

# A Multi-Faith Resource for Healthcare Staff



NHS Education for Scotland (NES) produced this booklet through its Healthcare Chaplaincy Training and Development Unit. It was prepared with the guidance of the Spiritual Care Development Committee, a multi-faith group which represents the main faith and belief groups in Scotland and also includes representatives from chaplaincy, the health service and the Scottish Executive Health Department. The group is a forum for discussing ideas and issues concerning spiritual and religious care within NHS Scotland.

# Contents

	Page
Introduction	4
Baha'i Faith	6
Brahma Kumaris	8
Buddhism	10
Chinese	13
Christianity	16
Church of the Latter-day Saints (Mormon)	18
Hinduism	20
Humanism	23
Islam	25
Jehovah's Witnesses	28
Judaism	30
Paganism	34
Sikhism	36
Mental Health: a note	39
Sources	40
Web sites	41
Contacts	42

Online at <http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/publications>

Large-print versions are available from Healthcare Chaplaincy Training and Development  
NHS Education for Scotland, 2 Central Quay, 89 Hydepark Street, Glasgow G3 8BW

# Introduction

Scotland is a religiously and culturally diverse country and this resource is designed to assist NHS staff to address some of the religious needs of patients in their care.

The Scottish Executive has stated that spiritual care, which includes but is not limited to religious care, must be provided in an equal and fair way for those of all faith communities or none. To enable this, all Boards have produced a spiritual care policy and work is being done to develop culturally competent standards for spiritual and religious care.

Most Boards now have a Department of Spiritual and Religious Care staffed by a chaplaincy team, who are a good source of knowledge and experience on how to serve the needs of a multi-faith population. Often the chaplaincy will be the first place people call when seeking advice or help in finding the right care. Chaplaincy teams help to facilitate spiritual or religious care for all, whatever their faith or life stance happens to be. They will usually know who to contact when a person asks to see someone from a particular faith community.

## **When in doubt – ask the patient**

You can resolve many of the issues arising from caring for people from a faith community or culture unfamiliar to you by simply asking the patient, or their visitors, how they wish to be looked after. It is polite, for example, to ask how a patient wishes to be addressed. This is important because not all cultures have a pre-name then a surname. When in doubt, ask. It is also worth noting that, in some cultures, it is not acceptable for men and women to shake hands in greeting.

This booklet may not cover all faith communities and relevant issues. Therefore it is essential to talk to the patient about their health needs. All NHS Boards should offer access to interpreting services and it is essential to use these services when a patient has difficulty communicating their needs.

When you know a person's faith community or group, you should be able to use this document to deal with the main areas which may be relevant. The communities covered in this document are:

- Baha'i faith
- Brahma Kumaris
- Buddhism
- Chinese<sup>1</sup>
- Christianity
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)
- Hinduism
- Humanism
- Islam
- Jehovah's Witnesses
- Judaism
- Paganism
- Sikhism.

<sup>1</sup> Although 'Chinese' does not represent a religious community, we decided to include a Chinese section as various religions are found in the Chinese community and there are particular practices that are specifically Chinese.

This document gives information, in the same order, for each of the communities listed above. The format is as follows:

- Introduction
- Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness
- Religious practices
- Diet
- Fasting
- Washing and toilet
- Ideas of modesty and dress
- Death customs
- Birth customs
- Family planning
- Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation

# Baha'i Faith



## Introduction

The Baha'i faith is an independent world religion that originated in Persia (now Iran) in the middle of the 19th century. Its founder is called Baha'u'llah (Glory of God). Baha'u'llah announced that he was a messenger from God sent to help bring about a new age of global civilisation which would be characterised by unity and peace. Baha'u'llah was persecuted and finally exiled to Akka (Acre) in Palestine where he died in 1892. The spiritual and administrative centre of the Baha'i faith is thus in present-day Israel.

Some key Baha'i beliefs are that:

- there is one God
- each person has a soul that lives on after death
- all religions have a common foundation
- men and women should have equal opportunity
- prejudice of all kinds should be challenged
- extremes of wealth and poverty should be abolished
- religious and cultural diversity should be respected.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Most Baha'is have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and are willing to seek medical help and advice when sick. As well as taking prescribed medication, Baha'is believe in the power of prayer in healing.

## Religious practices

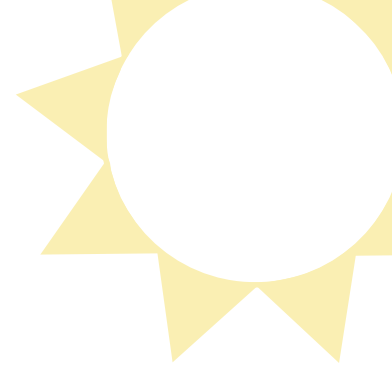
Baha'is must usually recite daily prayers. Although in illness Baha'is are exempt from these prayers, some may still wish to recite them, and would therefore appreciate privacy.

## Diet

Baha'is have no specific dietary requirements. Some Baha'is may be vegetarian but this is a personal choice, not a religious requirement. The use of alcohol and habit-forming drugs is strictly prohibited except when prescribed by a physician. Smoking is discouraged.

## Fasting

The Baha'i fast takes place every year from 2–20 March inclusive; at this time Baha'is may not take food or drink from sunrise to sunset. Fasting is not obligatory during sickness or pregnancy, while breastfeeding or menstruating, during hard physical labour, or on long journeys, and people under the age of 15 or over 70 are exempt from fasting.



## **Washing and toilet**

Washing and toilet present no unusual problems for Baha'is, although they prefer to have access to water for ablutions before prayers.

## **Ideas of modesty and dress**

There are no particular points to be noted in this area and few Baha'is would object to being examined by doctors of the opposite sex.

## **Death customs**

Baha'is treat the body of a deceased person with great respect. Baha'i law prescribes that burial should take place at a distance of no more than one hour's journey from the place of death. The body should not be cremated or embalmed. Funerals are normally arranged by the family of the deceased if available, or on occasions by the Baha'i Assembly (usually listed in the phone book). Baha'i relatives or friends will wish to say prayers for the dead. Autopsies and post mortem examinations are acceptable if necessary. Because they believe life begins at conception, a miscarriage is a great loss and the foetus should be treated with respect. Wherever possible the remains should be returned to the parents or local Baha'i community for burial.

## **Birth customs**

The birth of a child is a time of joy and Baha'is may wish to express their gratitude to God with prayer; but they have no rituals associated with birth.

## **Family planning**

Family planning is left to the personal conscience of a Baha'i, but please bear the following in mind. Irreversible sterilisation in either sex is discouraged unless there is a medical condition relevant to the decision, in which case the individual would seek qualified medical advice. Abortion is permitted only where there are strong medical grounds such as risk to the mother's life and health. Abortion is not regarded lightly and is not permitted as a contraceptive measure. Many Baha'is will not use the intra-uterine device for contraception as they regard it more as an abortive measure than a contraceptive. Artificial insemination and in-vitro fertilisation are permitted provided that the wife's egg is fertilised by the husband's sperm and that the child is born from the womb of the natural mother.

## **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

Most Baha'is would have no objection to blood transfusions and may receive transplants or donate organs for transplant.

# Brahma Kumaris



## Introduction

The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University (BKWSU) was founded in 1937 in Hyderabad Sind (then in India) by Brahma Baba, a businessman and philanthropist. Brahma Baba had a vision of how people of all cultural backgrounds could come together to rediscover and develop the spiritual dimension of their lives.

The BKWSU core curriculum is offered in the form of a foundation course in meditation, based on the teaching of Raja Yoga. Raja Yoga is viewed as a path to understanding and knowing one's identity as a spiritual being. Activities focus on developing a sense of self-worth and respect for others. There are currently 8,000 BKWSU centres in 90 countries, including five in Scotland. The international headquarters are in Mt Abu, Rajasthan, India and the International Co-ordinating Office is based in Global Co-operation House, London. Brahma Baba set up a trust of 12 women to run the organisation and this system has continued, with mainly women running BKWSU centres. Today the University is headed by two women now in their 80s and 90s, Dadi Prakashmani and Dadi Janki.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Most Brahma Kumaris have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and would be willing to seek medical help and advice when sick. Decisions about where to seek advice and the type of treatment are left to the individual.

