

# NUTRITION FOR CHILDREN DURING THE MONTH OF RAMADAN



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NUTRITION



# SALAAM ALAIKUM.

My name is Anar Allidina and I am a Registered Dietitian and Certified Diabetes Educator. I work with people to help them achieve healthier lives by making sustainable diet changes – whether their goal is weight loss, increased energy or managing a health condition. Eating healthy does not need to be expensive, boring and tasteless. My goal is to empower people to incorporate healthy eating into their lifestyle. I help people understand how powerful our diet choices are to overall health and wellbeing.

As a mom of 3 kids, I know how hard it is to make sure your children are eating well and

getting the nutrients they need to grow and thrive. The motivation behind this resource is when my daughter started fasting last year. I want to share with other parents how to safely prepare your children to fast during the holy month of Ramadan. My goal is to highlight the key nutrients children should include for a safe, energized and nourished month of fasting. In this resource, you will find foods to include for your children during the month of Ramadan to maximize nutrient intake. Additionally, you will find tips and answers to common concerns parents have, along with some easy and healthy recipes that your children will enjoy!

I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY SINCEREST GRATITUDE TO SR. TAHERA KASSAMALI AND DR. FATIMA R KAMALIA MD, FRCP(C), FAAP FOR PROVIDING THEIR EXPERTISE, RESOURCES, AND GUIDANCE ON COMPILING THIS RESOURCE.







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# PREPARING FOR RAMADAN

FOR YOU AND YOUR CHILD



*The month of Ramadan is the one in which the Quran was sent down as a source of guidance for mankind.*

The Holy Quran 2:185

## START SLOWLY

Before your child becomes of age (baligh), have your child start by doing a half fast. The half fast should be flexible and you and your child can decide how to structure it. Examples include delaying breakfast as long as the child is willing and able. Waking up for Suhoor can also be an option during half fasts. Or perhaps your child may have breakfast and delay eating or drinking again until lunch. It would be best to try a half fast on weekends so you can monitor your child's energy levels. This will help children understand what fasting feels like and give them the courage to prolong their fast each time they try. It doesn't matter how long the child fasts – they should always be encouraged to build their confidence.

# CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Fasting teaches us so much more than just staying away from food and drink. Fasting instills discipline, self-awareness, and gratefulness – qualities that are so crucial to have in our daily lives. Having our children embrace these qualities at a young age will benefit them as they grow into adulthood.

## DON'T COMPARE

Your kids may tell you about their friends who are fasting or perhaps you have close friends and family members whose children are already fasting. Resist the urge to compare. Allah has guided us and laid out specific age requirements for each gender. If you receive questions such as “How many fasts has your child kept?” be honest and don’t feel bad if your child hasn’t yet fasted. Please remember there is no obligation for children to fast a full fast if they are not yet of age (baligh).

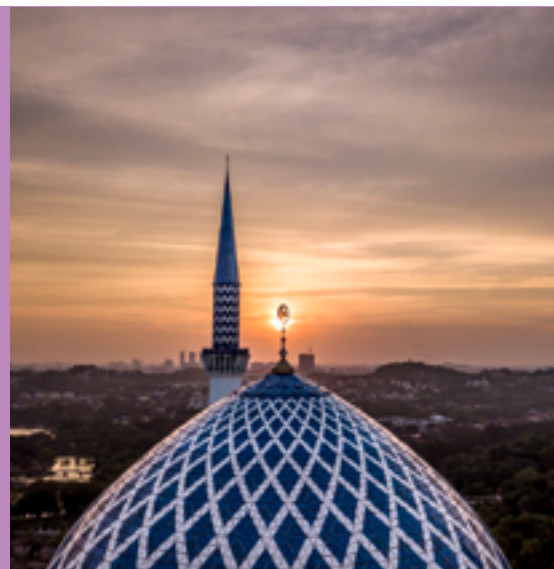
## MY CHILD DOES NOT WANT TO FAST

Perhaps your child has reached the age they need to start fasting and they don’t want to. As parents, we need to guide our children and not give up. A positive mindset is key. The holy month of Ramadan should be full of pleasant memories and it is important to start building these memories and experiences at a young age. Make an effort to take your kids to the mosque during this month so they can meet their friends and members of the community. Attend and host Iftaars. Have your kids invite their friends so they can break fast together. There are so many great books and activities surrounding the month of Ramadan. My kids love the [Ramadan advent calendar](#), which is a countdown calendar designed to help children learn about the month of Ramadan. Host an Eid gift exchange, decorate your home - make the month of Ramadan fun and exciting! If needed, speak to other parents or with spiritual leaders of the community to guide you if you are having a hard time getting your children to fast.



## SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Even if your child is too young or is not fasting for the entire month they can still learn and appreciate this beautiful month by going to the mosque, giving to charity and reciting Quran.



## PLAN AHEAD

Before the month of fasting begins, set some ground rules for your kids to help make sure everyone is on the same page. Some examples include: having at least 1 fruit and vegetable when they break fast, waking up for suhoor, taking a nap after school, drinking water and staying hydrated during non-fasting times and cutting back on sports and physical activities during the month of fasting.



## INVOLVEMENT WITH MEALS

Get your kids excited about Iftaar and Suhoor by having them tell you what they would like to eat. If possible, host an Iftaar and have your children hand out dates and water. The more involved kids are during the two important meals in Ramadan, the more understanding and appreciation they will have.



# COMMON CONCERNS

FOR PARENTS

*“Allah never burdens a soul beyond what it can bear.”*

The Holy Quran 2:286



## SPORTS AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Cutting back on extracurricular activities during the month of Ramadan is a good idea to help children preserve energy especially during the long days of fasting – see how your child feels and adjust accordingly. Talk to your child’s teacher at school to let them know your child is fasting. If needed, ask that your child be excused from gym class as well as to stay indoors for recess if the weather is very warm.

Physical activity is important and it is not necessary to be cut out completely during the month of Ramadan – just scale it back.



## SUPPLEMENTS

Eating balanced meals during the month of Ramadan is essential for children, as it will provide them with the nutrition they need while fasting. However, there are two nutrients, which are difficult to get through food alone. These are Vitamin D and Omega-3 fatty acids. It is advisable to supplement these nutrients during this month. **Vitamin D** helps with calcium absorption and it aids in building strong bones and healthy teeth. Furthermore, it also helps in regulating the immune system and for adequate cell growth. It is recommended to supplement between 600- 1000 IU of vitamin D3 daily for children. Vitamin D3 can be found in a pill or oil form at your local pharmacy. **Omega-3 fatty acids** are needed for brain, nerve and eye development and help fight inflammation. Omega-3 fatty acids are found primarily in cold-water fish such as salmon, arctic char and mackerel and sardines. A supplement that provides at least 500 mg of both DHA and EPA is recommended daily for children. One of my favorite brands is by [NutraSea](#) – it is a quality fish oil and third-party tested.



## WEIGHT LOSS

Losing a few pounds during the month of Ramadan is normal since your child's total caloric intake will be decreased. If, however, your child loses more than 10% of their body weight, or has particularly low energy, vomiting, significant mood swings or behaviour alterations it is advisable to consult your child's doctor immediately. Islam allows children to take a break from fasting if they are having unbearable difficulty.



# KEY NUTRIENTS

## CHILDREN NEED WHILE FASTING



***“And Allah is the Best of Providers”***

The Holy Quran 62:11

**#1 RULE**  
ENJOY A WHOLESOME MEAL  
THAT WILL NOURISH AND  
PROVIDE THE NUTRIENTS  
NEEDED TO FAST DURING  
RAMADAN.

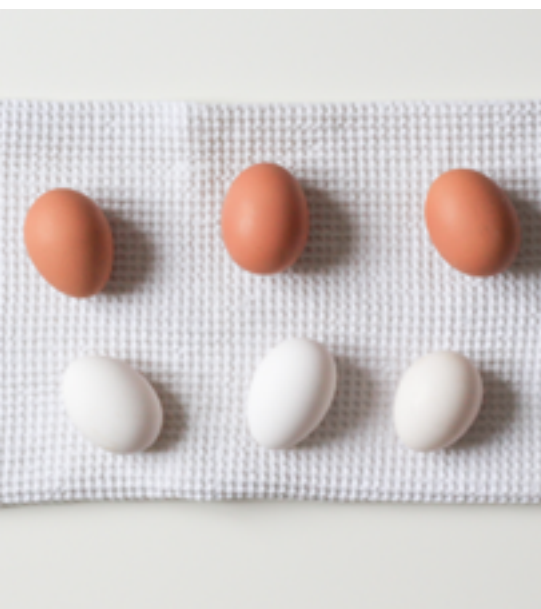
When it comes to fasting, children are incredibly resilient and not as fragile as we think. If your child is not feeling well, trust them to tell you and give them the opportunity to lead the way when they start fasting. As parents, our job is to educate, guide and trust our children to make decisions on how they feel. During Ramadan, kids will have all sorts of cravings during the day; allow them to indulge after Maghrib! That said, establish some ground rules with the #1 rule: Enjoy a wholesome meal that will nourish and provide the nutrients needed to fast during Ramadan.

