



What is fasting?

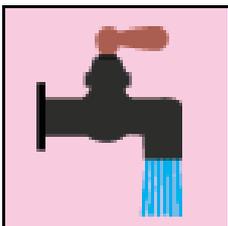
Fasting is the act of abstaining from all food or drink except water for a period of time. That period could be one day to a couple of weeks. It can be for therapeutic or religious purposes. What happens is that adipose tissue and eventually muscle is used to spare the breakdown of vital organs. Fasts should be done under supervision, and the type of fast should be matched well to the patient's needs, including their age, disease state, individual metabolism and their career commitments.

I've heard of a juice fast. Is that the same thing?

It is similar, but is really a restricted diet rather than a true fast. Juice is a concentrated food with a high level of carbohydrate. In a true fast, ketosis can occur which will help burn fats. This won't occur in a juice fast.

What sort of side-effects might occur?

Possibly none, but if there is undiscovered pathology, then a number of side effects may occur which could mean ending the fast prematurely. These could include a sudden drop in blood pressure, hypothermia, diarrhoea, cardiac arrhythmias, gout and other symptoms. In this case, the fast should end immediately. But if there are no serious side effects, there could still be some discomfort. For example, if the person is addicted to coffee, for example, then withdrawal symptoms may occur. There can also be hypoglycaemia, insomnia, dizziness, nausea, aching limbs, palpitations or headaches. Mostly these pass fairly quickly.



Do I have to prepare or do anything afterwards?

To prepare, it is good to reduce food intake, and if possible, undertake a liver detox diet. If not, steamed veg and clean wholefoods is a good start. High fibre, lots of water and antioxidants will help too.

After the fast, it is good to begin to eat a gentle vegetarian diet for the next week, gradually reintroducing meat and eggs after that.

What about supplements?

You would not take supplements during your fast, but if you are on medications, you should speak to your doctor prior to fasting and get advice.

How much water would I need?

This would be determined by your thirst. At least a few glasses a day are needed, but excessive amounts are not required. Some research has shown that obese patients may need up to 3L per day. Only pure water is recommended.

What about exercise?

During a fast you need to rest. Gently walking or doing a little yoga will not be a problem, but heavy exercise is contraindicated. Catch up on sleep and enjoy it. Do go outside for the sunlight, and fresh air. At least 20 minutes of sunlight is recommended.

Is fasting for one day enough?

That depends on you and what you want to achieve. Yes, it can be a good way to clear some toxins and re-evaluate your relationship with food. But if you are trying to lose weight or fast to improve your condition with diabetes, obesity, heart disease etc. then a slightly longer fast would be more useful. Again, it must be undertaken with your doctor's knowledge, and under supervision. If fasting for more than five days, some doctors recommend being an inpatient.



Will it help my immune system?

Research has shown that fasting can increase immune function after the fast, by increasing macrophage activity, enhancing T cell activity, decreasing antigen-antibody complexes and complement factors and increasing immunoglobulin levels.



Have people died while fasting?

Yes, they have. But usually they fasted when it was contraindicated, or fasted for too long. Fasting without competent supervision and support is not recommended. A short fast of 1-5 days for a healthy person is extremely unlikely to do any damage, and very likely to be beneficial, as long as common sense prevails (ie. no vigorous exercise, quick reporting of adverse symptoms, etc). Over time, our bodies have evolved adaptive mechanisms to survive without food for periods of time due to drought, famine, climate change etc.

Can children or pregnant women fast?

Children can, but only for very short periods, as their bodies are rapidly growing and need nutrients. Any fast for a child must be meticulously supervised. As for pregnancy, there is insufficient research into the effects on foetuses of fasting in pregnancy, so it should be regarded as a contraindication.

Where can I find more information?

Websites:

<http://cinque.getwebspace.com/facts.html>

<http://drbenkim.com/fasting.html>

The following website gives directions for Ayurvedic fasting practices:

<http://altmedicine.about.com/cs/dietarytherapy/a/PanchaKarma.htm>

Fasting procedure

- Discuss your fast with your doctor and your naturopath. Ask about taking any medications you are on during the fast, and work out the most desirable length of the fast. Your supervisor should have a full case history.
- Begin to prepare for the fast. Put in for your time off work, get in a good stock of library books, magazines, videos etc. Tell friends and family.
- The week before, start to eat a bit less, and cut down on alcohol, caffeine, junk food, cigarettes, sugars, fats etc.
- During the fast, rest well, and drink water to satisfy your thirst. Catch up on sleep, read and make sure you go outside for at least half an hour a day and get some sunshine. Very gentle exercise only for short periods daily if desired.
- If you experience any severe symptoms, contact your doctor immediately.
- When you come off your fast, begin to eat very small meals of steamed veg, fruit and clean foods, gradually increasing the size of the meals.
- After a week, gradually reintroduce meat, eggs, fish, and more normal foods, but try to stay away from poor dietary choices and bad habits.

Contraindications:

Do not fast if you are:

- very thin/emaciated/prone to anorexia nervosa
- very ill or have cancer or major heart disease
- needing to work or exercise hard within the fasting and recovery period
- anaemic or have porphyria
- pregnant or lactating
- very young (only very short fasts if absolutely necessary)
- have known nutritional deficiencies/malnutrition or low immunity
- pre or post surgery
- in very cold weather
- tired and run down
- clinically depressed or mentally ill