## Religious practices

The Brahma Kumaris practise meditation regularly, health permitting, especially in the early hours of the morning, and it may be helpful for them to have access to a quiet area for this.

## Diet

Brahma Kumaris are encouraged to eat a lacto-vegetarian diet (dairy products permitted) and discouraged from using alcohol, tobacco and other recreational drugs. Most Brahma Kumaris do not use onions or garlic in cooking and prefer to have their food cooked and blessed by fellow Brahma Kumaris.

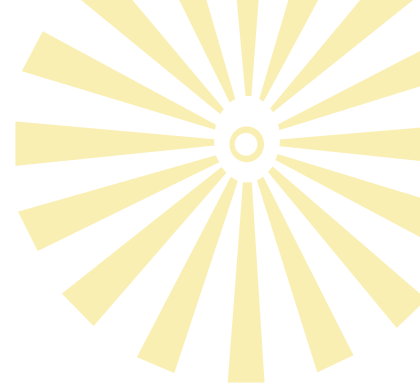
## Fasting

There is no religious obligation for Brahma Kumaris to fast.

## Washing and toilet

Brahma Kumaris take a shower each morning (showers are preferred to baths wherever possible). Brahma Kumaris also observe the discipline of bathing or showering after a bowel movement and would prefer to do this in hospital too, wherever possible.





### **Ideas of modesty and dress**

As Brahma Kumaris teachers live a celibate life they may prefer medical examinations to be undertaken by someone of the same sex. Other Brahma Kumaris are less likely to have a preference. Dedicated Brahma Kumaris women often dress fully in white if officially representing the BKWSU.

### **Death customs**

Brahma Kumaris favour cremation over burial. Dedicated Brahma Kumaris would prefer the body to be in special white clothes although there is some flexibility in this. Details of the funeral arrangements are always discussed with the family of the deceased so that the family's wishes are honoured.

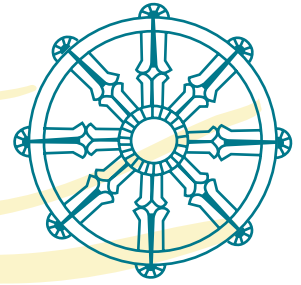
### **Birth customs**

Dedicated Brahma Kumaris live a celibate life so it would be unusual for someone from the Brahma Kumaris tradition to be giving birth.

### **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

Brahma Kumaris would have no objection to blood transfusion or organ transplants. Decisions about the donation of organs are left to the individual.

# Buddhism



## Introduction

Buddhism stems from the teachings of the Buddha Mahatma Gautama Shakyamuni who lived in Northern India around 500 BCE<sup>2</sup>. Buddha is not worshipped as a god but revered as an inspiration of how people can transform their lives. There are various Buddhist traditions. The ancient civilisations of India and China were profoundly affected by Buddhism and today it remains deeply influential in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Korea, Japan and the countries of the Himalayas; as well as in areas of India settled by Tibetans in exile.

The Buddha's words were transmitted orally through his followers and later formulated into teachings which Buddhists call the Dharma. These teachings were eventually written down and transmitted to anyone who wished to hear them. Buddhism encourages its followers to develop wisdom and to have compassion towards all forms of life. The Buddhist path involves meditation, practice and study leading to 'Enlightenment'. This path is eightfold and defined as:

- right view
- right thought
- right speech
- right actions
- right livelihood
- right meditation
- right effort, and
- right mindfulness.

There are five basic precepts and these are:

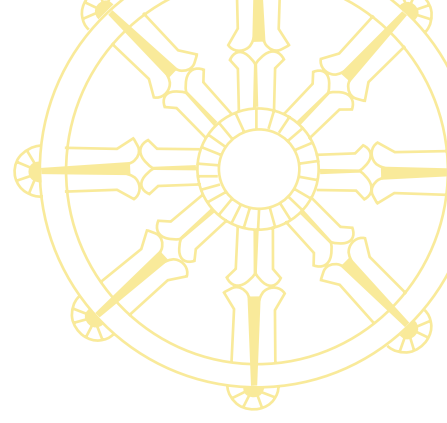
- to refrain from killing
- to refrain from taking that which is not given
- to refrain from misuse of the senses and sexual misconduct
- to refrain from lying or using false or harmful speech, and
- to refrain from taking intoxicating drink or drugs which cloud the mind.

Shortly before his death at the age of 80, the Buddha brought together a group of his followers and founded a religious order – the Sangha – which has remained both the guardian and the embodiment of his teachings to this day. These three aspects – the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha – are known to all Buddhists as the Three Refuges or the Three Jewels. For a sincere Buddhist they point to the practical path of spiritual awakening.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Most Buddhists have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and are willing to seek medical help and advice when sick. Buddhists generally are willing to take any medicine that helps. Some Buddhists will be wary, and will wish to know the effects of any drug that alters their emotional state or clarity of mind, because of the fifth precept. However, the idea of the fifth precept is to prevent people carrying out harmful acts while intoxicated, so they usually accept prescribed medication that may be intoxicating but also heals or reduces suffering. Nevertheless, some Buddhists may favour alternative health remedies or may be reluctant to accept sedating medication.

<sup>2</sup> Before the common era. This is often referred to as BC (before Christ)



## **Religious practices**

Most Buddhists practise meditation, and it may be helpful to offer access to a quiet area for this, or to allow chanting of prayers or sacred texts.

## **Diet**

Many Buddhists are vegetarian or vegan, due to the first precept and respect for other sentient beings. Some may follow a precept that involves eating only one main meal a day. This is usually eaten before midday. However, some Buddhists are non-vegetarian as the Buddha asked his monks to eat whatever they received.

## **Fasting**

If their health allows, some Buddhists fast on new moon and full moon days and on specific festival days such as Buddha's birthday, his death day, his enlightenment, his first sermon and others. Some Buddhists may also eat only one main meal a day (see above).

## **Washing and toilet**

Washing and toilet present no unusual problems for Buddhists.

## **Ideas of modesty and dress**

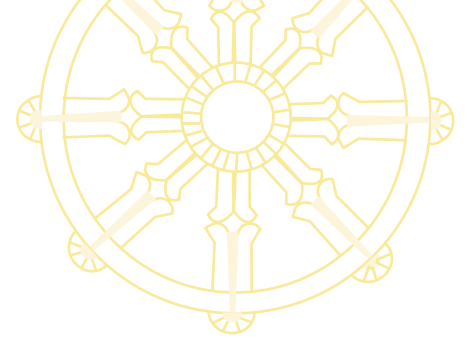
There are no particular points to be noted in this area and most Buddhists would not object to being examined by doctors of the opposite sex.

## **Death customs**

The manner of consideration for the dying will depend on the Buddhist group. If you need specific guidance about a patient's particular school of Buddhism, or want to arrange counselling from a fellow Buddhist practitioner, then you should find out from the patient or family which specific form or school of Buddhism the patient practises. You can then seek out local contact details.

The most important consideration relates to the patient's state of mind at the time of death, for this will influence how they experience the intermediate or 'bardo' states and thereafter the character of rebirth. Nearing the time of death, the state of mind should ideally be one of peace, so the patient may wish to meditate and ask for a quiet place. They may wish for a Buddha figure close by and may use a candle or incense stick. Some may ask for counselling from a fellow Buddhist, with recitation of prayers or sacred texts.

Some Buddhists may express a strong wish to die at home rather than in hospital. If possible this should be granted. Healthcare staff should discuss in full the practical implications of this decision with the patient and relatives if terminal illness is diagnosed.



After death, in many schools of Buddhism there is no ritual requirement and normal hospital procedures are accepted. However, some Buddhists hold strong views about how the body should be treated after death. It would be helpful to ask about such views before death occurs, to avoid unnecessary distress to relatives and friends.

After death, the main Buddhist tradition is for the family to request prayers from the sangha (usually a monk, lama, nun, priest or order member) of the appropriate school of Buddhism and to perform certain actions and dedicate them to the dead person. Particularly for practitioners of Vajrayana Buddhism – most commonly in Britain, Tibetan Buddhism – an experienced Buddhist practitioner may perform the special Buddhist practice of Powa or ejection of consciousness.

