

# FASTING INFORMATION

Today fasting is back on the health and wellness agenda. Western society, with its almost limitless opportunity to indulge in rich and processed foods in huge quantities, has seen the rise of a countermovement endorsing voluntary renunciation. Some 80% of all diseases can be considered diet and lifestyle related. Entire industries are seen to earn billions from treating and managing these diseases. Is a healthy recovery of the western world's population even supported by these industries? The fact that eating can make us sick does not mean we simply give up eating altogether. A considered, controlled, voluntary break from food has hardly harmed anyone and can herald a refining of the palate, making it receptive to a sensible change in diet.

*What Is Fasting? What Is Fasting Not?*

Fasting is not starving, and people who are hungry are not engaged in a fast. Yes, humankind does have the innate, natural ability to forego rich or even solid food and to survive perfectly well, but the ability to survive on very little has nothing to do with the process of fasting as we understand it in modern life. Fasting nowadays is an active and conscious process, only possible when sufficient food is available. Fasting properly does not lead to starvation.

Fasting is not dieting: during the fast, the body moves through short phases where it switches from burning ingested calories to using its own reserves. Initially it uses spare carbohydrate and then moves onto proteins and fats. A few days into the fast, and only fat is being burned. An interesting point to note is that not only overweight people can carry excess fat. Some seemingly lean people can and do carry abundant fat, hidden damagingly within and around their internal organs, which is known as visceral fat. Giving our bodies a chance to utilise excess fat means our organs and muscles are spared. An additional point of difference – and a huge benefit - between fasting and dieting is that the fasting process substantially reduces hunger pangs, allowing the digestive system to wind down and rest. Dieting, on the other hand, allows the digestive organs to continue to work normally, including continuing to expect regular food. Many of the adverse side effects of dieting, including the infamous yo-yo cycle of losing and gaining weight, are simply not an issue during a fast.

Fasting is not asceticism, because fasting is an active, life-affirming process. The period of abstinence does not exceed a prescribed time frame and must not be taken to the extreme. Healthy fasting entertains no false ambition, no self-mortification and no self-imposed compulsion. We can be reassured to see that the great religious advocates of fasting throughout history have warned against this.

Fasting is cleansing and of course serves to empty the colon and start a process of detoxification.

# FASTING FOR HEALTHY PEOPLE

During the fasting process, the digestive organs come to rest and can recover. Many substances that are 'stuck' in various areas of the body are mobilised, transported and excreted, so that in some sense there is a cleansing and detox process. This thorough, insistent cleansing of the digestive system has a powerful effect on mind and spirit, bringing about a state of mental clarity and an overriding feeling of being awake, aware and alert. Your new 'inner stillness' can be experienced in many ways, such as a new level of patience with others, or loving kindness directed towards the self and others.

Fasting is a simple, ancient antidote to the modern plague of stuffing in more, more, more and helps us become unstuck, refocused and renewed in a way that can be thoroughly surprising. The body will be heard: if we don't listen to and honour its requests for relief, it will eventually force us off life's hamster wheel. Chronic lifestyle illnesses are debilitating, depressing and on the rise. Fasting lets us alight the wheel at our own behest and start listening – or at least hearing. One of the most surprising practical changes you'll notice is how much extra time you have to yourself when food is removed from your day. The planning, shopping, transporting, storing, preparing, cooking, serving, eating and clearing up of food uses far more time and cognitive energy that you might imagine. You'll also perceive more time in your day because you will have more energy, less lethargy, will need for less sleep and are more consciously experiencing every minute. So why not make the decision to take back your life and consciously change something in the simplest, most wholesome way? The time to fast is now.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU FAST?

As the body learns to do without its previously abundant source of energy, you might well experience low blood sugar, headache, tiredness and irritability. Take heart, and think of this as a positive first stage towards a more healthy life. There is some evidence that by reducing the load a western diet puts on the system, you give your body a chance to manage inflammation and focus on disease prevention. From day six, more fatty acids and less protein are used up, and from day seven the increased rate of fat burning leads to the formation of Acton and beta-hydroxybutyric acid in the blood. Uric acid and urea increases. By the second week, people notice barely any feelings of hunger or discomfort. However, hypoglycaemia is possible with feeling exhausted and possibly shaky after exercise. From week three, the body is efficiently working on its internal nutrition, is much quieter and mostly problem-free. The burning of fat relieves the liver, joints and in fact, the entire bodily system. The digestive tract has completely normalised. The psyche experiences a high and often one is particularly productive and does not want to break the fast.

Further fasting for up to a total of six weeks is possible. Internal digestion reaches the cell structures. So changes can be achieved that focus on certain diseases have a very positive or healing effect.