritual community. Seniors in nursing homes would benefit from assistance in traveling to the nearest mosque for Jum'ah prayers. Mosque administrators may be willing to help arrange for transportation and accommodation of people who are elderly or limited in mobility.

Islamic Holidays

Islamic holy days and festivals follow the lunar calendar. Like the solar calendar, the lunar calendar has twelve months. However, a lunar month, marked by the appearance of a new crescent moon in the horizon, may last only 29 days. A lunar year is about eleven days shorter than the solar year. This means that Islamic festivals occur about eleven days earlier each year, and that the dates for significant holidays will change with the Western calendar.



There are several days in the Islamic calendar with special religious significance, but the major celebrations common to all Muslims are the two Eid (holiday) days. The first Eid day is celebrated on the day after the month of Ramadan (the month of fasting) and is called Eid al-Fitr (translated as the Festival of the Breaking of the Fast). The

second is celebrated on the tenth day of the twelfth Islamic month and is called Eid al-Adha (Festival of the Sacrifice). Eid al-Adha coincides with the timing of the Hajj pilgrimage and is considered to be the holier of the two Eid holidays. Eid festivities include congregational prayer, gatherings with family and friends, and gifts and entertainment, especially for children. A typical greeting on these occasions is “Eid Mubarak,” or “blessed Eid.” Another acceptable greeting is “Happy Eid.”

Pronunciation Guide:

Eid al-Fitr:	EED ull-FITTr
Eid al-Adha:	EED ull-AHD-ha
Eid Mubarak:	EED moo-BAR-ak
Ramadan Mubarak:	rah-mah-DAN moo-BAR-ak

Eid days are major holidays devoted to spending time with family and community. Elective medical tests and other procedures should be scheduled around these holidays wherever possible. Hospital administrators may add Islamic holidays to their calendars. Because the occurrence of Eid depends on the sighting of the new moon, the exact date cannot be determined with certainty until a few days before the holiday. It may be beneficial to consult with local Islamic centers for the exact dates.

Ramadan Fasting

The month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, is the time when Muslims are required to fast. Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five “pillars” of Islam. The dates of this fast change each year, so the fast will eventually rotate throughout the full solar year. A common greeting during this month is “Ramadan Mubarak,” or “blessed Ramadan.”

The Five Pillars of Islam:

- 1. Shahada:** declaration of belief in God
 - 2. Salat:** daily prayers
 - 3. Zakat:** charity
 - 4. Sawm:** fasting during Ramadan
 - 5. Hajj:** pilgrimage to Mecca
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Ramadan is a period of self-restraint and a time to focus on moral conduct and one’s relationship with God. During this month, Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, and sexual activity from dawn until sunset. Other prohibited activities during Ramadan include negative speech about others, smoking, cursing, and other sinful behaviors. It is a time for personal reconnection with religion and spiritual growth as well as a way to empathize with those who are less fortunate and to appreciate what one has. Many Muslims use this time to increase their charity work, reading of the Qur’an, and generosity towards others. Each morning before sunrise, Muslims enjoy the pre-fast meal called suhoor. Fast is broken by a meal called iftar, which is often shared with family or community members.

Exemptions to fasting include menstruation, pregnancy, breastfeeding, travel, and severe illnesses. Generally, an illness exempts a person from fasting if the performance of the fast would worsen or exacerbate the illness or condition. If necessary, a sick person can defer fasting and make up the missed days during a later period. Fasting does not inhibit the provision of emergency medical care. In non-emergency situations, fasting Muslims will usually agree to medical testing but not to nutritional intravenous injections. Drops put in the eyes or ears can be administered, as can vital injections, blood tests, and medications absorbed through the skin.

Dietary Restrictions

The Qur'an prohibits consumption of alcohol, pork, and any pork by-products or derivatives. Therefore, practicing Muslims are careful about the food they consume and how it is prepared. Muslims follow certain standards, called halal, or permissible by Islamic law, in slaughter and preparation of meat and poultry. Halal food preparations are similar to Kosher preparations, although halal standards differ depending on individual preference.

Some objectionable food items include:

- Pork and pork by-products
- Pepperoni, sausage, and hot dogs containing pork
- Bacon, alone or in soups, quiche, etc.
- Animal shortening in breads, puddings, cookies, cakes, donuts, etc. (Vegetable shortening is acceptable)
- Gelatin in Jello, desserts, candies, marshmallows, chocolates, etc.
- Lard, in any product
- Blood and blood by-products
- Alcohol and food ingredients containing alcohol, such as vanilla extract and Dijon mustard, or sauces prepared with alcohol

Food items that do not contain the above ingredients are permissible.



