

THE BENEFITS OF FASTING

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Fasting has been used in religious and health traditions around the world to improve health and to aid in the achievement of enlightenment and to help strengthen self-control for thousands of years. From the bible to the Koran to the medical texts of ancient Greece, abstinence from food and drink has played a central role in the treatment of illness and disease. Today, many practitioners turn to fasting for a variety of conditions, but does this practice actually work? Is there any hard scientific evidence backing up this practice, or is the idea of fasting little more than self-induced starvation?

Fasting can take on three essential forms:

1. **Dry Fasting** involves abstaining from all manner of food and liquid.
2. **Juice Fasting** involves abstinence from all food and drink except water and pure vegetable and fruit juices.
3. **Modified Fasting** includes small amounts of food, usually raw fruits and steamed vegetables or the use of herbal teas or broths.

Recommended fasting normally lasts from one to three days and can be safely tolerated by most people. Any fast for periods longer than this or experienced by individuals suffering from a particular illness or medical condition should involve the supervision of a doctor and or fasting therapist as you will read later on in this article.

HOW DOES FASTING WORK?

In the fasting state, nonessential tissues, like fat, are used for fuel, while vital organs are spared. The physiological effects of fasting have been well-researched and documented and follow a distinct sequence. This process includes specific changes in metabolism to conserve energy. During the initial period of conservation, the body continues to function with the same degree of efficiency and blood sugar levels remain fairly constant. Early on in the fasting cycle, the body manufactures glucose (a process known as gluconeogenesis) and releases stores of it from within the liver (glycogenolysis). By the second day, the body releases triglycerides from fat cells. These triglycerides oxidize into acids called ketones, which are then used for energy production. Throughout this process, the body's metabolism can slow by as much as 75% its normal rate, therefore any fasting lasting longer than 24 hours should include plenty of rest and abstinence from vigorous exercise. For fasting lasting longer than three days, it is important that the subject is not suffering from any medical conditions that might affect energy levels. Also, it is important to monitor and regulate exertion levels. At this point there is a risk of bodily starvation occurring if the fast is being conducted improperly. Obviously, if the body does not receive food after a

supervised fast, starvation will inevitably follow. Therefore, providing you are healthy, not pregnant or breast-feeding and able to refrain from extreme exertion, a one to three day fast is entirely safe.

Preparation for any fast should begin with a day of lighter eating to allow the body to adjust. Research has shown that vegetarian meals are best as they are easier to digest and allow the body to begin decelerating. Digestion is the singular most demanding physical function your body is required to regularly perform. Since animal products are usually harder to digest, the more of them you eat, the more “years” and mileage you add to your body. The day before fasting, focus on raw fruits and steamed vegetable and move away from large meals, to smaller and more frequent servings.

For your first experience with fasting, it is best not to go dry. Drink plenty of water (preferably bottled or distilled). If you are drinking juices, avoid acidic juices or drink caffeine-free herbal teas. It is important to continue taking any prescription medication, and to consult your physician first, however, you should refrain from taking vitamins and supplements which would place an unnecessary strain on the body that would negate many of the benefits you are seeking. Individuals taking recreational drugs should avoid fasting without medical supervision, as the withdrawal can be severe. Once your fast is completed, you should similarly ease back into solid foods, beginning with light meals of raw food. Avoid binging at all costs as this will place an uncomfortable demand on your body.

At the beginning of a fast, energy levels will usually increase. It is not uncommon for initial sugar levels to adjust at that point and cause hunger pains, headaches, fatigue or irritability, but this phase is like a *withdrawal* phase that will pass quickly. This is usually followed by a feeling of calmness and serenity and improved mental clarity. If increases in energy levels disrupt your sleeping patterns at night, be sure to take a nap or two during the day. Your lunch break is an ideal time for this. Your body will often eject a number of toxins leading to a thick feeling on the tongue and unpleasant flavors in the mouth. Simply rinse your mouth with warm water or water with mint leaves or real lemon juice to cut the taste. Rather than performing intense physical exercises, try to stay close to home during a fast, listening to music, watching movies, reading, napping or meditating.

GIVE ME PROOF!

