

## Myths about Islam

### All Arabs are Muslims/All Muslims are Arabs.

Muslims may come from any country in the world. An Arab person could identify with any faith or be an atheist.

### Women are oppressed in Islam.

The Qur'an clearly defines the rights of women. Women are regarded as individuals in their own right. Neither men nor women are superior to each other.

### People who are of Middle Eastern appearance are Muslim.

A Muslim person can be of any appearance because Muslims come from all parts of the world.

### Jihad means Holy War.

Jihad has several meanings. Principally, it means striving to live one's faith. It can also mean a justifiable struggle in defence of Islam and Muslims.

### Female circumcision is a Muslim practice.

Female circumcision is not an Islamic practice. Body mutilation is not permitted under Islam.

### All Muslims are fanatics.

Like all religions, Muslims have varying approaches to their faith and religious practices.

### Muslims want to introduce Shariah law into Australia.

Shariah law is a legal system based on Islam, and is as complex as common law in Australia. It is the basis for the Islamic communities' beliefs, rights and practices within the community.

Shariah law only applies to Muslims and therefore it is not reasonable or feasible to apply Shariah law to Australia.

## Accommodating to prayer times

Muslims are generally able to adjust their prayer times to accommodate work or study routines. However, if it is possible, avoid scheduling meetings, examinations, lectures or tutorials on Fridays at noon if significant numbers of Muslim people are involved.

## Muslim guests

Expect a Muslim guest to remove their shoes before entering your home. This is a sign of respect for you and your home.

As most Muslim people will fast during daylight hours in the month of Ramadhan, expect that they will refuse offers of food and drink at this time.

As with other guests, it is a good idea to ask if there are foods that are forbidden or 'haram' for your Muslim guests. 'Halal' foods are those that can be eaten by Muslims freely.

Dancing with partners who are not their spouse is uncomfortable for Muslim people, as this generally involves touching the other person.

Pets, and especially dogs, are a difficulty for Muslims. When Muslims come into contact with dogs, they are concerned that the dog may lick them and then they will have to change their clothes before prayer.

## Academic studies and Muslim students

In Australia, when Muslim students are considering taking academic studies that require them to have close physical contact with people of the opposite sex – for example, nursing, medicine or physiotherapy – it is important to provide information to them about the course content in advance, so that they can make an informed choice about courses and programs. Once students choose to study a particular academic program it is important that they participate fully.

**Further information is available from Focusing on Islam: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions at [www.newcastle.edu.au/islam.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/islam.html)**

**Challenges for International Muslim Students in the Academic Environment: [www.newcastle.edu.au/islamhealth.html](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/islamhealth.html)**



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Immigration**  
**and Citizenship**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NEWCASTLE**  
AUSTRALIA

## Understanding Islam

Islam is a world religion and the people who practise it are called Muslims. All Muslims share the same essential beliefs, values and God centred approach to the world. Islam is practised by people from many different cultures.

The **Qur'an** is the prime source of Muslims' faith and practice, and the wording has not been changed from when it was originally transcribed fourteen centuries ago.

The **five pillars of Islam** are the basis of a Muslim's life.

They are:

- **Belief** that there is only one God and that Muhammad (pbuh\*) is His Last Prophet and Messenger;
- **Prayers** which are performed five times each day;
- **Fasting** in the month of Ramadhan;
- **Charity** in which a percentage of earnings is given to the poor;
- **Pilgrimage (Hajj)** to the holy city of Mecca is required once in a lifetime if the means are available.

Islamic dress may vary depending on a person's country of birth or origin. However, it should be modest and dignified for both women and men and should not emphasise the body.

\* 'Peace be upon him' is a sign of respect to the mention of Muhammad



## Islamic Practices

Prayer times occur at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall. Although it is preferable to worship together in a mosque, a Muslim can pray almost anywhere, such as in their office, as long as the space is clean; they can face towards Mecca; and there are no photos or pictures directly in front of them. It is compulsory for a Muslim to attend the mosque for Friday (Jumm'ah) midday prayers. Before prayers a Muslim is required to make ablutions so therefore needs to have access to washing facilities.

Muslim people follow a faith of peace and forgiveness. The majority will have nothing to do with violent events that some have associated with Islam. If a Muslim person commits an act of terrorism, they are violating the laws of Islam. However, the Qur'an recognises the right of people to defend themselves.

There are two main schools of thought in Islam: Sunni and Shia. However, the differences in practice are extremely minor and in most cases unnoticed by non-Muslims.



## Building positive connections

### Greetings

It is important to remember that male and female Muslims do not greet each other by shaking hands. As a good tip, when greeting a Muslim person for the first time, follow their lead by responding to what they do.

### Touching

Touching a person of the opposite sex, even in a gesture of goodwill or comfort, is not common practice among Muslim people.

### Social occasions

Muslims do not drink alcohol, nor do they eat pork, ham or bacon. When issuing an invitation for a social event, it is appreciated if some information can be provided about the food and drinks that will be served. By letting people know that soft drinks and vegetarian foods will be available, Muslim people will be encouraged to attend and assured that they will be able to participate fully in the event.

### Etiquette

It is considered bad manners to point the sole of one's feet at a Muslim person, for example by crossing one's legs while in conversation. It is best to keep your feet together on the floor so that the soles of your feet are not directed at another person.



## Important Islamic festivals

Ramadhan generally occurs once per calendar year and lasts for 30 days. Most Muslims will fast from first light until sundown during this period. Fasting is regarded principally as a method of self purification. It is believed that by cutting one's self off from worldly comforts, a person gains true empathy with the poor and needy.

Over Ramadhan the Imam, an Islamic scholar, recites the whole of the Qur'an – a little each evening during the last prayers. The fasting month has a very rigorous routine, so participants often feel tired.

Id-ul-Fitr marks the end of Ramadhan. During Id-ul-Fitr, presents are given and food is offered to the poor.

The Hajj pilgrimage occurs approximately two months and 10 days after Id-ul-Fitr. The end of the pilgrimage is marked by Id-ul-Adha, another special celebration.

Muslims use a lunar calendar having 12 lunar months in a year of about 354 days – so Islamic holy days usually shift 11 days earlier each successive calendar year.