## EAT SMALL FREQUENT MEALS

In place of a big dinner at iftaar, focus on getting small frequent meals in. This way your child will not get full too quickly, which can lead to being lethargic. Break Iftaar up so your child eats something, then performs their prayers before coming back to eat again. Frequent eating will help enhance their caloric intake.

## HYDRATION

Keeping your child hydrated during Iftar and Suhoor is incredibly important. Stay clear of tea and energy drinks and have your child drink water, coconut water or milk. Avoid juices and pop, as this is a concentrated amount of sugar and void of nutrients that will just spike blood sugars. Fill up a water bottle and encourage your child to sip throughout the evening. At Suhoor, make sure they have a glass of water before they eat and again after they eat.



## PROTEIN

Our body uses protein to build and repair tissues. Protein is also needed to make enzymes and hormones. Protein is an important building block for muscles, cartilage, skin, and blood. **Protein is a macronutrient – and unlike fat and carbohydrates, the body does not store protein for subsequent use.** This is why it is crucial to include a protein source at Iftar and Suhoor, examples include chicken, fish, beef, lamb, lentils, tofu, eggs, nuts, and seeds.

## LOW GLYCEMIC CARBOHYDRATES (COMPLEX CARBS)

When we are fasting, we need to optimize the food we eat. We need to think of food as sustenance as much as possible. **Fueling your family with low glycemic foods will ensure steady blood sugar that will directly impact energy levels.** Steady blood sugar means we don't experience the highs and lows of blood sugar spikes. Eating foods with a quick energy release can cause feelings of fatigue, hunger, and irritation. Processed foods and foods with refined sugar cause a spike in your blood sugar since they release glucose very quickly into the bloodstream. As a result, blood sugar spikes rapidly, but it also quickly crashes back down. High glycemic foods include white bread, rice cakes, most crackers, bagels, cakes, doughnuts, croissants, and most packaged breakfast cereals. Low glycemic foods release glucose SLOWLY into the bloodstream. Examples of low glycemic foods include vegetables, legumes, some fruits (berries, apples, pears, and oranges), whole grains, nuts, and seeds.



FUELING YOUR FAMILY WITH LOW GLYCEMIC FOODS  
WILL ENSURE STEADY BLOOD SUGAR THAT WILL  
DIRECTLY IMPACT ENERGY LEVELS.



## HEALTHY FAT

Fat is a macronutrient, and like protein and carbohydrates, is needed for energy, vitamin absorption, and for protecting the heart and other organs including the brain. **The digestion of fat is very favourable when we are fasting since fat slows digestion, increases fullness and decreases appetite.** Making sure we have the right types of fat is key. “Unhealthy” fats, such as artificial trans fats and saturated fats are found in fried foods, potato chips, processed meats, frozen pizzas, cookies, and crackers. These fats can lead to weight gain and heart disease. The “healthy” fats such as monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and omega-3s have a favourable effect on our body and can improve our lipid profile. Healthy fats play a huge role in managing moods, mental acuity, fighting fatigue, and controlling weight. Healthy fats are found in nuts, seeds, and nut butter, legumes, avocados, olives, olive oil, salmon, trout and eggs.

## FIBRE

Dietary fibre is a type of carbohydrate that cannot be digested. The benefits of fibre are widespread but it is **particularly important to get enough fibre when we fast since it helps in keeping us full for a long time. High-fibre foods not only provide volume but also take longer to digest, making you feel full for longer.** Fibre delays stomach emptying and slows the passage of food through your intestines.

Fibre-rich foods add to stool bulk and reduce the time needed for waste to pass through the digestive system. To prevent constipation in children during Ramadan, make sure your child is adequately hydrated and is consuming fibre. Fibre is found in fruits, veggies, whole grains, legumes and nuts/seeds.





# SUHOOR IDEAS

The early morning meal should not be skipped - especially for kids! Make sure your child eats at this meal so they have the energy for the long day ahead. Here are some great nutrient dense and delicious foods to offer your children during the month of Ramadan.