Some patients and relatives may object to a post mortem due to the belief that the mind may stay in the body for some time after the heart has stopped, and interfering with internal organs may undermine the optimal dissolution of consciousness; therefore the body should not be moved for 72 hours.

Buddhists can dispose of a dead body by any of the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) – whichever is appropriate to the country and people. Traditions vary as there are different schools of thought. However, most Buddhists are cremated and the body should be disposed of within three to seven days.

## **Birth customs**

Generally, there are no guidelines, although Buddhists in some South East Asian countries traditionally prepare a basket containing some tools for a baby boy, and a cradle containing needles and thread for a girl. Some may ask for the umbilical cord to be salted and placed in an earthenware pot.

## **Family planning**

There is no established doctrine about family planning for Buddhists, although they are generally reluctant to tamper with the natural development of life. A Buddhist may accept all methods of family planning, but with different degrees of reluctance. The worst of all is abortion or 'killing a human to be'. This is seen to be harming a living sentient being. Pills and condoms are much more acceptable, though many prefer condoms. Generally all Buddhist traditions condemn abortion and euthanasia.

## **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

There are no religious objections to blood transfusions, but attitudes amongst Buddhists to organ transplants vary. Many will have no religious objections, since helping others is fundamental to Buddhist belief – and all consider organ donation during life an act of compassion. However, some Buddhists may decline to offer organ donation after death because they believe the mind may stay in the body for some time after the heart has stopped (see above).

# Chinese



## Introduction

Although there is a great variety of Chinese belief systems (including Christianity and Islam), the most prevalent influences are Buddhism (see above), Confucianism, Taoism and veneration of ancestors.

Confucianism was founded by K'ung Fu Tzu, who was born in 551 BCE<sup>3</sup>. Confucianism deals mainly with individual morality, ethics and the proper exercise of political power. It emphasises respect for rules and authority.

The founder of Taoism is believed to be Lao-Tse (604-531 BCE). Taoism is broadly based on the key concepts of yin and yang, ch'i and the five elements of matter (water, fire, earth, metal and wood). Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are often blended to form a set of complementary, peacefully co-existent religions.

In traditional Chinese families sons and daughters must be dutiful towards older family members, particularly their parents. Reverence for ancestors is regarded as a matter of great importance. Children are expected to carry out rituals and obligations in respect to the living and the dead; however, religious scepticism among the younger generation of Chinese is common.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Due to western influences over the last two or three decades, many Chinese now accept western medicine as the most advanced form of treatment. However, traditional herbal remedies given by Chinese physicians are still used and you should check whether the patient is taking Chinese herbal medicine in combination with western medicine.

Many Chinese are shy to ask the doctor questions about their condition. Always use an interpreter, not a family member, during consultations.

## Religious practices

Chinese religious practices vary according to background and tradition (see the religious practice section in Buddhism, Christianity and Islam for guidance for Chinese patients from those backgrounds).

<sup>3</sup> Before the common era. This is often referred to as BC (before Christ)



## **Diet**

The Chinese have definite customs concerning food, its preparation, its service, and the manner in which it is eaten. The older generation believe that rice is the only form of staple food which can give them energy and vitality. (Northern Chinese eat little rice and more wheat, maize and other cereals). Patients often ask relatives to bring in rice and other food when they visit. A traditional Chinese belief relating to diet in hospital concerns drinking soup that has been boiled for a long time (six to seven hours). Many believe that consuming well-boiled soup will help clear one's system and promote a speedy recovery.

## **Fasting**

There is no specific guidance on fasting for the Chinese community (see Buddhism, Christianity and Islam for Chinese patients from those backgrounds).

## **Washing and toilet**

Chinese cultures place great emphasis on physical cleanliness. Most Chinese wash by pouring water over themselves or sponging. Some worry that baths could make them ill.

## **Ideas of modesty and dress**

Chinese women are generally modest and would probably be more relaxed and content if attended by female professionals. In practice, however, the great majority of Chinese people today are used to being treated by doctors of the opposite gender.

## **Death customs**

Funeral and mourning customs vary widely in the Chinese tradition, making it very difficult to generalise for all Chinese. In the case of a child some Chinese prefer things to be kept quiet and simple, with little or no fuss. In some instances a coffin may not be used – simply a sheet. There is no formal funeral service for a child and many Chinese do not like to mention a child who has died at all, so counselling may be difficult. Chinese families do not like to be given back any of the child's belongings as it is considered bad luck. On the death of a child, the burial takes place at once with no special ceremony. In the case of adults, the body is simply bathed and covered in a white sheet. Some Chinese still follow the custom of clothing the body in white or old-fashioned Chinese dress. The only Chinese who object to post mortems are Muslim Chinese.



### **Birth customs**

A Chinese woman may ask not to wash her hair for one month after the delivery of a baby. This is an important tradition and she may be unwilling to go for a shower or sit in a bath. She will take great care of her body and will not take any form of exercise. Often women eat a lot of root ginger before the birth, boiled with vinegar for several weeks. Eggs may be added to 'cleanse' one's inside. They may eat this dark mixture every day for a month after delivery. When a child is born, relatives will visit and bring presents such as chicken soup, clothing, cap and shoes for the baby, and eggs dyed red.

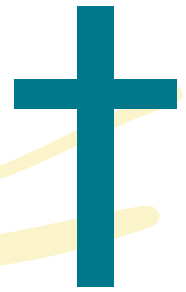
### **Family planning**

Generally there are no problems with family planning although there is often a certain reserve in talking about it, and it should not be mentioned in the presence of other Chinese. Family-planning devices, sterilisation and abortion are acceptable.

### **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

Most Chinese will agree to blood transfusion. Organ transplant can cause difficulty as traditionally the body should be buried whole, so they may be reluctant to donate organs or tissue.

# Christianity



## Introduction

Christianity was founded around 2000 years ago in the area of modern-day Israel and Palestine. It is based on the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, known as Christ (the anointed one). Christianity is a world-wide religion followed by people of many different cultures and backgrounds. Although Christians hold much in common, there is a wide diversity of beliefs, ethical standpoints and forms of worship among the many denominations and groups which make up the Christian Church. The two major groups of Christians in Scotland are Protestants and Roman Catholics.

At the centre of Christian belief is Jesus, who is regarded as the revelation of God. For many Christians this revelation is such that he is understood to be the incarnation of God. The Christian holy book is called the Bible and key Christian practices are baptism and Holy Communion (or Eucharist). Prayer and meditation are important to Christians in their daily life, and many Christians are also involved with justice, peace and development issues, in common with adherents of other faiths.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Most Christians have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and are willing to seek medical help and advice when sick.

## Religious practices

Key Christian practices (depending on denomination) are Holy Communion, confession, absolution and the anointing of the sick. The relevant hospital chaplain would be able to offer these sacraments to Christians on a hospital ward. Prayer is also very important to Christians and they would appreciate some privacy for this.

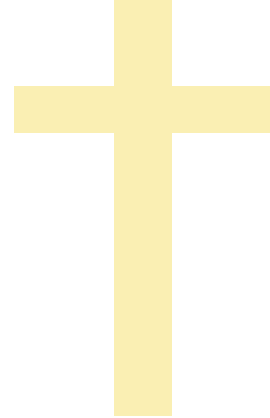
## Diet

There are no universal Christian dietary regulations.

## Fasting

There are no universal Christian fasting regulations. Some Christians fast on particular days and at particular times of the year. Some Christians give up certain foods during Lent (a 40-day period between Ash Wednesday and Easter). Other Christians observe Friday as a no-meat day or may fast before receiving Holy Communion.





## **Washing and toilet**

Washing and toilet present no unusual problems for Christians.

## **Ideas of modesty and dress**

There are no particular points to be noted in this area and most Christians would not object to being examined by doctors of the opposite sex.