The first published research into therapeutic fasting appeared in the West in the late 19th century. Since that time, literally thousands of studies have emerged, including coverage in the most esteemed medical journals in our country. Documented studies have found fasting to have positive effects on obesity, cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disorders, diabetes, skin disease, gastrointestinal disease, arthritis and allergies to name just a few conditions. Below, we will detail some of these studies. In every case, the essential principle at work here is that fasting allows your body, which is overworked from digestion, to rest. By placing fewer demands on the gastrointestinal tract, the skin, the liver and your kidneys, your body is better

able to remove damaging toxins, including metals like lead, cadmium and mercury and chemical compounds like pesticides and herbicides. Fasting also helps strengthen personal resolve and self-control, not only on a physical level, but also at a physiological level. Many individuals use fasting to begin a period of weaning themselves off of unhealthy foods. Three-day fasts can be used to launch a new healthier diet, transition to vegetarianism or reduced meat consumption, or to reduce caloric intake. Consider the research:

Sir Robert McCarrison discovered patterns in the health conditions of individuals living in India which he correlated to their eating habits. As the nutritional value of food grew worse from north to south, so too did the health of the citizens. Individuals eating more fruit and vegetables and smaller portions were healthier than those eating processed foods. McCarrison was among the first to notice that individuals with healthier diets usually incorporated regular fasting into their routine and he associated the increased level of control as a discipline required for both fasting and stricter dieting to be codependent skills;

A Norwegian study on rheumatoid arthritis patients found that fasting was an effective treatment for their condition. Patients that left the fast with healthier eating habits and who maintained a habit of weekly fasting, were able to sustain the benefits, while those who returned to unhealthy habits lost the benefits soon after. Patients who had a reduced fast for four weeks and then entered into a vegetarian diet for one-year report decreases in swollen joints, increased strength and overall improved health. There was also substantial proof that there was a reduction in disease activity as well. (Kjeldsen-Kragh);

A study by Kernt et al, found that fasting caused changes in biomechanical structure, including an increase in the production of Growth Hormone by the pituitary gland, which had a positive role in strengthening the immune system;

Author Jack Goldstein, author of *Triumph Over Disease*, cites numerous studies that show harmful toxins like DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane) a mutagenic insecticide, have been removed by strict water fasts;

Dr. Shahid Athar, performed a series of studies on Muslims fasting during Ramadan and found that Islamic fasting was able to lower lipid levels in the body, lowering cholesterol, lowering systolic blood pressure and releasing hypertension. He also cited that all practitioners reported the psychological advantages of peace of mind and increased tranquility;

Similar studies on Ramadan fasting by Ahmed Adlouni, Nosreddine Gail, Abdellah Benslimane, Rachid Saile and Jean Mechel Lecerf conducted in 1997 found a marked increase in high density lipoprotein cholesterol (so called good cholesterol) and a decrease in low-density lipoprotein cholesterol (bad cholesterol);

A study by A. Michalsen, W. Weidenhammer, D. Melchart, J. Langhorts, J. Saha and G. Dobos found that fasting followed by a vegetarian diet effectively treated rheumatoid arthritis, reduced chronic pain, countered stress exhaustion and increased mental acuity;

In a study by Dr. Alan Goldhamer, it was found that fasting (while under medical supervision) greatly reduced the length of time addicts of nicotine, caffeine, cocaine and alcohol suffered withdrawal symptoms;

Dr. Goldhamer's research also found that fasting is particularly effective and commonly recommended to counter uterine fibroid tumors. While hysterectomies are ordinarily used in such cases, Dr. Goldhamer has found that a correct fast will often dramatically reduce the size and effect of these tumors and allow surgery and drug use to be completely avoided. Similar success has been experienced with ovarian cysts and cervical dysplasia;

In another study conducted by Dr. Goldhamer, 151 of 154 (98%) consecutive cases of high blood pressure (hypertension) were able to achieve and maintain normal blood pressure through fasting, without medication. Similarly, he noted that it was not unusual to see a drop in cholesterol levels of as much as 100 points;

Sharon Begley and Mary Hager, in their article featured in Newsweek on March 5th, 1990, stated that our bodies begin to fall *apart* because of wear and tear and the effects of accumulated toxic materials. Research into how to slow this inevitable process down has been focusing on "caloric restrictions" and fasting to successfully reverse and slow cellular decline. Richard Weindruch Ph.D. and Roy Walford M.D., have both conducted extensive research substantiating this claim;

A study performed by JA Mattison, MA Lane, GS Ross and DK Ingram at the Intramural Research Program, Gerontology Research Center, National Institute on Aging in Baltimore in 2003 found that caloric restriction extended lifespan in and reduced the incidence and age of onset of age-related diseases in Rhesus Monkeys by up to

30%. A follow up study in 1987 by GS Ross et al proved a direct correlation between rhesus monkeys and human biology in this regard.