## OATMEAL

Opt for steel cut oats in place of quick oats or rolled oats. The benefits of steel cut oats are superior to rolled oats, quick oats, and old fashioned oats because of the way they are processed. Steel cut oats are dense and chewy since they are put through sharp, steel blades that cut them into thin slices. This process helps retain more fibre and protein compared to rolled oats and quick oats. Having said this, steel cut oats do take longer to cook. If you have an Instant pot – steel cut oats can cook up very fast. If not, you can always prepare a big batch the night before to last for a few days. Top with some fresh fruit and chia seeds or hemp hearts or add 1 tbsp. of your favorite nut and seed butter for some additional creaminess. Add some cinnamon, vanilla and a touch of maple syrup for sweetness.



## EGGS

A popular breakfast staple, eggs are loaded with great nutrition. One large egg has about 6 grams of protein and 5 grams of fat, (1.5 grams of saturated fat). Eggs are a great source of iron, vitamins, minerals, and carotenoids. Eggs are delicious and super easy to cook up. You can make an omelet and add in veggies or have them hard-boiled, scrambled or over easy – the options are endless!

”HAVE SUHOOR EVEN IF IT IS A SIP OF WATER. FOR SURELY THE BLESSINGS OF ALLAH ARE ON THOSE WHO DO SUHOOR”.

- PROPHET MOHAMMED (PBUH)



## BREAD

For wholesome bread, opt for one that is organic and sprouted. The way bread is made today is very different than how it was made 50 years ago. Conventional bread has added sugar and sodium and other additives to help prolong the shelf life. Sprouted-grain bread is made from wheat kernels that have been sprouted, grounded and baked into bread - this process retains more of the nutrients. Sprouted grains are also easier to digest. The sprouting process almost pre-digests the starches for you by breaking them down into simple sugars. Sprouted grains contain less gluten, which is a bonus for those who are gluten- sensitive. A brand that my kids enjoy is by [Silver Hills](#), which can be found at Costco.

## NUT BUTTER

All natural nut and seed butter are fantastic since they pack in lots of good nutrition in a small amount. Add a tbsp into your oatmeal for some extra creaminess or spread on toast. If there is a nut allergy in your family try seed butter such as pumpkin or sunflower seed. A great way to enjoy nut and seed butter is to spread on whole grain toast and top with sliced bananas and a sprinkle of chia seeds. Choose all-natural nut butter as opposed to a processed one since all-natural nut butter have no added sugar, salt, and additives.



## YOGURT & GRANOLA

A good rule to follow when choosing yogurt is to find one that has more protein than sugar grams. This usually means that you would need to stick to a plain Greek or Icelandic ([Skr](#)) yogurt and sweeten yourself with some honey or fruit. Greek yogurt is high in protein since it takes twice as much milk to make yielding a thicker richer product. Opt for a yogurt at has at least 2% milk fat. Granola is often high in sugar so choose one that has less than 7 grams of sugar per serving. Or better yet make your own!



## RECIPE

# GRANOLA

3 cups rolled oats  
¼ cup pumpkin seeds  
¼ cup sliced almonds (or sunflower seeds for nut free)  
¼ cup unsweetened coconut flakes  
2 tbsp chia seeds  
2 tbsp hemp hearts  
⅓ cup maple syrup  
⅓ cup coconut oil  
1 tbsp cinnamon  
2 tsp vanilla  
½ cup dried fruit of your choice such as cranberries or blueberries (optional)

Preheat your oven to 300 F and line a baking tray with parchment paper. In a medium sized bowl combine the oats, nuts seeds, coconut flakes and mix well. Add the cinnamon to the dry ingredients and mix well. In a small saucepan melt the coconut oil and maple syrup over medium heat until combined. Add the vanilla to the wet ingredients and stir gently. Pour the maple syrup mixture over the dry ingredients and mix until everything is well coated. Spread the granola out onto the baking tray and pop it in the oven for 30 minutes, stirring every 10 minutes. Remove the granola from the oven when it starts to become golden. Add any dried fruit and mix gently then press the granola into the tray and leave it to cool. Once cooled break up the granola into little chunks and clusters. Store in an airtight container in the pantry.



## WHOLE GRAIN WAFFLES & PANCAKES

To boost nutrition you can always replace white flour with whole grain, almond or oat flour, this way you will be getting more nutrients such as fibre. Feel free to add some hemp or chia seeds as well. A quick ready-made healthy waffle that you can buy at the store is [Nature's Path Cinnamon Waffles](#). Here is a simple and healthy pancake recipe to try.