## **Death customs**

Dying patients of all Christian denominations may wish the services of the appropriate chaplain. It is important that whenever possible Roman Catholic patients be offered the sacrament known as the sacrament of the sick. If a baby is seriously ill, stillborn or dies shortly after birth, it is customary for parents to be offered a service of blessing, baptism or funeral for their baby. A chaplain or minister usually performs the service, although a member of staff may perform an emergency baptism in their absence if requested. Some Christians do not practise infant baptism and may prefer that sick or dying babies receive a blessing instead.

## **Birth customs**

There are no specific or universal Christian customs relating to birth itself, although many Christian traditions practise infant baptism. This may be significant for a new-born child who is dying, as the family may request that the baby is baptised.

## **Family planning**

For many Christians, family planning is an individual choice. All Christian churches uphold the sanctity of life and every effort is made to preserve life. Certain churches discourage their members from using artificial means of contraception. Roman Catholics believe that every human being has a divine right to live, and that life begins at conception, so abortion is forbidden. Abortion is also strongly condemned in some other Christian denominations.

## **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

Most Christians do not object to blood transfusions and may receive transplants or donate organs for transplant. Jehovah's Witnesses are an exception to this (see the relevant section for further details).

# Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)

## Introduction

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) was founded in America in the early 19th century by Joseph Smith. The Bible and Book of Mormon are essential scriptures for Latter-day Saints. The Church views the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Ghost) as three separate and distinct members of a united Godhead. Members believe in pre-existence: a spirit life before birth that a person has no memory of. They view life on earth as a period in which to become worthy to return to live in the presence of Jesus Christ and God.

Family unity is of central importance, epitomised by a 'sealing' ceremony at a Temple, when man and wife are sealed together for eternity. Children may be sealed to their parents. Family members, already dead, who were not members of the Church, may be baptised into the faith and sealed to their families. The Church encourages reverence and care for the body, and so counsels against immoral practices and the use of illegal drugs.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Most Latter-day Saints have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and are willing to seek medical help and advice when sick.

## Religious practices

The sacrament of bread and water (Latter-day Saints abstain from alcohol) equates to the Eucharist of other Christians and is performed each Sunday. Although it may be taken in hospital, it is not regarded as essential for a sick patient.

The LDS Church administers spiritual healing to the sick. At the request of a patient two members of the LDS priesthood may visit them. One would anoint them with consecrated oil and the second would place their hands on the patient's head and offer prayer. Some privacy for this would be greatly appreciated.

## Diet

Church members live by a health code known as the Word of Wisdom. It warns against the use of stimulants and substances that are harmful to the body, and promotes healthy eating. LDS patients will refuse tea, coffee, alcohol and tobacco. Hot chocolate, Ovaltine and other such drinks normally available on hospital wards are perfectly acceptable.

## Fasting

All Latter-day Saints who are medically fit to do so fast for 24 hours on (usually) the first Sunday of each month. Normally the fast would last from after the evening meal on Saturday until a meal on Sunday late afternoon. They are encouraged to donate the money saved from missing two meals to help the poor. Some Latter-day Saints in hospital may feel well enough to continue with the monthly fast.

## **Washing and toilet**

Washing and toilet present no unusual problems for Latter-day Saints.

## **Ideas of modesty and dress**

Some Latter-day Saints will wear special 'endowment' undergarments (white knee length shorts). They believe these intensely private items to be sacred and will normally wear them day and night. They may be removed by staff in an emergency following an accident, but must at all times be treated with respect. Members don't usually wear them while in hospital.

## **Death customs**

There are no special rituals associated with dying or death for any age group. After death, a deceased member should be washed and dressed in a shroud according to hospital protocol. An 'endowed' Latter-day Saint should be buried wearing special undergarments (see above) and other special clothes, and members of the Church will dress the body before burial, by arrangement with the funeral director. Generally cremation is not encouraged, although the family of the deceased must decide on either burial or cremation.

## **Birth customs**

There are no specific Latter-day Saint customs relating to birth itself.

## **Family planning**

Although Latter-day Saints are not encouraged to use contraception, the Church does not explicitly teach that contraception is wrong and makes no doctrinal statement about it. Latter-day Saints condemn abortion on demand but permit it where there are strong medical grounds such as risk to the life or health of the mother. The Church teaches that sterilization should only be considered where medical conditions jeopardise life or health. The husband or wife must choose what is best for their family circumstances.

## **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

Most Latter-day Saints do not object to blood transfusions and may receive transplants or donate organs for transplantation.

# Hinduism



## Introduction

Hinduism originated near the river Indus over 5,000 years ago, although elements of the faith are much older. The Hindu tradition has no founder and is best understood as a group of closely connected religious traditions rather than a single religion. It represents a complete way of life and is practised by over 900 million followers. Eighty per cent of the population of India is Hindu. Hindus believe in one God and worship that one God under many manifestations, deities or images. Examples of Hindu deities are Krishna, Shiva, Rama and Durga.

Hindus believe that existence is a cycle of birth, death and rebirth, governed by karma (a complex belief in cause and effect). Hindus believe that all prayers addressed to any form or manifestation will ultimately reach the one God. Hinduism does not prescribe particular dogmas; rather it asks individuals to worship God according to their own belief. It therefore allows a great deal of freedom in matters of faith and worship.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Most Hindu patients have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and are willing to seek medical help and advice when sick. Many Hindu patients may be using Ayurvedic medicine and, as this may involve the use of herbal remedies, it is important to find out.

## Religious practices

Hindus will usually wish to pray twice daily. Where possible they will burn incense and use holy books and prayer beads. Privacy would be appreciated for prayer times.

## Diet

Most Hindus are vegetarian. The cow is viewed as a sacred animal so even meat-eating Hindus may not eat beef. Some Hindus will eat eggs, some will not, and some will also refuse onion or garlic; it is best to ask each individual. Dairy produce is acceptable so long as it is free of animal rennet, so for example the only cheese some Hindus will eat may be cottage cheese. It is important to remember that strict vegetarians will be unhappy about eating vegetarian items if they are served from the same plate or with the same utensils as meat.

## Fasting

Fasting is a regular feature of the Hindu religion but few Hindus insist on fasting in hospital. Fasting is commonly practised on new moon days and during festivals such as Shivaratri, Saraswati Puja and Durga Puja. Some fasts may only require abstinence from certain foods. At the end of each period of fasting, visitors may bring in 'prasad'<sup>4</sup> so that the patient can join in the celebration.

<sup>4</sup> Food that has been blessed



## **Washing and toilet**

Hindus will require water for washing in the same room as the toilet itself. If there is no tap there, or if they have to use a bed-pan, they will be grateful to have a container of water provided. Hindu patients prefer to wash in free-flowing water, rather than sit in a bath. As Indian food is eaten using the fingers, hand washing before and after meals is customary.

## **Ideas of modesty and dress**

A Hindu woman will much prefer a female doctor when being examined or treated. Hindu women should be accommodated in mixed wards only in emergencies. A Hindu woman may find it difficult to accept an X-ray gown because it is short.

Hindu women may wear bangles or a thread and you should not remove them without permission. Some Hindus wear a red spot on their foreheads or scalp, which again should not be removed or washed off without permission.

## **Death customs**

If a Hindu patient is dying in hospital, relatives may wish to bring money and clothes for him or her to touch before they are given to the needy. They will wish to keep a bedside vigil – if the visitors are not allowed to go to the bedside themselves they will be grateful if a nurse can do this for them while they wait. Some relatives will welcome an opportunity to sit with the dying patient and read from a holy book.

After death the body should always be left covered. Sacred objects should not be removed. Relatives will wish to wash the body and put on new clothes before taking it from the hospital. Traditionally the eldest son of the deceased should take a leading part in this, however young he may be. If a post mortem is unavoidable, Hindus will wish all organs to be returned to the body before cremation (or burial for children under five years old).

## **Birth customs**

Relatives will want to make sure the mother has complete rest for 40 days after birth and they will be worried if she has to get up for a bath within the first few days. This attitude is based on the belief that a woman is at her weakest at this time and is very susceptible to chills, backache etc.

If there is a need to separate mother and baby for any reason this should be done tactfully as she may prefer to keep the baby with her at all times.

