

Fasting

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Historical records tell us that fasting has been used for health recovery for thousands of years. Hippocrates, Socrates, and Plato all recommended fasting for health recovery. The Bible tells us that Moses and Jesus fasted for 40 days for spiritual renewal. Mahatma Gandhi fasted for 21 days to promote respect and compassion between different religions.

For much of human history, fasting has been guided by intuition and spiritual purpose. Today, our understanding of human physiology confirms the powerful healing effects of fasting.

Fasting is a powerful therapeutic process that can help people recover from mild to severe health conditions. Some of the most common ones are high blood pressure, asthma, allergies, chronic headaches, inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease), irritable bowel syndrome, adult onset diabetes, heart disease, degenerative arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, [eczema](#), [acne](#), uterine fibroids, benign tumours, and systemic lupus erythematosus.

Fasting provides a period of concentrated physiological rest during which time the body can devote its self-healing mechanisms to repairing and strengthening damaged organs. The process of fasting also allows the body to cleanse cells of accumulated toxins and waste products

Fasting gives the digestive tract time to completely rest and strengthen its mucosal lining. A healthy intestinal mucosal lining is necessary for preventing the leakage of incompletely digested proteins into the bloodstream, thereby offering protection from autoimmune conditions. A healthy digestive tract also helps to protect the blood and inner organs against a variety of environmental and metabolic toxins.

A fast that is appropriate for your situation will allow for you to experience some or all of the following:

- More energy
- Healthier skin
- Healthier teeth and gums
- Better quality sleep
- A clean and healthy cardiovascular system
- A decrease in anxiety and tension
- Dramatic reduction or complete elimination of aches and pains in muscles and joints

- Decrease or elimination of headaches
- Stabilization of blood pressure
- Stronger and more efficient digestion
- Stabilization of bowel movements
- Loss of excess weight
- Elimination of stored toxins
- Improvement with a wide variety of chronic degenerative health conditions, including autoimmune disorders

It is important to understand that the detoxifying and healing processes that occur during a fast are also active when a person is consuming food. A fast can be helpful for people whose conditions are not improving as quickly as they would like, or for people who have health conditions that require a concentrated period of healing to resolve. It is also important to understand that the most important part of a fast is how a person lives after the fast. Fasting can provide a clean and revitalized foundation upon which you can build and maintain a strong and well-conditioned body by consistently making healthy food and lifestyle choices.

Here are some answers to commonly asked questions on fasting:

- [How do I know if I need to fast?](#)
 - [How long should I fast for?](#)
 - [Can anyone fast?](#)
 - [Can fasting cure specific conditions?](#)
 - [How much weight will I lose if I fast?](#)
 - [What is the difference between water fasting and juice fasting?](#)
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Q. How do I know if I need to fast?

A: The answer to this question depends on your health status and goals. For many people, adopting an unprocessed, whole food diet, engaging in a sensible exercise program, acquiring restful sleep, and living in a relatively unpolluted environment will provide the necessary conditions to recover and maintain vibrant health. If a person is having a difficult time making necessary dietary and lifestyle changes, fasting can be a powerful way of accelerating health recovery. Fasting can also reset the sensitivity of the nervous system, providing an effective way of overcoming dependencies on caffeine, nicotine, alcohol, other recreational drugs, salt, sugar, and other stimulants. After fasting, many

people marvel at how sweet romaine lettuce is, how refreshing apples are, and how wonderfully delicious baked potatoes are – without sour cream and butter! Many of us have been eating rich, salty, and sweetened foods for so long that we are unaware of how good foods taste in their natural, unprocessed states.

Some people choose to fast in the absence of overt symptoms of disease, knowing that a period of complete physiological rest can allow the body to rejuvenate itself from the toxins that build up in our tissues despite our efforts to live healthfully.

[Back to top](#)

Q. How long should I fast for?

A. If you choose to fast to recover from acute illness, you can fast until you feel well enough to eat again. In the case of a chronic health challenge, the length of the fast is determined by the progress of the fast. The healing processes that take place during a fast are predictable. Blood levels of cholesterol and uric acid tend to elevate during a fast, a result of the body stirring up stores of undesirable materials and expelling them into the circulation to be eliminated from the body. Shortly after the fast, these levels tend to be lower than they were before the fast, indicating a cleaner system. ESR, a marker for inflammation, tends to decrease during the course of a fast. As a part of the detoxification process, some people experience vomiting, diarrhea, headaches, dizziness, skin rashes, and other uncomfortable symptoms. Fasting under the supervision of a health care professional who is trained to distinguish healing responses from harmful processes can be helpful in allowing a person to "ride out" uncomfortable symptoms of detoxification.

