

NHA: The Science and Practice of Water-Only Fasting

Since the inception of the American Natural Hygiene Society in 1948 to its present status as the National Health Association (NHA), the NHA continues to be separate and distinct from all other health organizations by its unique, unwavering commitment to the science and practice of water-only fasting (WF). Beginning with early pioneers including Drs. Shelton, Esser, Gian-Cursio, Scott, Sidhwa, Burton, Gross, and others, and followed by subsequent generations of fasting doctors, these physicians redefined alternative, natural healthcare by helping countless thousands recover their health with WF.

Through the years, the interest in fasting has waxed and waned with cautious approval, misinformation, and unfounded concerns, while currently achieving a renewed interest and popularity with the general population, as well as numerous physicians and scientists. The successful clinical results of fasting care, coupled with established research on the science of fasting and food restriction, have only intensified the need for more widespread fasting care and more evidence-based research on the clinical benefits of WF. This is exemplified in the ongoing work of the TrueNorth Health Foundation at the vanguard of clinical fasting research under the direction of Dr. Alan Goldhamer.

Water-Only Fasting

By definition, WF is the complete abstinence from all food and liquids except water for some extended period of time. There is an extensive body of clinical evidence supporting the use of WF for a wide range of health problems. Scientific evidence continues to reveal and shed light on the reasons and cellular mechanisms for these beneficial effects.

The incredible effects of WF are the result of unique and remarkable changes that occur in the body as a direct consequence of food deprivation. When you begin to fast, blood sugar levels drop, insulin is decreased, and the hormone glucagon is increased to replenish blood sugar from the sugar reserves (glycogen) in liver and muscle cells. However, within a few days of fasting the sugar reserves are depleted, and the body is compelled to create energy from body fat and protein. By the third day of WF, protein is used more sparingly as the body shifts to fat metabolism and the production of ketones (ketogenesis) to provide energy for the body and brain.

The loss of protein and the depletion of blood sugar is tempered throughout a fast by resting as much as possible. If you are too active during a fast, body responses can be more unstable, including more rapid muscle loss, increased blood pressure, and blood sugar decline.

It is important to understand that WF is a fundamentally a resting process that harbors energy for healing, repair, and rejuvenation. When dietary nutrients are

eliminated, cells shift from typical growth and reproduction to energy conservation, maintenance, and repair.

As evidence of this, insulin, growth hormone, and insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1, which is abnormally increased by eating excessive high-protein animal products and fat- and sugar-laden junk food), which can all promote cancer and tumor growth in adults, are reduced during WF. This reduction of growth factors combined with food deprivation protects normal cells while compromising cancer cells, which are less able to adapt to extreme food deprivation. In fact, just a few days of WF before conventional cancer chemotherapy has been shown to reduce the debilitating, adverse effects of drug treatment on normal cells¹ while increasing the susceptibility of a variety of cancer cells to chemotherapy.^{2,3}

Every second of every day, the cells of the body are taking in nutrients and producing waste and by-products of routine metabolism. In addition to this internal toxemia (toxic chemicals in the bloodstream), there are a variety of

chemicals/poisons that come into your body from the outside, e.g., pesticides, pollution, additives in toxic foods, and drugs that you may be taking. To protect your vital organs, body fat can store these metabolic waste products and toxic chemicals. However, eliminating these chemicals from the body can improve your quality of life and health.

Energy harbored in the fasting process enhances the mobilization of waste from fat cells for removal through organs and tissues of elimination in a process of detoxification. The lungs, with their extensive surface area, and the skin are the largest organs of the body. So, it is very common to see discharge, drainage, and symptoms of elimination via these organs, including mucous discharge, cysts, and rashes. This enhancement of detoxification and elimination is profound and completely under the body's brilliant, intelligent, and selective control.

During fasting, the miraculous process of cellular housekeeping—autophagy—transports, recycles, and digests worn out/damaged parts of cells, fragmented proteins, bacteria, and viruses contained in your cells, providing raw materials and building blocks to support and restore vital body parts. Cells also contain a unique enzyme called mTOR, which is the primary regulator of cell growth, energy production, potential cancer growth, and cellular aging. When cells are deprived of nutrients during WF, this enzyme is turned off as the cell switches from cell division and growth to maintenance, repair, and cellular “housecleaning,” thereby promoting an antiaging effect on all body cells.

During the transformative process of autophagy, the body uses what it needs least to provide support for what it needs most. It needs its heart, lungs, kidneys, bowels, etc., but it doesn't need cysts, tumors, stones, and growths. Through autophagy, it can discard old, worn-out cells and break down and dissolve tumors or cysts, taking what it can from these unnecessary growths to support the vital organs of the body.

What makes WF even more beneficial is that while many pathological conditions are improved and resolved (including chronic inflammation, hypertension,⁴ allergy, asthma, autoimmune disease,

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and certain forms of cancer), there is also substantial fat and weight loss—typically 1–2+ pounds a day. Significantly, this fat loss includes very dangerous, hard-to-lose visceral body fat around organs—fat that does not return with healthy refeeding after the fast. So, while WF is not a complete weight-loss program, it does significantly improve the metabolic efficiency of the body. As a result, it can improve calorie use and fat loss across time and jump-start a healthy, successful weight-loss program.

WF enhances the balance and function of all body systems. In just a few days of fasting, the immune system resets and promotes the production of new white blood cells. In addition, fasting also activates the genetic expression of enzymes that repair DNA to significantly protect the reproduction and integrity of all cells.

Since WF is a profoundly simple process of deep physiological rest, exercise and activity are not recommended during WF so that as much energy as possible is available for the healing work at hand. That means rest on every level, including all the senses. The more time spent being quiet, serene, and introspective the better. Even making your fast a bit of a digital fast and taking a break from all electronic devices has great value. Sometimes only by slowing everything down and stepping back from the chaos and distractions around us can we feel, question, and change the patterns and choices of our lives. For this reason, fasting is also a profound tool for creating a more mindful, self-aware life and resolving compulsive addictive behavior.

The body-mind changes evoked by the fasting process make it a valuable option to support healing and recovery in lieu of more risky conventional medical interventions. It is one of the most efficient and powerful tools to jump-start and maintain any health program. However, due to the panorama of potential responses and symptoms that can occur during WF, the NHA recommends fasting under the supervision of doctors trained in fasting care. This will ensure proper screening and evaluation, adequate hydration, proper refeeding, and monitoring to certify that you are a good candidate for fasting and that fasting is in your best interest.

REFERENCES

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