Some Hindus consider it crucial to record the time of birth (to the minute) so that a Hindu priest can cast the child's horoscope accurately.



### **Family planning**

There is no objection to family planning from the religious point of view. However, there may be strong social pressures on women to go on having babies, particularly if no son has yet been born, and you should involve her husband in any discussion of family planning.

### **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

Most Hindus have no objection to blood transfusions and may receive transplants or donate organs for transplant.

# Humanism



## Introduction

Although humanism is not a faith, it does provide a moral framework for a life free from superstition and supernatural beliefs, and rejects any notions of a life after death. Believing that a person has only one life, humanists try to make it as worthwhile and happy as possible for everyone. Humanists are atheists, agnostics or sceptics who either reject or at least robustly question the idea of any god or other power beyond the physical world. However, humanism is more than just a simple denial of religious belief. Humanists base their moral principles on a rational approach to life, under-pinned by shared human values and respect for others, with the aim of improving the quality of life, making it more equitable for all.

Humanism focuses on human beings and offers an ethical approach to life, a belief in people's ability to solve problems, recognising that much of what happens in our world is what people cause to happen. To this end, humanists try to co-operate with people of all faiths to achieve the shared aims of a caring free society, although they condemn religious adherence that harms or disadvantages others. Humanists assert that morality comes from our ability to see that there is general benefit when we behave well towards each other; an ability that is enhanced by personal responsibility, a caring and principled upbringing and education that always insists that we treat others with consideration and unselfishness. Human rights law is important to all humanist organisations throughout the world and they endorse the principles of humanitarian ideals that are enshrined in all such declarations, covenants and conventions as well as the universal initiatives promoted by the United Nations for the peaceful co-habitation of all the world's populations.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Humanists respect healthcare staff and are comfortable seeking medical help and advice when sick.

## Religious practice

Not relevant. However, registered humanist celebrants conduct non-religious ceremonies to observe rites of passage – for birth, marriage and death.

## Diet

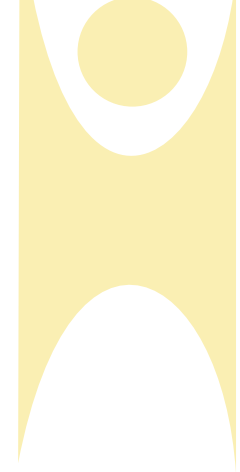
No particular requirements. Some humanists are vegetarian or vegan.

## Fasting

Not relevant.

## Washing and toilet

No particular requirements.



### **Ideas of modesty and dress**

No particular requirements.

### **Death customs**

Many Humanists will have a living will or advance directive. Humanists favour cremation or green burials and would want a humanist funeral. Many humanists endorse death with dignity and would therefore favour legal voluntary euthanasia (with appropriate safeguards) for adults.

### **Birth customs**

No particular requirements.

### **Family planning**

Humanists have always been strong advocates of birth control and for the right to choose in relation to abortion.

### **Blood transfusions & transplants and organ donation**

Most humanists have no objection to blood transfusions and may receive transplants or donate organs for transplantation.



# Islam



## Introduction

Islam is a world religion that originated in the Middle East in the seventh century CE<sup>5</sup>. It is practised by about a fifth of the world's population. Muslims believe there is only one God (Allah) and Muhammad is his prophet. Although Muslims revere Muhammad they do not worship him. Muslims believe that everything and everyone depends on Allah. All Muslims of whatever race are members of one community known as the ummah.

Muslims are guided to follow Allah's will by obeying their holy book, the Qur'an, and also by following the example set by Muhammad.

Every Muslim must perform duties known as the 'five pillars of Islam'. These are:

- to recite a specific verse – their declaration of faith (Shahadah)
- to offer five specific prayers daily (Salat)
- to give two-and-a-half per cent of their savings once a year to the poor (Zakat)
- to undertake a pilgrimage to Mecca, if they can afford to, once in a lifetime (Hajj)
- to fast during the month of Ramadan (Sawm).

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Most Muslim patients have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and are willing to seek medical help and advice when sick.

## Religious practices

One of the most important religious practices for Muslims is daily prayer (Salat). They pray five times a day. The times are broadly as follows:

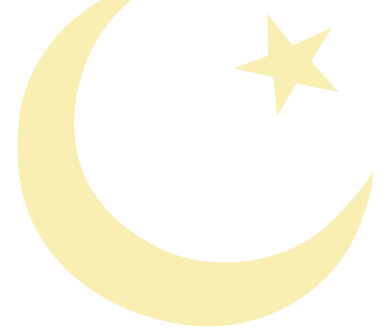
- dawn (Fajar)
- just after noon (Zuhur)
- afternoon/evening (Asr)
- following sunset (Maghrib)
- night time (Isha).

Muslims welcome privacy or a quiet space during prayer times, and they must face towards Makkah (Qibla, to the south-east in the UK). The section on washing and toilet covers hygiene needs relating to this practice.

## Diet

Muslims will eat only permitted food (halal) and will not eat or drink anything that is considered forbidden (haram). Halal food requires that Allah's name is invoked at the time the animal is killed. Lamb, beef, goat and chicken, for example, are halal as long as a Muslim kills them and offers a prayer. Fish and eggs are also halal.

<sup>5</sup> Common Era



All products from pork, carrion and blood are forbidden (haram), as are all types of alcohol. In Britain Muslims buy their meat from a Muslim butcher whenever possible. A Muslim does not eat generally available meat or food that contains animal fats, in case it contains pork fat or fat from other animals not ritually slaughtered.

Fish and eggs must be kept strictly separate from meat during preparation. Unless absolutely sure that all food is halal, when away from home many Muslims will follow a vegetarian diet. Pakistanis and Arabs like their food well seasoned and spiced, and may find bland food unpalatable.

### **Fasting**

Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan (the date varies each year). At this time Muslims will not eat or drink between dawn and sunset. The sick, infirm or very old need not fast. Fasting is also excused during menstruation, for 40 days after childbirth, while breastfeeding or during a long journey. However, some Muslims will choose to fast even if ill and you should try to accommodate this. This means providing adequate and acceptable meals during the hours of darkness and, wherever possible, adjusting medication to fit in with the fast. If the doctor says a patient should eat and drink more, you should explain to the patient that this is part of the medicine to assist recovery. It is important to recognise that a decision to fast is based on different priorities, not on ignorance or being unco-operative.

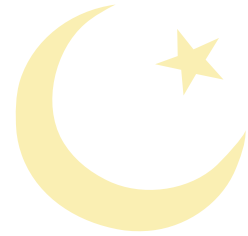
### **Washing and toilet**

Muslims attach great importance to cleanliness. They must have running water (from a tap or poured from a jug) in toilets, as they consider toilet paper inadequate; if a bedpan has to be used a container of clean water should accompany it. Muslims prefer to wash in free-flowing water, and cannot accept the idea of sitting in a bath. Ablution before each prayer is necessary. The worshipper washes their hands and face, rinses their mouth, cleans their nostrils, washes their arms up to the elbows, wets the hands and runs them through the hair, cleans inside and behind the ears and lastly washes their feet up to the ankles – each of these three times. After menstruation women must wash their whole bodies. It is regarded as unclean to eat or perform religious ceremonies using the same hand that is used for toileting purposes.

### **Ideas of modesty and dress**

Generally a Muslim woman is not allowed to be examined or surrounded by male members of medical staff. It is always preferable that a female member of the medical staff is present. In certain cases a Muslim woman may not agree to be examined or treated at all by a male staff member. In Islam free mixing of sexes is prohibited and there should be no physical contact between a woman and any man except her husband. Muslims should be accommodated in mixed wards only in emergencies. A Muslim woman may find it difficult to accept an X-ray gown because it is short.

Many Muslim women wear a headscarf when out in public (the hijab) and some Muslim women will also choose to be fully covered with only their eyes and hands showing (burka). You should show sensitivity to the needs of Muslim women to dress appropriately.



## **Death customs**

A dying Muslim will wish to lie on their right side facing Makkah (the Qibla). Familiar people can give comfort by reading to the patient verses from the Qur'an. It is an important religious duty to visit the sick and dying, so a large number of visitors may arrive at all hours.

