



Nutrition During Ramadan

By Barbara Wakeen, MA, RD, LD

Does nutrition take precedence over the Fast?

Although the season of Ramadan is past, I felt compelled to write about the current practices of providing meals to those inmates observing Ramadan by fasting. I have received queries in relation to Ramadan, addressing items such as meal times and the number of meals served.

I solicited input from the corrections dietitians and other corrections foodservice specialists with regard to nutrition during Ramadan. This resulted in 17 total responses from nine prison systems and eight jail/county systems. Results were categorized into three methods:

1. Sack meal served in addition to breakfast and dinner.
2. Enhanced breakfast and/or dinner meals.
3. Breakfast and dinner only, with no replacement for lunch and no meal enhancements.

Seven respondents provide an additional sack meal to replace lunch. The rationales for this included: must meet nutritional requirements, legal requirements, state requirements to provide three meals and to keep peace in the facility. One respondent indicated that, per the Imam, the time after sunset is a time of feasting.

Six respondents provide only breakfast and dinner without a replacement for the lunch meal. Some rationales included: facility procedure and "it's a 'fast.'" Some of these respondents identified the calories they provided with only the two meals. The range was approximately 1800-2200, which reflects common caloric levels for medical diets. At least one of these agencies is ACA accredited.

Four respondents indicated that two enhanced meals were served. In some cases, the meals were the regular menu with modifications, such as one and one half servings of all food items or a double entrée at dinner. One agency serves two enhanced sack meals to ensure sufficient calories. Within this agency, facilities may have the option to serve a hot meal when possible. One respondent commented that inmates complain they are being starved otherwise.

Other comments from respondents:

- Inmates have the option to get a sack meal at lunch and consume it later.

- Option to serve hot or bag meals.
- Per the Imam, extra food is considered insulting and contradicts the principle of the religious observance.
- Provides one date to break the fast.
- Provides three dates and half pint milk to break 'fast.'
- Number of participants declines toward the end of Ramadan.
- Those with medical conditions and diabetes are not encouraged to fast.
- Even though it is a time of fast, Muslims don't necessarily reduce their overall caloric intake.

In summary, procedures for Ramadan vary across the continent based on mandates of the governing agencies and with guidance from respective Imams. Although all agencies honor Ramadan, nutrition during the religious fast seems to be governmentally influenced more so than by religious standards. Just as the agencies have differing mandates, note the perspective of the Imams also varies. Although these mandates exist to provide replacement for main population menus that range approximately from 2800 - 3200 calories, the calorie levels served in those institutions where only the regular breakfast and dinner meals are served, are comparable to those consumed daily by most of us in the free world.

Other News and Meetings

The CD-HCF Corrections Sub-Unit met at FNCE in San Antonio. There were more than 17 in attendance. Items discussed included ways to increase membership in both CD-HCF and ACFSA; the Correctional Food Service and Nutrition Manual revision (this will be available for the ACFSA Spring Conference) and the new ACA Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions.

Can We Help You?

As always, we welcome your questions and input on topics that are of interest to you as ACFSA members. If you would like to submit articles, questions or any other communication, please contact me at (330)-499-0809, by email at bwakeen@neo.rr.com or visit the ACFSA web site at www.ACFSA.org or the CD-HCF Corrections Sub-unit web site at www.CDHCF.org.