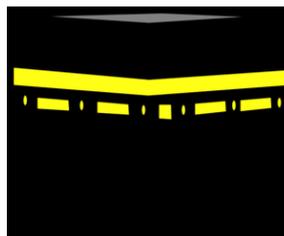


A Healthy Hajj



Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam that is compulsory for every Muslim. There are great physical and spiritual benefits for the believers in this great act of worship. The aim of this article is to provide some tips and answer some common health related questions for pilgrims.

Do I have to perform Hajj if I am unwell?

Islam is a religion of tolerance and understanding and therefore somebody who is physically unable to perform the Hajj because of illness or infirmity are exempt from going. For example, people who have chest pain at rest or minimal exertion due to angina or heart disease.

What effect may the climate and environment have on my health?

There are undoubtedly many benefits to be derived from the Holy Land and many people return from Hajj with positive changes to their lives. Annually more than 2 million people travel to Makkah during Hajj and this can result in overcrowding. Depending on when you travel, the temperatures could reach as high as 45 degrees and strenuous exertion during the Hajj rites can result in heat stroke or dehydration. For example the total distance that can be covered during a Tawaf can be upto 1.1km. There is also the risk of developing blisters on the feet as well as catching coughs and colds.

Why do I need to have a Meningitis ACWY vaccine?

There have been outbreaks of meningitis in pilgrims in the past. If meningitis is left untreated it could lead to death. Therefore the Saudi Government has made it mandatory for all pilgrims to have the Meningitis ACWY vaccine before issuing a visa. Sadly some people have forged certificates in order to obtain a Hajj/Umrah visa. Not only is this risking their own health but also poses a risk to others. Ultimately it is unislamic and showing dishonesty towards the Holy Land.

Should I have any other vaccinations?

You should also consider vaccinations against typhoid, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B and polio. If you are aged over 65 years or suffer from chronic diseases you should also consider the Flu jab and the pneumococcal jab. Ensure that you have your jabs at least 10 days before you travel. Speak to your GP or the practice nurse at your local surgery for further information.

What medical kit should I carry with me?

If you are prescribed medicines by your GP, ensure that you take these medicines with you.

The following are items that you should consider taking with you . You can purchase most of these from your local chemist or supermarket:

- ✓ Simple painkillers- Paracetamol or Ibuprofen
- ✓ Plasters, bandages, scissors
- ✓ Oral rehydration salts (eg Dioralyte)
- ✓ Anti-diarrheal tablets (eg Loperamide)
- ✓ Good footwear
- ✓ Suncream (Non Perfumed) to avoid sunburns especially if you are fair skinned
- ✓ Antiseptic cream (eg Sudocrem)
- ✓ Petroleum jelly (eg Vaseline) for the feet and groin to avoid irritation when walking
- ✓ Throat lozenges
- ✓ Clove oil for toothache
- ✓ A white umbrella
- ✓ Water flask

Other Tips

Avoid using roadside barbers and use designated barbers. You should ensure that they use new blades to minimise the risk of catching viruses like Hepatitis B & C.

Try to avoid the midday sun and use an umbrella to reflect the sun but remember that head coverings are prohibited for men during Hajj.

Be careful with what you eat. Remember the rule to avoid food poisoning:
Boil it, Cook it, Peel it or Forget it!

Consider gradually increasing your physical activity- for example, building up to walking a few miles a day before you travel.

Free health care is provided for all pilgrims with 24 hour access. There are plenty of chemists where you can purchase medicines. If you are travelling via other countries then you should consider travel insurance.

Finally, we pray that you have a safe and prosperous Hajj and do remember us in your prayers.



Research Box

Does olive oil protect against stroke?

A French study that was published in the Neurology Journal 2011, Volume 77, revealed that greater use of olive oil lowered the chances of developing strokes by 41% when compared to non-users.