A Support Worker’s Guide

A person from any background is a product of not just his or her culture but also upbringing, life experiences, and personality. This is as relevant for a Muslim as it is for any other person.

Be aware that cultural differences exist, even within the same family.

Avoid stereotyping or making generalisations about an individual based on what is known about a group.

Remember that there may be various interpretations of religious teachings and different levels of observance.

Be respectful and do not be afraid to ask about what the care recipient needs. Ask them and/or their families about the specifics of care relevant to their faith and culture and share this information with relevant people so that services can be designed and delivered appropriately.

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Prayer

Prayers are fixed sets of standing, bowings, prostrations, and sittings which are combined with recitation from the Qur’an and hence, spoken in Arabic.

Prayer times vary with the location and the sun’s position and there is a time range within which the prayer can be made.

Prayer times are available from local mosques.

Remember:

• A Muslim who is praying prefers a quiet environment to fully concentrate on their prayers.
• No one should cross in front of someone during prayer.
• A Muslim who is praying must not be interrupted; schedule care activities to avoid interruptions during prayers.
• The Qur’an, the sacred religious text of Muslims, must be treated with respect. It must be kept high above the ground in a clean place and it should not be touched by anyone who is ritually unclean. Nothing can be placed on top of the Qur’an.

Halal

It is a spiritual responsibility of Muslims to take care of body and mind and eat good things, so they follow strict dietary laws that have their roots in the Qur’an.

Food that is permitted is called Halal, while food that is forbidden is called Haram. Any food made with non-halal products/ingredients should always be avoided.

Haram food includes:

• Pork and any products or by-products such as sausage, salami, gelatine
• Animals and birds not slaughtered according to strictly prescribed rules
• Birds of prey
• Injured or dead animals or birds
• Blood
• Alcohol or intoxicating substances
• Food offered or sacrificed to idols

Halal products certified by designated Muslim organisations give Muslim consumers the confidence that the product is allowed. Meat such as beef, chicken, and lamb purchased from a supermarket will not be acceptable without this seal.

Halal products are available in all major metropolitan areas in Australia. If not, Muslims can be given a choice of fish, vegetables, or eggs.

Medicines that contain any alcohol or pork derivatives or are from non-halal origin (for example gelatine capsules) must be avoided unless there is no alternative. If this occurs, patients must be given the information and allowed to make an informed choice.

It is important to note that, Islam allows the use of medications that may include haram ingredients only in cases of absolute necessity when no other substitute is available – for preserving or enhancing life – but only as long as the necessity lasts.
Examples of some otherwise halal products that become unacceptable with the presence of prohibited ingredients are:

- Gravies that contain non-halal meat or meat by-products
- Food fried in lard or dripping
- Beer battered fish
- Desserts containing alcohol such as pudding and trifle
- Ice cream with animal fat
- Vanilla essence (alcohol base)
- Mouthwash and cough syrup containing alcohol

For food to be acceptable to Muslims, separate storage, handling and cooking is critical when there are pork or pig products in the same area.

Use separate utensils and cutlery for halal food. Do not, for example, use the same knife that was used for cutting pork.

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**Diet and Routine during Ramadan**

Fasting during the month of Ramadan is one of the Five Pillars of Islam and is a commitment of Muslims to their faith.

Ramadan is the ninth month on the Islamic lunar calendar. As the lunar calendar does not correspond to the Gregorian (international) calendar, the month of Ramadan occurs approximately 10 days earlier each year. Muslims may choose to fast on other prescribed days as well.

Fasting is an obligation on those who fulfil certain conditions, such as being fit and in good health.

Fasting demands total abstinence from food and drink (including oral medications), smoking and sex during the fasting hours.

Fasting begins with a predawn meal known as Suhr and ends with a meal called Iftar that is eaten just after sunset.

It is preferable to break the fast at Iftar by eating dates, following the tradition of Prophet Muhammad.

Meal times for fasting Muslims during Ramadan are available from Muslim community organisations and mosques.

**Remember to:**

- Serve meals to a fasting Muslim at the right times during Ramadan.
- Kitchen and catering staff must be informed about these meals and times.
- Be considerate in the presence of a fasting Muslim and be mindful of eating, drinking or smoking.
- Sleep patterns may change to cater for fasting times and special prayers during Ramadan. It may be necessary to alter the timing of some services to facilitate this.
Muslim men and women are required to observe modesty in their dress, speech and conduct. 