Should a baby die at or after four months of pregnancy or soon after birth, he or she will be named, washed, shrouded and buried in the usual manner. If the foetus dies before four months of pregnancy, then it should be wrapped in a clean cloth and buried.

It is customary among Pakistanis and Arabs to express their emotion freely when a relative dies. Whenever possible you should give them privacy to do so; and explain gently but firmly the need to avoid disturbing other patients by their mourning.

The next of kin will want to arrange to wash the body before burial. In Islam the body must be buried as quickly as possible (cremation is forbidden). A post mortem must be avoided if legally possible, as this is not allowed and causes considerable distress; organs should all be buried with the body.

## **Birth customs**

Some Muslim women will refuse to be examined internally before giving birth and may be reluctant to be attended by a male obstetrician unless in an emergency. When a Muslim child is born, as soon as possible a member of the family must recite in the baby's ear a prayer that normally lasts a minute or two (Azaan). A Muslim boy must be circumcised as soon as possible. It is not a religious requirement for girls to be circumcised.

## **Family planning**

Strictly speaking an orthodox Muslim would not approve of family-planning devices. In practice individuals vary widely in their attitudes; information about facilities should be given, but no pressure exerted. Any discussion should be in strict confidence, and never in front of visiting relatives or friends.

## **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

There are no particular issues relating to blood transfusions, but although organ donation has been permitted it is a complicated issue for Muslims and will often be met with reluctance. The decision would lie with the individual and their family in consultation with their local religious leader.

# Jehovah's Witnesses

## **Introduction**

Charles Taze Russell founded the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1872, although it did not become known officially as such until 1931. Jehovah's Witnesses view themselves as Christian and regard Jesus Christ as the Son of God, but not in the sense of being equal with God or one with God. Jehovah's Witnesses consider their religion to be a restoration of original first-century Christianity. They accept both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible as inspired by God. They do not, however, use the symbol of the cross because they believe it to be of pagan origin.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe it is important to share their views with others and are well known for calling on people at their homes and for their magazine *The Watchtower*. Today the Jehovah's Witness publishing complex in Brooklyn, New York, issues 800,000 copies of its two magazines daily and publishes 100,000 books.

Jehovah's Witnesses refuse blood transfusions and take a non-negotiable stance on this matter (see below).

## **Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness**

Most Jehovah's Witnesses have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and are willing to seek medical help and advice when sick. They may be keen to make sure that medical staff are aware they would reject blood transfusions.

## **Religious practices**

There are no specific religious practices that would affect a Jehovah's Witness while in hospital.

## **Diet**

Jehovah's Witnesses reject foods containing blood but have no other special dietary requirements. Some Jehovah's Witnesses may be vegetarian and others may abstain from alcohol, but this is a personal choice. Jehovah's Witnesses do not smoke or use other tobacco products.

## **Fasting**

Jehovah's Witnesses are not required to fast for religious reasons, but must not consume blood (for example in blood sausage or in animal meat if the blood has not been properly drained).

## **Washing and toilet**

Washing and toilet present no unusual problems for Jehovah's Witnesses.

## **Ideas of modesty and dress**

There are no particular points to be noted in this area and few Jehovah's Witnesses would object to being examined by doctors of the opposite sex.

## **Death customs**

Jehovah's Witnesses do not have special rituals for the sick or the dying. You should make every reasonable effort to provide medical assistance and comfort. Spiritual care will be provided by local Witnesses (friends, family and elders).

## **Birth customs**

There are no specific Jehovah's Witness customs relating to birth itself.

## **Family planning**

Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God or Jehovah. As the Bible does not directly discuss birth control, birth control is seen as a personal decision and is left to the individual's conscience. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that human life begins at conception and do not therefore approve of abortion. If the termination of a pregnancy is the only means of saving a mother's life, the choice is up to each individual. Witnesses are strictly politically neutral and do not get involved in any debates or demonstrations on this issue.

## **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

Jehovah's Witnesses carry on their person an advance medical directive/release that states they must not receive blood transfusions under any circumstances, while releasing medical practitioners and hospitals from responsibility for any damage that may be caused by their refusal of blood. When entering the hospital, they should sign consent/release forms that reiterate this and specify the hospital care needed.

Jehovah's Witnesses' religious principles do not absolutely prohibit the use of minor blood components such as albumin, immune globulins and haemophiliac preparations. Each Witness must decide individually whether he or she can accept these. While forbidden to take blood, they are not specifically forbidden to take in tissue or bone from another human. Jehovah's Witnesses currently accept organ transplants, although any surgery would have to be performed on a bloodless basis. Some Jehovah's Witnesses may not wish to donate their organs because someone else's blood would then flow through them. In the case of organs that do not involve blood flow, for example corneas, they would have no religious grounds to object to donation. Therefore, whether to accept an organ transplant or donate organs is a personal decision.

# Judaism



## Introduction

Judaism is an ancient religion that has been practised for over 5,000 years and is based on the belief in one universal omnipotent God. They also believe that God is omniscient and will reward the righteous and punish the wicked at the end of time when there will be a resurrection of all the dead.

Jews live according to values based on love of one's neighbour and tolerance of one's fellow human beings. Judaism requires its followers to live their lives in accordance with 613 Commandments (mitzvot) covering all aspects of life. Judaism does not believe non-Jews are obliged to live by the same rules.

The religious aspects of Judaism are based on relationships: the relationship of God and humanity, and the relationships between humans based on principles of fairness and equality. Religious observance is a means of publicly displaying subservience to the will of God.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Most Jewish patients have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and are willing to seek medical help and advice when sick.

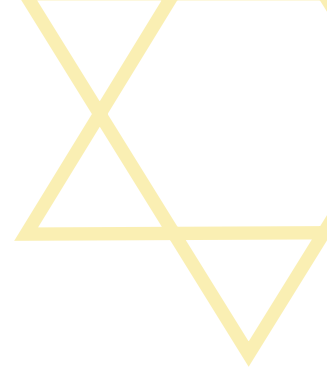
## Religious practices

One of the most important Jewish practices is Sabbath observance. The Jewish Sabbath (Shabbat) begins at dusk on Friday and ends with full darkness on Saturday night, a period of approximately 25 hours. It is a day of rest and begins and ends with ceremonies in the home. Before dusk on Friday candles are lit, and a prayer of blessing is said over wine and bread before a festive meal. After dark on Saturday night, a prayer of farewell is said over a candle, wine and spices. If at all possible you should make arrangements to enable Jewish patients to observe these rituals.

On the Sabbath creative work is prohibited, and this includes things such as writing, travelling and switching on lights or electrical appliances. Orthodox Jews will not ask a non-Jew directly to do anything they would not do for themselves. If you are arranging travel for a Friday discharge, make sure you leave adequate time for all discharge procedures, such as collecting prescriptions, so that the patient has enough time to get home before dusk.

Observant Jews will travel to hospital for admission on the Sabbath only in an emergency, but if discharged on a Sabbath will wait in hospital until nightfall when Sabbath ends before travelling home.

Observant Jewish men and women pray three times a day in the morning, afternoon and evening, and would appreciate privacy for this. Men will wrap themselves in a prayer shawl, and during weekday morning prayers will wear phylacteries (leather boxes containing scriptural passages) strapped to their head and arm. Any room or area provided for prayer should be clean, and contain no religious items on display which may offend or distract them in their act of worship. It would be helpful to indicate which way is east.



## Diet

Judaism lays down strict guidelines concerning some aspects of their diet. Acceptable food is called kosher. Continuing to eat a kosher diet while in hospital or on a medically restricted diet poses a major problem for Jewish people. However, as there is a wide range of religious practice by Jewish people, observance of the dietary laws will vary from patient to patient.

It is important that staff ensure that Jewish patients are given meals bearing the word Kosher. Religious Jews will not wish to use hospital crockery and should be served the kosher meal in its original wrapping, together with plastic cutlery. If help is required to open the container, it should be done in full view of the patient.