### RECIPE

## BANANA OAT PANCAKES

2 ripe bananas  
2 eggs  
1 cup oats  
½ tsp baking powder  
2 tsp chia seeds  
Splash of milk of your choice

In a blender, combine the peeled banana, eggs, oats, baking powder, chia seeds and a splash of milk. Blend until the mixture is smooth add a splash of milk to thin out the batter. Heat a non-stick frying pan over medium heat. Pan fry spoonful of the batter until golden brown on both sides. Serve with a drizzle of maple syrup and fresh fruit!



THE EARLY MORNING MEAL SHOULD NOT BE  
SKIPPED - ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS!

Below are specific foods (and recipes)  
to provide children so they can maximize their nutrition  
intake during the month of Ramadan.

# IFTAAR IDEAS



# SMOOTHIES

A fantastic way to get a variety of nutrients in an easy and convenient way. The smoothie doesn't have to be a large amount, 4-6 ounces is a good portion. Make a smoothie and have your child sip on it throughout the evening. Smoothies will provide adequate hydration especially if **Coconut water** is used. Coconut water is a refreshing beverage filled with electrolytes such as potassium and sodium— just be careful and choose coconut water that has the lowest sugar grams per serving. Smoothies are a useful way to get in fruits and veggies as well (either fresh or frozen). Cauliflower is a great vegetable to add in because it is very mild and doesn't add to the colour of the smoothie. You can also add in ½ cup of **Kefir** - a fermented drink traditionally made by using cow or goat's

milk - non-dairy versions are also available. Kefir is high in nutrients and probiotics and is greatly beneficial for digestion and gut health. Another way to boost nutrition in a smoothie is to add **Hemp hearts**. These seeds pack in the most protein compared to any other seed and have fewer carbohydrates compared to flax and chia seeds. They are great sprinkled on foods (oatmeal, salads, toast) and a great alternative to protein powder in smoothies since they are a whole food. Hemp hearts also contain magnesium, fibre, iron, zinc, and phosphorus; they are super convenient to add and contain an incredible nutrient profile with a slightly nutty taste. This month of Ramadan, make a smoothie for the whole family - it's a delicious and efficient way to pack in tons of nutrients!

## RECIPE

# MANGO KEFIR SMOOTHIE

- ½ cup mango chunks
- ¼ cup cauliflower
- ½ cup kefir
- ¼ cup coconut water
- 1 tbsp hemp hearts

Blend everything in a powerful blender until everything is combined and smooth. You may need to add more water to reach desired consistency. Serves 2-3.





## SOUPS

It's a good idea to have something warm and nourishing when breaking your fast. Soups are such a great way to get in vegetables, protein, and water. Again, a small bowl will do. Pureed soups or water-based soups are your best bet. Adding lentils and legumes are a fantastic way to get in protein and fibre. Try this delicious minestrone soup – feel free to swap the pasta for barley!



### RECIPE

## VEGETABLE MINSTRONE SOUP

1 tbsp of olive oil  
1 small onion  
3 carrots, chopped  
3 stalks celery, chopped  
2 nuggets of frozen spinach  
3 cloves of minced garlic  
2 large tomatoes pureed  
1 carton of no sodium vegetable broth

½ tsp dried basil  
½ tsp of oregano  
black pepper  
½ tsp of salt  
1 can of mixed beans; 19 oz.  
½ cup of whole grain short pasta  
2 cups of water

Sauté onion in 1 tbsp of olive oil, add garlic, dried herbs and salt then add the rest of the veggies. Sauté for a few minutes until veggies are tender. Add Vegetable broth and let cook for 5-10 minutes. Add pasta and 2 cups of water, simmer for 15 minutes until pasta is cooked through and turn off the stove.





## PASTA

A great way to boost nutrients to any pasta dish is to add some pureed vegetables. This is a perfect trick if you have kids that don't like vegetables and who pick them out. One vegetable that is always a winner is pureed cauliflower – it takes the flavor and colour of whatever you are mixing into. Steam some cauliflower florets and purée with some water and a little butter. Start with ½ cup and add more if you would like. It's perfect to add to macaroni and cheese for a nutrition boost as well as in soups and smoothies!