Dresses for both men and women need to be loose-fitting and non-transparent so as not to reveal the shapes of their body parts.

Many Muslims believe that men must cover their bodies from navel to knees, while women must cover their whole body. Most women do not cover their faces while some do.

The degree and the way in which Muslim women cover up varies.

### Examples:

1. **Hijab**: the hijab is the head covering worn most commonly in the West. It covers the hair and neck while leaving the face clear. Please note that the hijab is not just a headscarf but a fulfilment of faith obligation and a symbol of empowerment and dignity. Muslim women in care may need assistance to keep their hijab on, even if in a state of unconsciousness.

2. **Chador**: a full-body cloak most commonly worn by Iranian women covering the head and upper body while leaving the face clear.

3. **Niqab**: covering the head, neck and lower part of the face (not the eyes), the niqab is widely worn in Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

4. **Burka**: the burka covers a woman’s body from head to toe; a mesh screen allows to see through.

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Cleanliness and Hygiene

Cleanliness is an important part of Islam and personal hygiene needs to be maintained not just for health purposes but also for spiritual purposes. Muslims cannot pray or hold a copy of the Arabic Qur’an unless they are free of all impurities. This is primarily achieved through Wudhu, a ritual cleansing process involving washing the hands, mouth, nostrils, face, and forearms; wiping the head, ears and the back of the neck; and washing the feet with clean water.

Cleansing with water after toileting is needed for purity. Bathrooms should, therefore, be equipped with a bidet or a suitable container of water provided to assist with washing after each use of the toilet.

Importance is also placed on the removal of pubic and underarm hair, trimmed and clean nails, and clean teeth and nostrils.

Privacy and Modesty

Privacy and modesty are among the hallmarks of Muslim values and traditions.

It is important to Muslims not to be seen when dressing or being dressed or examined.

Be considerate about the exposure of bodies during personal care or medical examination – only those areas that need to be uncovered should be an exception to the rule.

Please announce or knock on the door and await a response before entering a Muslim woman’s room so as to give her time to cover herself properly.

A shower is preferable to a bed bath, if possible.

During a shower, modesty should be maintained such as, not using the bathroom while others are present.

Islam enforces strict separation of sexes outside the immediate family. Unrelated men and women are not allowed to touch or to be touched by one another, including through a handshake.

For personal care, please follow the gender segregation rules. For home visits, it is preferable to schedule male assistance for men, and engage female care workers for women. If in doubt, ask.

Exceptions to the gender segregation rule can be made:

• In emergency situations
• When the only (or the best, in some cases) health care professional available is of the opposite gender.
Etiquette

Greetings: The universal greeting Muslims use is ‘As salaamu alaykum’ which means ‘Peace be with you’ in Arabic. In reply one says ‘Walaykumus salaam’, which means ‘And with you be peace.’

In greeting non-Muslims, Muslims would generally use similar words of greetings as the mainstream.

A handshake is not an appropriate form of greeting between men and women as touching between people who are not related is highly discouraged. When greeting a person of another gender, wait for them to extend their hand for shaking.

Titles: Muslims prefer to address a person who is older than them with an appropriate title while first names are used mainly with family and close friends. Ask the individual how he or she wishes to be addressed.

Shoes: Most Muslims would prefer shoes to be removed before entering their house or a carpeted area to keep it free from impurities. Ask the family what they want during home visits. Wearing shoe covers is an alternative in situations where Workplace Health and Safety regulations need to be followed. Sitting with the sole of the feet toward someone is considered disrespectful among some Muslims.

Using the Left Hand: Use your right hand when giving medications or feeding. This is because Muslims use the left hand for cleaning after toileting, while reserving the right hand for eating, feeding, handshakes and giving and taking. As the left hand is considered unclean, use of the left hand by a carer may be acceptable if cutlery is used to assist with eating.

Death and Dying

Many Muslims prefer that their face be turned towards Makka (Mecca) as soon as they die.

The eyes should be closed and the lower jaw should be tied to the head to prevent a gaping mouth.

The body should be straightened and the feet tied together.

The whole body and face of the deceased must be covered by a plain, preferably white sheet.

The body must be handled as little as possible. Even after death, modesty should be maintained.

Islamic washing of the body followed by shrouding is done before burial. The body should not be washed by service provider personnel. This is critical to follow. Contact the mosque and they will assist.