Milk should not be offered to Jewish patients along with a meal of meat or chicken. Most Jews observe a period of at least three hours before having milk or products that contain milk. Simple items like jelly or yoghurts can be a problem for Jewish patients as they can contain gelatine, which is of animal derivation. Since most cheese contains rennet, cheese must display a rabbinical seal of approval. Many Jews will not eat cheese which is described as vegetarian. While most Jews will take regular milk, some religious Jews will only use supervised milk.

The Really Jewish Food Guide from the United Synagogue Kashrut Board has useful information about approved products. It covers many items available in supermarkets and grocery stores ([www.kosher.org.uk](http://www.kosher.org.uk)).

The Festival of Passover, which occurs in the spring, is a time when there are additional dietary stringencies. The label on the kosher hospital meals must indicate that they are specifically approved for Passover. In particular, no leavened bread or cakes are permitted, and instead, unleavened bread called matzah is eaten. At this time, Jewish patients may wish to eat and drink only products approved for Passover. They may require to store food in their locker or in a refrigerator. Some patients may only take food and drink brought in by relatives and every effort should be made to accommodate them.

## Fasting

Yom Kippur is the most important holy day of the year for most Jews. Many Jews who do not observe any other Jewish custom will fast during Yom Kippur. It is a 25-hour fast beginning before sunset on the evening before and ending after nightfall. These restrictions can be lifted where a threat to life or health is involved. Children under the age of nine and women in childbirth (from the time labour begins until three days after birth) are not permitted to fast, even if they want to. Older children and women from the third to the seventh day after childbirth are permitted to fast, but are permitted to break the fast if they feel the need to do so. People with other illnesses would consult a physician and rabbi for advice.

There are five further fasts, four of them minor, that last from dawn to nightfall, and a person is permitted to eat breakfast if up before sunrise. There is a great deal of leniency in the minor fasts for people who have medical conditions or other difficulties with fasting. The fifth fast is Tisha B'Av, a fast that takes place in July or August and begins in the evening at sunset and finishes at nightfall.





## Washing and toilet

On waking, orthodox Jews will want to wash their hands as they may not eat or drink before doing so. A brief blessing is recited before eating any food, and Orthodox Jews will want to wash before eating bread. Some Orthodox Jews do not bathe or shower during major festivals or Shabbat and some men prefer to be bearded or will only use an electric razor (a modern circumvention of a ruling against shaving).

## Ideas of modesty and dress

For the older generations and more Orthodox Jews, one usually exposes the body only in the privacy of the home and to a spouse. A Jewish woman may be reluctant to have any intimate physical examination, especially during menstruation. Women will probably wish to keep their arms and their legs above the knee covered at all times, or expose only those parts of their body that are to be examined. For Orthodox patients, wherever possible the examiner should be of the same sex as the patient. However, if the only person available to do an examination is of the opposite sex, this is acceptable as a last resort.

Both sexes may wish to keep their hair covered (Orthodox Jewish women may wear a wig, hat, scarf or snood and Orthodox Jewish men a skull cap called a yarmulke, kippah or kappel). If the examination is to include the head, then discuss the removal of head coverings sensitively, and where appropriate offer an alternative (a theatre cap, for example).

## Death customs

There are specific Jewish laws and customs for dealing with the dead. It is important to contact the family and the appropriate Burial Society as soon as possible. No mutilation of the body is allowed unless there is a legal requirement for a post mortem. When a Jewish person dies, the following guidelines apply:

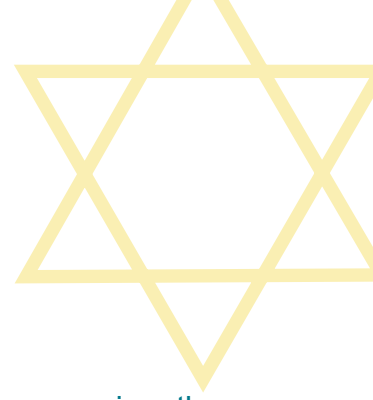
1. Do not touch the body until 20 minutes after death.
2. Do not wash the body (clean crevices if required to preserve the dignity of the deceased).
3. Do not remove false teeth or other prostheses.
4. Close the eyes.
5. Straighten the body out, laying it flat with the feet together and arms by the side.
6. Cover the body with a plain white sheet without emblems.

Jewish law forbids Jews to do anything to hasten a person's death and at the same time requires everything possible to be done to comfort the dying. Some Jews would not touch a dying person for fear that the slightest touch might hasten their death. So the range of what you can or cannot do for a dying person may vary and you should consult a trusted rabbi acceptable to the family.

Some families will want to ensure that someone from the Jewish community remains to sit with the body. Psalms may be recited during this time. While Orthodox Jews are buried, not cremated, Reform and Liberal Jews may choose either method of disposal of the body.

Immediately after death, close relatives may make a tear in one of their garments.





If a child dies, the body should be treated in the same way as an adult. Jewish law requires the burial of miscarried foetuses, which should be delivered to the family or burial society.

### **Birth customs**

A healthy male boy must be circumcised on the eighth day after birth, although this must be delayed for a premature or unhealthy baby. The ritual is performed by a trained and medically certified religious functionary, and the child is named at the ceremony. If the mother and child are still at the hospital a small room may be requested and others of the family will attend.

### **Family planning**

Contraception is not banned in the Jewish religion, but there are guidelines that need to be followed as to when and how it is appropriate. Couples may wish to consult their chosen rabbi, together with guidance from medical staff, before making a decision.

Jews believe that until the head of a baby has left the womb of its mother, it does not gain full status as a living person. This means that where the mother may die if the pregnancy continues, Jewish law permits a therapeutic abortion to save the life of the mother at the expense of the child. In cases of rape or where the mental health of the mother is at risk if the pregnancy continues, the mother may wish to discuss the medical advice with her rabbi before making a decision.

### **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

Jewish law approves blood transfusion in order to achieve the desired medical outcomes.

Jewish law permits organ donation from dead bodies where there is a high chance of success for the specific recipient. Relatives of a potential donor will wish to consult an appropriate rabbi before making a decision, and this should obviously be facilitated.

# Paganism



## Introduction

Paganism has its roots in the pre-Christian religions of Europe. Its re-emergence in Scotland parallels that in other western countries, where it has been growing rapidly since the 1950s. The social infrastructure of paganism reflects the value the pagan community places on unity in diversity; it consists of a network of inter-related traditions and local groups served by several larger organisations. In Scotland the Pagan Federation acts as an educational and representative body.

Pagans understand deity to be manifest within nature and recognise divinity as taking many forms, finding expression in goddesses as well as gods. Goddess worship is central in paganism. Pagans believe that nature is sacred and that the natural cycles of birth, growth and death observed in the world around us carry profoundly spiritual meanings. Human beings are seen as part of nature, along with other animals, trees, stones, plants and everything else that is of this earth. Most pagans believe in some form of reincarnation, viewing death as a transition within a continuing process of existence.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Most pagans have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and are willing to seek medical help and advice when sick.

## Religious practices

Most pagans worship the old pre-Christian gods and goddesses through seasonal festivals and other ceremonies. Observance of these festivals is very important to pagans, and those in hospital will generally wish to celebrate them in some form. As there are many diverse traditions within paganism, you should ask individual patients if they have any special requirements. Some pagans may wish to have a small white candle or a small figure of a goddess on their locker.

## Diet

For ethical reasons, most pagans strongly prefer foods derived from organic farming and free-range livestock rearing, while many are vegetarian or vegan.

## Fasting

There are no organised fast days, but some pagans choose to fast in preparation for Ostara (spring equinox).

## Washing and toilet

Washing and toilet present no unusual problems for pagans.



### **Ideas of modesty and dress**

There are no particular points to be noted in this area and few pagans would object to being examined by doctors of the opposite sex.

### **Death customs**

Most pagans believe in some form of reincarnation, viewing death as a transition within a continuing process of existence. Pagans accept death as a natural part of life and will wish to know when they are dying so that they may consciously prepare for it.

### **Birth customs**

As paganism celebrates life, birth is viewed as sacred and empowering. Pagan women will wish to make their own informed decisions regarding prenatal and neonatal care.