A similar study by this group found that caloric restriction had positive effects on thyroid hormone production.

A third study conducted at the Institute concluded that: "For more than 70 years it has been recognized that reduction in calories intake by 30-40% from ad libitum levels leads to a significant extension of mean and maximal lifespan in a variety of short-lived species."

A study by CG Fowler, P. Torre and JW Kemnitz in Wisconsin found that caloric restriction reduced the effects of aging on the auditory function of rhesus monkeys.

A study in 2001 by GS Roth et al found that caloric restriction prevented the age-related decline in plasma melatonin levels in rhesus monkeys.

A study by TD Moscrip et al found that caloric reduction had a positive effect on locomotor activity in elderly rhesus monkeys.

In the end, there simply is overwhelming evidence regarding the benefits of fasting in a sound and correct manner. Dr. D.J. Scott notes that despite this there is an *unfounded fear about the peculiar state of disease within the imagination, arising largely out of a lack of knowledge. If we are slaves to unfounded fears, we are also slaves to the beliefs and practices and actions, which are inconsistent with our well-being. So it is a matter of necessity that we understand fasting and all of its facets if we are to overcome the fears that are associated with it. Many people attempt to solve the problems of life, the distresses of the body and the anxieties of the mind with food and drugs. They have great fear about not eating because they have experienced the headaches, the weakness and distress they associate with it and they are convinced that food and drugs are the answer to their problems. How can you convince someone that going further without food is a matter of necessity for the recovery of their health? Only through knowledge and enough suffering to change his attitudes.*

In the first 100 years of study, involving thousands of cases of medical fasting, involving patients usually suffering from severe life-threatening conditions, there have been only 7 cases of death reported from fasting. In every case, these were extremely long fasts lasting weeks on end. In five of these cases, drugs were administered

during the fast, which as Dr. Joel Fuhrman notes, is quite contraindicated: *If we look at these cases, we can clearly see that the individuals were fasting improperly, using multiple drugs during the fast, in patients who had heart failure and kidney disease prior to the fast...[some of] these patients drank unrestricted amounts of coffee and tea...during the fast and were given digoxin, diuretics and anticoagulants.*

Dr. Leon Chaitow, N.D., D.O., M.R.O conducted a detailed study on fasting and concluded that fasting for periods of less than three days is a safe and powerful tool for combating many major ailments in the world today and a powerhouse preventative measure.

Dr. Trevor Salloum notes that beyond decreasing weight, clearer skin, tissue repair, decreased pain, improved concentration, relaxation, spare time and saving money, perhaps the greatest benefit is the satisfaction that you are taking a major role in improving your health.

In the end, there should be nothing rote about eating. The power of eating and the incredible ability to draw nourishment into your body from our planet will once again become the celebration it was intended to be. You will realize that if you can't put something good into your body, it's better not to put anything at all. Fasting will heighten your awareness and bring you closer to your nature as a mortal creature. As Dr. Ralph Cinque wrote: *Fasting teaches us to eat with reverence. The power to control your body, to improve your health, to celebrate life and to find newness wherever you are is awaiting you. Will you claim it*

“A wonderful thing about fasting is that it puts an interval between the behavior that you are accustomed to and the behavior that you aspire to. We tend to be creatures of habit, and the ways that we are accustomed to eating and living feel as natural to us as breathing. That is why it is so difficult for people to stop bad habits. But fasting brings your present lifestyle to an abrupt halt. It gives you an opportunity to pause, reflect and decide how you are going to conduct your life afterwards. This enables you to make a break with your past and set off in a new, more positive direction. “

—Dr. Ralph Cinques—