Health care centers can order Muslims special meals from certified halal food providers. If this is not possible, patients must be given choices that meet Muslim dietary requirements such as vegetables, egg, milk, and fish. Some patients may object to the consumption of fish without scales such as catfish; however, most varieties of fish are considered halal by default and are generally consumed by most Muslims in place of meat options.

Physicians should avoid prescribing medical pills coated with pork-extracted gelatin. Many medications such as cough syrups often contain alcohol; if possible, alternatives to these medications should be provided. For example, the pediatric formulations of most cough syrups do not contain alcohol and can be given to adult patients once dosage is adjusted. In the event that no suitable alternative is available for medicines of porcine origin or medicines containing alcohol, the patient must be made aware of the medicine's origins and contents so they can make an informed decision.





Clothing and Dress

Islam prescribes that both men and women behave and dress modestly. Muslims believe that an emphasis on modesty encourages society to value individuals for their wisdom, skills and contribution to the community, rather than for physical attractiveness. There are a number of ways in which Muslims express such teachings, varying widely by culture and individual practices. Staff and administration should ensure that all caregivers respect the diversity of the Muslim community and the variations in how these practices are expressed.

When in public, some Muslim women wear loose-fitting, non-revealing clothing, known as hijab. This attire, which may vary in style, usually includes covering the hair, neck, and body. Depending on personal preference, some women also opt to completely cover their arms and legs, to wear long skirts rather than trousers or pants, or to wear loose-fitting robes such as abayas. Some Muslim women may wear a face veil, commonly referred to as niqab.

Terms for Women's Dress:

- Niqab (nee-KAHB):** a face covering that leaves open a slit for the eyes
- Abaya (ah-BUY-ah):** a long, loose fitting dress or gown with long sleeves; often black
- Burqa (BURR-kah):** a loose garment covering head to toe, with veiled slits for the eyes
- Chador (Cha-DOOR):** a large cloth wrapped around the head and upper body, leaving the face exposed
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Men and boys often choose to wear clothing that covers them from the navel to the knee. Also, some Muslim men wear a small head covering, called a kufi. Muslim men may choose to grow beards for religious reasons as well.



Doctors and nurses should not demand the removal of any piece of clothing unless absolutely necessary. Female patients may wish to maintain their head covering even in bed. Staff may hang a “please knock” sign on their door, so that if a male needs to enter the room, a knock can give the patient the opportunity to replace her scarf or other religious covering. In cases where disrobing is necessary, some patients may request that only providers or caregivers of the same gender be allowed in the room. Communicating between providers and patients is key here.

Hygiene

Islam places great emphasis on hygiene in both spiritual and physical terms. In addition to the ritual cleaning before prayer, Muslims also follow a number of other hygiene-related rules, including:

- Washing with water after urination or defecation
- Removal of armpit and pubic hair
- Keeping nostrils clean
- Keeping fingernails trimmed and cleaned

A small container to assist with washing can be placed near the toilet. For a bedbound patient, a beaker of water is suitable for washing after use of a bed pan.

Gender Relations and Physical Contact

Many adults past the age of puberty place certain limits on relations between members of different genders. For example, some Muslims prefer not to shake hands or hug people of different genders. In some cultures, prolonged eye contact between individuals of different genders is considered rude. This should not be taken as an insult, but instead regarded as a sign of personal modesty. Patients may require that they be treated only by a doctor, nurse, or caregiver of their same gender, particularly when physical contact is required during treatment.



Childbirth and Newborns

Following prophetic tradition, Muslim parents whisper the adhan, or call to prayer, into the right ear of a newly born baby. This ensures that the first words the infant hears are an invitation to follow God. Circumcision is required only of male babies and usually takes place within the first seven days of life, unless a medical reason requires the procedure to be postponed.

Some cultural traditions require the burial of the placenta after birth, as it is considered part of the human body and therefore sacred. If there are medical reasons for not providing the placenta to parents, these should be clearly explained.

Generally, other religious rituals for newborns may be delayed and are usually performed at home. For babies that require longer a longer stay in the hospital, communication with parents about required religious practices is important.



Death

The Muslim perspective on death and dying is that every person has an appointed term in life. Death is the end of the testing phase of earthly life, allowing one to move on to judgment and reward or punishment in the eternal life. The death of infants and children is regarded as a tremendous trial from God. Babies and children who die go straight to Heaven, where they pray for their parents through the remainder of their lives.

