

Fasting is the Answer. What is the Question?

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In the world of our ancient ancestors, fasting occurred primarily by force, not by choice. Humans would fast when resources became scarce, such as when spring came late. The ability of humans to fast was a biological necessity born from the disproportionate use of glucose by the brain. Were it not for the biological adaptation we call fasting, our species would never have survived. During fasting, the body preferentially utilizes fat for energy and breaks down other tissues in inverse order to their importance to the body.

Today, the environment of scarcity has largely been eliminated in the industrialized countries and has been replaced by an environment of excess. Surprisingly, the physiological process of fasting, which once kept us from dying of starvation, can now help us overcome the effects of dietary excess from the consumption of “pleasure trap” chemicals including oil, sugar, and salt as well as highly processed flour products and factory farmed animal foods that have resulted in an epidemic of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, autoimmune disorders and cancer. We can use the natural process of fasting to counteract the effects of poor diet choices and to help make the transition to a health promoting diet.

Would fasting help?

In the past 30 years, I have witnessed the effect of medically supervised, water-only fasting in over 8,000 patients. There is nothing that is more effective than fasting when it comes to treating the consequences of dietary excess. Not every condition will respond to fasting. Genetic disorders and certain types of kidney disease, for example, may not respond. But many of the most common causes of premature death and disability respond, and often spectacularly.

Who benefits from fasting? The following are six of the most common conditions that respond well.

1. Obesity is primarily the result of addiction to the artificial stimulation of dopamine in the brain by the consumption of chemicals added to our foods, including oil, sugar, salt and dairy products. The answer to obesity is to adopt a health-promoting diet derived exclusively from whole natural foods including fruits and vegetables, raw nuts and seeds and the variable addition of minimally processed, non-glutinous grains and beans. When fully implemented, in conjunction with adequate sleep and activity, predictable, consistent weight loss will occur that averages 1.5-2 pounds per week for women and 2-3 pounds per week for men.

If your goal is to lose excess fat and you have trouble adopting a health-promoting program, a period of fasting may be of benefit. The protected environment of a fasting center provides a focused opportunity for intense education and the social support needed to escape the addictive

forces of the dietary pleasure trap. The fasting experience functions like rebooting a corrupted hard drive on a computer. After fasting, whole natural food is once again appealing, making adopting a health-promoting diet more achievable.

If your goal is to lose weight and escape the pleasure trap of processed foods, a period of fasting from a few days to a few weeks may be beneficial.

2. The dietary pleasure trap is insidious, and the consequences of poor dietary choices go beyond obesity. Overstimulation by artificially concentrated calories can confuse normal satiety signals resulting in persistent overeating. Over time, this results in the degenerative diseases of dietary excess including high blood pressure and the resulting cardiovascular disease.

For people who have fallen into the dietary pleasure trap and developed high blood pressure, medically supervised water-only fasting has been shown to be a safe and effective means of normalizing blood pressure and reversing cardiovascular disease. In a study conducted at the TrueNorth Health Center in conjunction with Cornell University Professor T. Colin Campbell, the use of fasting for 2-4 weeks in patients with stage 3 hypertension resulted in reductions of systolic blood pressure of over 60 mm/Hg. This is the largest effect size of any study published to date. At the TrueNorth Health Center we routinely see patients normalize their blood pressure and eliminate the need for medications.

If your goal is to normalize elevated blood pressure and reverse cardiovascular disease, a period of medically supervised fasting may be beneficial.

3. Diabetes is a condition that is increasing in epidemic proportions. Largely the consequence of dietary excess, the resulting alteration of physiological functions such as high blood sugar levels and insulin resistance results in a cascade of consequences including blindness from retinal damage, heart attacks and stroke, reduced healing capacity, nerve damage, impotence, gangrene, etc. Fasting, along with a health-promoting diet and exercise program, can dramatically increase insulin sensitivity and bring blood sugar levels under control.

If your goal is to normalize blood sugar levels and avoid or eliminate the need for medications and their consequences, a period of fasting may prove beneficial. Most patients with Type 2 diabetes are capable of achieving normal blood sugar levels without the need for medications.

4. Drug addiction has become the norm. Nicotine, alcohol, caffeine, and a plethora of prescription and recreational drugs dominate the lives of the majority of people living in industrialized society. The supportive environment of a fasting center can be helpful in getting safely through withdrawal symptoms and more effectively establishing healthy habits while eliminating the perceived need for addictive substances.

If your goal is to escape addiction and live a life free of dependence on health-compromising chemicals, a period of fasting may prove to be beneficial.

5. Autoimmune disorders including Arthritis, Lupus, Colitis, Cohn's disease, Asthma, Eczema, Psoriasis, and environmental allergies are becoming more common and more debilitating. One possible contributing factor to the aggravation of autoimmune disease involves gut leakage. The absorption of antigenic substances into the blood stream as a result of increased gut permeability appears to be a factor in the aggravation of these conditions. Fasting can help to normalize gut permeability and ease the transition to a health promoting, low inflammatory diet. Many of our patients are able to effectively manage the symptoms of autoimmune disorders, thus eliminating the need for medication.

If your goal is to eliminate the problems associated with autoimmune disorders, a period of medically supervised fasting may be an important component in a comprehensive program designed to save the quality and quantity of your life.

6. Exhaustion, both physical and emotional, has become increasingly common in our fast-paced lives. Feelings of fatigue and depression can compromise the quality of your life. Reliance on artificial stimulants compounds the problem. The lack of adequate sleep and exercise and poor dietary and lifestyle choices work together to interfere with the ability of many people to enjoy their life or fulfill their potential. Fasting can give your body and your mind a complete rest.

If your goal is to "recharge" your system, fasting may help you accomplish your goals.

When properly utilized, fasting can be a powerful tool in helping your body do what it does best...heal itself. It is the answer to a surprising number of questions.