### RECIPE

## LENTIL RICE

¼ cup split yellow mung daal \*  
1 cup basmati rice \*\*  
1 tsp Ghee  
pinch of salt

Boil 2 cups of water in a large pot on the stove. Add 1 cup of basmati rice and ¼ cup of drained split mung daal. Let rice and mung cook - once rice and mung daal have cooked. Turn stove on low heat and cover lentil rice for a few minutes. Turn stove off and add 1 tsp ghee and a pinch of salt and enjoy!

\*Soak for a few hours to soften and speed up cooking time

\*\*Cook 1 cup rice with 2 cups of water



MAXIMIZE YOUR CHILD'S NUTRITION INTAKE  
DURING THE MONTH OF RAMADAN.

# BURGERS

An easy way to boost the nutrition in hamburgers is to add some oats! Adding oats to ground beef or chicken makes for a lower-calorie dish with less saturated fat per serving. Rolled oats are a complex carbohydrate and high in fibre and low in calories. Not only does adding oats boost the nutrition but it adds volume to the meat - making it budget friendly! Use ½ cup of oats to 1 lb. of meat.



## RECIPE

# CHICKEN BURGERS

- 1 lb ground chicken
- 3 tbsp of minced onion
- 3 cloves of minced garlic
- 1 tbsp of Montreal steak seasoning
- 2 tsp of Worcestershire sauce
- 1 egg beaten
- ½ cup of rolled oats

Combine all ingredients together and make into patties. Pan fry in a skillet for a few minutes each side until chicken is cooked through. Serve on hamburger buns or lettuce wraps. Yields about 6- 8 patties.

# FRUIT & NUT BARS

A great alternative to a granola bar! Filled with wholesome goodness from chia seeds, hemp hearts, nuts, seeds, and dried fruit including dates. This is great for the whole family to enjoy. **Chia seeds** - these tiny seeds pack in tons of great nutrition from fibre, protein, omega 3 and calcium. Chia seeds are tasteless and a great addition to meals to boost nutrition. Packed with fibre, protein and a healthy dose of heart-healthy fats. To make these bars nut free, omit the nuts and add sunflower seeds instead.

## RECIPE

# FRUIT & NUT BARS

- 1 cup raw almonds
- 1 cup unsalted pumpkin seeds
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup of dried cranberries
- 1 cup of pitted dates
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of hemp hearts
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of chia seeds

In a food processor, add the almonds until they combine into a ball (about 4 minutes.) Then add the remaining ingredients until everything comes together and is smooth. Spread mixture into a rectangular dish, cover and place in the fridge for a few hours or you can freeze it for an hour. Once bars have set, cut and enjoy! Keep in fridge for up to 2 weeks.



CHIA SEEDS ARE TASTELESS & A GREAT ADDITION TO MEALS TO BOOST NUTRITION. THESE TINY SEEDS PACK IN TONS OF GREAT NUTRITION FROM FIBRE, PROTEIN, OMEGA 3 & CALCIUM.



## BAKED GOODS

Adding fruits and vegetables to baked goods is not only a great way to add nutrition but it adds tenderness; sweetness and moisture to baked goods without sacrificing flavor and taste! Adding fruits and vegetables to your baked goods will add fibre, protein and additional nutrients.



### RECIPE

## APPLE CARROT SPICED MUFFINS

1 cup whole-wheat pastry flour  
1 cup oatmeal  
1 tsp cinnamon  
½ baking soda  
½ tsp salt  
½ tsp baking powder  
¼ cup chia powder

¼ cup plain Greek yogurt  
½ cup melted butter or coconut oil  
1/3 cup maple syrup  
1 large egg beaten  
½ apple finely shredded with skin  
1 carrot finely shredded

Mix the first 7 dry ingredients in a bowl (whole wheat flour, oatmeal, cinnamon, baking soda, salt, baking powder, chia powder). In a separate bowl combine the yogurt, coconut oil, maple syrup, egg, apple, and carrots ingredients. Add the dry ingredients to the wet slowly and mix just until combined. Scoop batter into muffin tins and sprinkle some oats on top. Bake at 375 F for 15-18 minutes and enjoy!

To make chia powder, all you need to do is pour the seeds into a coffee grinder, powerful blender or food processor. Pulse the seeds until they're finely ground and store the chia flour in an airtight container.



I WISH YOU AND YOUR FAMILY A  
HEALTHY AND SPIRITUAL UPLIFTING  
MONTH OF RAMADAN.

If you have any questions please reach out  
to me [here](#).

Yours in health,

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*Ramadan  
Kareem*