It is essential that family members be notified when a patient is dying. Families and close friends will wish during the last days of life to hold special prayers with the person. It is very common to hear constant recitation of the Qur'an from the patient and from their family and friends. In the event that the family cannot be present, a local imam may be consulted to counsel the patient.

When a Muslim dies, friends and family commonly repeat the phrase “Inna-li-llahi Wa-inna-ilahyi Raji’oon”, which means “from God we come and to God we return.”

Funerals

When a person dies, funeral planning and preparations for burial begin immediately. Burial is intended to take place on the same day or otherwise as soon as possible. Following the death, family members may wish for the face, or whole body, of their deceased to be turned towards Mecca. Family or community members must wash the body of the dead and cover him or her with a white cloth or sheet. If possible, the family may prefer that the body

be handled only by persons of the same gender. The imam or local Islamic organization should be contacted as soon as possible to begin preparations for the janaza, or funeral service. Cremation is not permitted, and embalming should not be performed unless required by law. Muslims do not use caskets in the burying process, so many communities have specific cemeteries in which Islamic funerals and burials are held.



Many patients have a provision in their wills or end-of-life directives that specify where they will be buried and who should handle their funeral and burial. Such requests should be accommodated wherever possible. Staff may ask about such a will and encourage patients to put these requests in writing where they do not already exist.

Autopsies

Islam discourages the performance of autopsies as they delay burial and are considered a disrespect to the dead. However, if required by law or in the performance of a criminal investigation, an autopsy is permissible. Similarly, in cases where the cause of death is in question, an autopsy may be performed. Some Muslims will allow for the donation of the body for medical research if respect for the body can be guaranteed.

Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia

Most Muslims are opposed to the practice of assisted suicide, as the Qur'an teaches that God is the ultimate giver and taker of life. Some Muslims differ on end of life decisions. Many might believe ending life in the face of a terminal illness is viewed as a killing, and so physicians should be mindful of these differences when speaking to the family of a loved one.

Abortions, Contraception, and Stillborns

Although Muslims may not approve of abortion, there is some variance in views on the use of contraception and when abortion is permissible. Religious authorities all agree that abortion is permissible if continuing the pregnancy threatens the mother's life or health. Some schools of thought permit abortion in the early stages of fetal development, particularly when the pregnancy is less than 120 days old.

Many Muslims are unopposed to the use of contraception specifically in the context of a marital relationship between husband and wife, particularly where the health of the mother or the well-being of the family is concerned. Permanent forms of contraception, however, are discouraged except where further pregnancy threatens the woman's health.

For many schools of thought, the death of a fetus past the age of 120 days is considered as the death of a viable baby. In the event of a miscarriage, intra-uterine death, or stillbirth of a fetus past 120 days, Muslim parents may wish to observe full funeral rites.

In cases dealing with abortion and the use of contraception, religious leaders consider each case carefully on an individual basis and will issue a ruling or conclusion based on the circumstances at hand. The most important thing for medical providers is to allow a family or individual to consult with a religious authority.

Other Medical Procedures

- Blood transfusions are permissible, particularly where recovery would be impossible without the transfusion. Some patients may prefer directed blood donations from relatives over anonymous ones, or prefer if possible to receive blood from a donor of the same gender.
- If a patient still has any possibility of an active, conscious life, withdrawal of life support is considered active euthanasia and is forbidden based on a religious leader's interpretation of individual circumstances. However, maintaining a terminal patient on life support for a prolonged period in a brain dead or persistent vegetative state is not encouraged.
- Transplantation is generally allowed after consultation with the patient and/or guardians so long as the transplant does not bring harm to the donor.
- Organ donation is permissible after death if specified in the will of the deceased.
- Artificial reproductive technology, such as surrogate pregnancy and embryo donation, is permitted between a husband and wife in an intact marriage. In the case of sperm donation, the donor must be the husband.
- In cases of organ or skin transplants, tissue of porcine origin is not permitted.
- Cosmetic surgery is considered permissible for reconstruction or for health reasons but is not encouraged for purely beautification purposes.

Perspectives on Mental Health

A person diagnosed as having a cognitive dysfunction such as a severe mental illness or intellectual disability is absolved from all obligatory requirements in Islam. For example, they are not required to say daily prayers, fast, or perform the pilgrimage. Persons with mental illnesses are considered to be God's children, deserving of special considerations and care.

For providers of mental health services, it is important to understand the particular religious practices of a Muslim patient. For example, the repetitive movements of daily prayer are not a sign of compulsive behavior but are rather part of the prayer ritual itself. Fasting during Ramadan is not necessarily a sign of disordered eating. Mental health providers are encouraged to connect with a local imam or Muslim organization for assistance in serving Muslim patients.



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