

# Expert help for those with diabetes who wish to fast

## This enables Muslims with type 2 diabetes to observe Ramadan safely

By **CAROLYN KHEW**

MUSLIMS with type 2 diabetes can be assured that fasting during the month of Ramadan can be done safely, if their medication is adjusted by a healthcare professional.

A team of experts led by Associate Professor Joyce Lee and graduate student Melanie Siaw from the Department of Pharmacy at the National University of Singapore studied a total of 153 patients from an outpatient endocrine clinic.

The study was done after over 5,000 patients in a local chronic disease database showed improving blood glucose control during Ramadan.

Participants were given questionnaires on their diet and physical activity, while blood tests were taken to determine their blood sugar levels at specific time periods.

“When they are not eating and you give them the medication, their sugar level will dip even more so they can get really sick with low-sugar symptoms... That’s why, in general, healthcare professionals will advise them not to go for fasting,” said Prof Lee.

It was found, however, that patients who had their medications adjusted by a healthcare professional while fasting remained healthy and had reduced risk of the effects of low-sugar levels, including seizures.

Medication was adjusted both

higher or lower as some needed higher dosages because they tended to eat large amounts after breaking fast.

The study was done in 2012 before, during and after the month of Ramadan, where fasting from both food and drink is observed from sunrise to sunset.

The improvement in blood sugar levels did not continue after Ramadan as patients resumed their normal lifestyle, the study also noted.

It is the first time a survey is being done on Muslim patients in Singapore with type 2 diabetes.

The next step would be to develop guidelines for doctors to advise diabetic patients on their medication adjustments during Ramadan fasting.

Such guidelines are already available in countries such as Britain and Saudi Arabia.

The team now plans to do a more detailed study, which will take more than a year to com-



A team of experts led by Associate Professor Joyce Lee (right) and graduate student Melanie Siaw found that those who had their medications adjusted by a healthcare professional while fasting remained healthy. ST PHOTO: CHEW SENG KIM

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### FALLING SUGAR LEVELS

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– Associate Professor Joyce Lee, who led the study

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“We will need to get to know their lifestyle a lot more before we can come up with the (treatment) algorithm and apply it to the patients with type 2 diabetes... It takes a lot of trials to see what would work,” said Prof Lee.

This year, the start of the fasting month is on June 18.

Mr Juraiman Rahim, 47, manager at Al-Muttaqin mosque, has type 2 diabetes. He said that having guidelines to adjust the diabetes medication would help patients like himself who still wish to fast during Ramadan.

“When I was diagnosed with diabetes last year, I was worried that I would have to miss my fast. I wouldn’t want to lose any opportunity to fast during Ramadan,” he said.

The results of the studies were published in the *International Journal Of Endocrinology and Journal Of Diabetes Investigation*.

✉ [kcarolyn@sph.com.sg](mailto:kcarolyn@sph.com.sg)