It is not uncommon for people to experience significant improvement in their health from fasting between 3 and 30 days. The idea is to fast as briefly as possible, but as long as is necessary to allow the body to restore health.

[Back to top](#)

Q. Can anyone fast?

A. There are a handful of exceptional circumstances in which it is not advisable to fast. A small portion of the population has an

inborn error of metabolism whereby they lack an enzyme that is needed to process fatty acids. Since fatty acids are needed as an alternate source of energy during a fast, it would not be safe for such a person to pursue a fast of significant duration. This disorder can be recognized early in the fasting process by a trained observer.

Intake of certain medications, certain liver and kidney disorders, states of extreme weakness or malnutrition, pregnancy, and certain types and stages of cancer are other examples of conditions that are not conducive to fasting.

[Back to top](#)

Q. Can fasting cure specific conditions?

A: It's important to keep in mind that fasting is not a *cure* for specific health challenges. Rather, it is an opportunity to give the body a prolonged period of rest to do what it does best – heal and restore itself. The same healing mechanisms that are at work during a fast are also at work while a person is eating. The difference is that during a fast, *all* of the body's resources are channeled towards its self-healing and restorative mechanisms.

Conditions that tend to respond favourably to fasting and dietary modification include high blood pressure, asthma, allergies, chronic headaches, inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease), irritable bowel syndrome, adult onset diabetes, heart disease, degenerative arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis, eczema, acne, uterine fibroids, benign tumours, and systemic lupus erythematosus.

[Back to top](#)

Q. How much weight will I lose if I fast?

A. On average, a typical faster loses approximately one pound per day during a water-only fast. Initially, the loss may approach two or even three pounds per day for the first few days if the person is retaining significant sodium and water. This can decrease to approximately half a pound per day in the later stages of a fast. From day two onward, the body begins utilizing fatty tissues for energy, thereby conserving as much muscle tissue as possible, a

mechanism called **protein sparing**.

[Back to top](#)

Q. What is the difference between water fasting and juice fasting?

A. During a water fast, only water is consumed. During a juice fast, any variety of fruit and vegetable juices are consumed.

People detoxify and heal more quickly with a water fast than with a juice fast. This is because with a water fast, your digestive passageway and organs are able to rest completely, allowing for all of your energy to be used for cleansing and repair of damaged tissues. With a juice fast or a cleansing diet of fruits and vegetables, your body must use energy to digest nutrients, leaving less available energy for detoxification and healing. When a person's health condition is related to a weak or damaged digestive system, recovery may depend on fully resting the digestive passageway and organs through water fasting.

Another significant difference is that more fat tissue is burned during a water fast, as your body must rely exclusively on fat reserves to supply its energy needs after the first 1-3 days of water fasting. Your body stores the bulk of incoming toxins in your fat reserves. As these reserves are burned for energy during a fast, any stored toxins will be released into your circulation, to be eliminated through various eliminative channels like your urine and respiratory tract. This mechanism of detoxification also occurs with juice fasting, but at a slower pace.

All of this considered, both types of fasting can be used with effectiveness, depending on your circumstances and goals. If your situation and goals include wanting or needing to make significant gains in your health in a short period of time, water fasting may be the best route. If a person has a long history of taking extremely toxic drugs like certain chemotherapeutic agents, an intense period of detoxification through water fasting can cause damage to the kidneys. In this type of circumstance, juice fasting or a simple diet of organic vegetables and fruits may be the best first step to recovery.

Finally, a water fast is most effective when you are able to get a lot of physical and emotional rest. If your life circumstances don't

allow this, juice fasting is a better choice.

[Back to top](#)

Q. Won't my metabolism slow down during and after the fast, causing me to gain back more weight over the long haul?

A. Metabolic rate fluctuates according to our moment-to-moment physiological needs. When we are active, our metabolic rate speeds up. When we sleep, our metabolic rate slows down. In the same way, when we fast, our metabolic rate slows down because our physiological needs are lower than they are when we are consuming food and going about our regular activities. When a fast is broken and a person returns to eating and more activity, her metabolic rate increases to match her increasing physiological needs.

What *does* change during a fast is our digestive and assimilative capacity. Fasting provides an opportunity for our digestive organs to heal and make more efficient use of the nutrients in the foods that we consume. Weight gain or loss is always a simple function of how many calories we take in versus how many we expend. If your primary goal is to be at a healthful weight for your unique disposition, the optimal approach is usually to combine an unprocessed, whole food diet with a regular aerobic exercise and strength-training program.

[Back to top](#)