### **Family planning**

Pagans will generally plan pregnancies, and use contraception as appropriate. Paganism emphasises women's control over their own bodies, and the weighty decisions relating to abortion are seen as a personal matter for the woman concerned, who will be supported in the choices she makes.

### **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

Most pagans would have no objection to blood transfusions and may receive transplants or donate organs for transplant.

# Sikhism



## Introduction

The Sikh faith is a distinct religion revealed through the teachings of ten Gurus (messengers of God), the first of whom was Guru Nanak Dev Ji who was born in 1469 CE<sup>6</sup> in the Punjab, India. In 1708 the tenth and the last human Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, vested spiritual authority in the Holy Sikh Scriptures (Guru Granth Sahib Ji) and temporal authority in the community of baptised Sikhs (Khalsa Panth).

Sikhs strictly believe that there is one god, who is both transcendent and immanent (present in all things and everyone). Although above human comprehension, God can be realised and experienced through contemplation and service. The object of a Sikh's life is to develop consciousness of God and to receive God's grace through truthful living and selfless service in the context of a family life. A Sikh's way of life is guided by the following principles:

- remembering and praying to God at all times
- earning a living by honest means
- sharing with the poor and needy
- selfless service to God and His Creation
- treating all human beings as equal.

Baptised Sikhs wear five articles of faith:

- uncut hair (Kesh)
- a small wooden comb (Kangha)
- an iron/steel bangle (Kara)
- a short sword (Kirpan), and
- special shorts (Kachhera).

These articles have deep spiritual and moral significance, forming part of the Sikh Code of Ethics and Discipline. The articles of faith must not be removed.

## Attitudes to healthcare staff and illness

Most Sikhs have a positive attitude towards healthcare staff and are willing to seek medical help and advice when sick.

## Religious practices

Sikhs pray in the morning and evening, and are also expected to recite hymns whenever they have time in the day. Some privacy for prayers will be appreciated.

## Diet

Sikhs who have taken Amrit (baptised) are vegetarians. They will exclude from their diet eggs, fish and any ingredients with animal derivatives or cooked in animal fat. Dairy produce is acceptable

<sup>6</sup> Common Era



providing it is free from animal fat e.g. cheese made from non animal rennet. It is essential to avoid contamination with meat at all stages of preparation, storage and serving. Some Sikhs will only eat food prepared by their own families. Non-vegetarian Sikhs will only eat meat that has been slaughtered according to their own rites (jhatka) and not halal or kosher rites.

Practising Sikhs will also refrain from alcohol, tobacco and other intoxicants. The use of tobacco or alcohol in any form is strictly forbidden to baptised Sikhs. So it is very important that they are accommodated in places where smoking or consumption of alcohol is not permitted.

### **Fasting**

Sikhs do not fast.

### **Washing and toilet**

Sikhs prefer to wash in free-flowing water, rather than sitting in a bath; and they will appreciate having water provided in the same room as the toilet, or with a bedpan when they have to use one. Sikhs will want to wash their hands and rinse their mouth before meals. The uncut hair is kept clean and neat by washing regularly and combing normally twice a day. If the patient is not well enough, nursing staff may assist in washing and combing and such help will be welcome.

### **Ideas of modesty and dress**

Some Sikh women would prefer a female doctor when being examined or treated. Sikh women should be accommodated in mixed wards only in emergencies. A Sikh woman may find it difficult to accept an X-ray gown because it is short.

As mentioned above, the five articles of the Sikh faith must not be removed. Baptised Sikh men always have their uncut hair in a turban, and baptised Sikh women will also cover their hair. You should be particularly sensitive about removing the turban, as it is worn to maintain the sanctity of Kesh (hair) and is treated with the utmost respect. Sikh women wear a long Punjabi scarf (chunni) for the same purpose.

### **Death customs**

In the final stages of illness a Sikh patient will be comforted by reciting hymns from the Sikh Holy Scriptures. A Giani (priest) from the local Gurudwara (Sikh place of worship) or another practising Sikh may do this with the patient. Most Sikhs are cremated although babies who are stillborn or die around the time of birth may be buried, and the body of a stillborn baby should be given to the parents to perform the funeral rites. The child should simply be wrapped in a plain white sheet to await the arrival of a relative who will perform the Last Offices. Cremation should take place as soon as possible after death, and friends and relatives will prepare the body the night before the cremation at the funeral parlour. After death and identification, the body or parts of the body should be covered with a plain white sheet or shroud. If the condition of the body permits, the eyes and mouth should be closed and limbs straightened with arms placed straight beside the body.



Nursing staff must ensure that none of the five articles of faith on the body of a Sikh is disturbed. It is also important not to trim the hair or beard, and the hair on the head should be kept covered.

Sikhs do not like the idea of a post mortem but will accept it if it is legally unavoidable.

### **Birth customs**

The birth of a baby is a happy occasion. The baby may not be named for several days as the initial for the name is obtained from the Guru Granth Sahib Ji (the Sikh Scriptures)<sup>7</sup>. The family may also have the baby baptised by having Amrit (holy water) placed on the tongue by a family member or baptised Sikh.

### **Family planning**

Sikhs have no objection to family planning.

### **Blood transfusions, transplants and organ donation**

Most Sikhs would have no objection to blood transfusions and may receive transplants or donate organs for transplantation. However, with regard to transplants, especially the donation of organs, the decision rests with the individual or their family, or both. In the absence of close relatives, a medical officer in charge may take whatever action he or she considers necessary to save the patient's life.

<sup>7</sup> A Sikh is likely to have a personal name (common to both sexes), a middle name ('Singh' for all males and 'Kaur' for all females), followed by a family name

# Mental Health: a note

Mental health is but one of many diagnostic areas: it has therefore not been picked out for special mention in the separate sections on individual faiths. However, sometimes a person's mental health problem is expressed in a religious way or with religious terminology. Also, a faith or belief system or faith community can be a major help in supporting people through the healing process.

When considering the religious and cultural needs of patients, please bear in mind that people from black and minority ethnic groups living in the UK are more likely to be diagnosed with mental health problems and more likely to be admitted to hospital. They are also more likely to stop attending mainstream mental health services during or after treatment. There is also some evidence that mental health problems in such minority groups sometimes go unrecognised. There are many possible reasons for this – but cultural and religious factors may well be involved.

In these circumstances, health care staff will need to be aware of differences in culture and faith when assessing the mental health and well being of patients, whatever their background or community. Research into clinical outcomes has shown that patients benefit when their care plans take account of their faith, religious practices and other personal beliefs.

# Sources

**The sources listed below have been used in preparing this document and may be of further interest to NHS staff**

*A Guide to Faith Communities in Scotland: 2003: The Scottish Inter-Faith Council*

*Culture and Belief System, Information Manual: 22/03/06: editor, Rev Alister Bull, Yorkhill Division, NHS Greater Glasgow*

*Promoting Race Equality and Cultural Competency in Health: Greater Glasgow Primary Care NHS Trust*

*Religions and Cultures Manual: NHS, Ayrshire and Arran*

*Religions and Cultures Manual: 2005: North Glasgow University Hospitals Division: Rev. Pat McDonald, Hospital Chaplain, Glasgow Royal Infirmary*

*Religions and Cultures, Guide to Beliefs, Customs and Diversity for Health and Social Care Services: revised edition 2004: Dr. Moussa Jogee OBE*

*'A Mosaic of Meaning' – attitudes towards mental health: University of Central Lancashire.*



# Web sites

[www.beliefnet.com](http://www.beliefnet.com)

[www.diversiton.com](http://www.diversiton.com)

[www.ethnicityonline.net](http://www.ethnicityonline.net)

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

[www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions)

[www.mfghc.com](http://www.mfghc.com)

[www.chaplains.co.uk](http://www.chaplains.co.uk)

[www.elib.scot.nhs.uk/equality](http://www.elib.scot.nhs.uk/equality)

# Contacts

A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, horizontal brushstrokes in a light yellow color, located at the top of the page behind the title.

A list of useful national contacts can be found in the flap on the back cover of this guide.

If you would like another copy please contact Healthcare Chaplaincy Training & Development, NHS Education for Scotland, 2 Central Quay, 89 Hydepark Street, Glasgow G3 8BW.



