

Exploring the Muslim Culture

Background

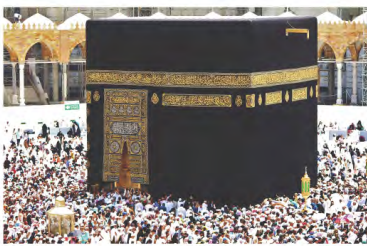


The term Muslim, or a person who practices Islam, embraces various peoples and societies spread over many countries. Islam began in what is now present-day Saudi Arabia, is a monotheistic faith and the second-largest religion in the world. Muslims believe the Prophet Muhammad received a holy text, the Quran/Koran, through an angel. Islam means peace or submission to God. Islam respects other prophets and faiths, such as Christianity and Judaism, and mosques are Islamic places of worship.

Traditions and Customs

Islamic practices provide guidance of various aspects of life, including prayers, greetings, and clothing, and dietary practices such as Halal, Ramadan, and other holidays.

As acts of worship, it is recommended that Muslims pray five times a day with congregational prayer on Fridays. They are preceded by ablution (washing their body) and cleanliness. There are also special prayers for other occasions such as holidays and many travel for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia.



Holidays and Celebrations

Ramadan is a one-month holiday in the Muslim lunar calendar. The Rules of Ramadan require Muslims to abstain from eating any food, drinking liquids, smoking cigarettes, and taking medications from dawn until sunset. This is followed by a three-day holiday of feasting, called Eid Al-Fitr. During Ramadan, they consume a pre-dawn meal. There are flexibilities for those who are pregnant and lactating, experiencing menstruation, and during the postpartum period. Also, this does not apply to infants and children.

Physical Practices

Muslims practice modesty. Women wear headscarves called hijabs, some wear face coverings called Niqabs, and men wear kufi hats. They maintain distance and space.

Muslims may avoid shaking hands or direct eye contact. They may not want appointments during holidays or on Fridays. Muslim women may remove their facial covering in private offices and prefer a private space for breast or chestfeeding.



Special Food Practices

Muslims practice handwashing, avoid gluttony, and eat slowly while seated. They avoid Haram or forbidden foods, including:

- Pork or pork products, including gelatin.
- Alcoholic beverages or products containing them, including vanilla extract.
- Animal meats not slaughtered according to Islamic practices.

The Islamic recommendation for breastfeeding or chestfeeding duration is two years. Middle Eastern and North African foods include basmati/long-grain rice, refined grains, pita bread, bulgar, couscous, legumes, a variety of vegetables, olive oil, and sesame oil. Sources of protein often include lamb, goat, seafood, and legumes. Parsley, cilantro, zaatar, saffron, turmeric, and cumin are commonly used herbs and spices. Olives and olive oil are fermented products. North African cuisine resembles Middle Eastern food patterns as stews are common, and tagines (pictured to the side) are popular dishes.



Considerations for WIC Educators and Counselors

- WIC educators and counselors can learn the basic principles of Halal and how it differs from Kosher.
- Some WIC-approved products are not Halal, including Nutramigen, Progestimil, Alimentum, and infant meats.
- Meals may be consumed at low tables with cushioned seating, while some prefer floor seating and eating with their hands.
- During Ramadan, Muslims can be encouraged to hydrate, avoid overeating calorie-dense foods after sundown, consume nutrient-dense foods, and limit sodium.
- If a pregnant client wants to fast, encourage them to speak with their health care provider and Islamic leader.
- A hookah, or water pipe is a common social activity among Middle Eastern people. It uses tobacco products and releases harmful smoke.



References

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