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Fasting facts

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- Skills and guides - Safety and health -



Publication: Tuesday 13 January 2004

Description :

What does lack of food do to our body?

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Introduction

The modern world does not really look at fasting with an objective view. In a world of abundance, lack of such, whether intended or not is a reminder that life, is tough and that not all humans have enough food at their disposition to eat. Even our fat medics (it is an image) often consider fasting as a danger, without even knowing anything about it. I eat only once per day, and everybody tells me it is not good for the health...

This is the paradigm, and it needs to be shifted.

Fasting is the act of depriving oneself of food. It needs to be voluntary, since the involuntary act is rather called starving. The voluntary situations are known since the dawn of mankind. Most religions involve some kind of fast at one time, and it has been associated with a mystical vision of the world in some religions. Contesting may also bring some people to fast, or starve, as a threatening to kill themselves. Involuntary fasting is rather associated with starting from lack of food, bad crops, natural calamities, or survival situations. There are also involuntary recurrent periods in primitive life where, no or little food is available, like winter in some countries, dry season in some other. Whatever word is used, we are talking here about the concept of not eating for a period of time greater than one day. From now, and in order to simplify the discussion we will call both concepts starving.

Getting to the point

Mammals, like most hot blooded animals have a priority, which is to maintain the core temperature within the limits of the functional range. This said, if mammals were not able to sustain periods of starvation, nature would have got rid of us long before. In the animal reign, starvation is not an awful lack of chance, but a recurring normal pattern of animal life. Recurring does not mean that it is safe for everybody, it is the reason why the starving lion is really dangerous, as all its intentions, senses, and body are tuned at getting food; and I would not stay in the middle of a decided starving man and food for the same reasons.

The human body, like that of all animals is designed to survive periods were little or no food is available, without any problem, and I would say so well designed to do this, that it actually takes advantage of these periods. Fasting is beneficial for its side effects. As always, nature uses every event in its own way...

Indeed things needs to be moderated by external conditions, because fasting in -20 C is not as simple as fasting in 40 C, because obviously the daily calorific needs are extremely different for the same effort.

The facts about not ingesting food for some time are not really what is hammered in our westerners well fed heads by well fed MDs, fasting is not always a problem, far from it, and certainly not such a problem that it is discussed by some health professionals.

It is currently recognized that an average human body can go through a maximum of 15 days, or three weeks of fast without **any** danger at all, meaning that medical attention is not required.

The 3 phases

During that time, the body enters different phases:

- **Hunger**, this lasts 3 days. It is advised at this stage, if there is no food consumption to find a way to empty the intestines with some purgative, so that the extra toxins that should be rejected in normal times as excrements do not get digested in a last try to extract as much nutrients as possible from the matter still in the digestive system.
- **Flying**. The body starts using its internal reserves: First sub dermal and muscle greases, liver stock, and later, muscles proteins are converted to energy. This can last between 10 and 15 days without danger, meaning that you have 10 days of reserve with you at least. The body switches to a low consumption mode, where people are slower, often joyous, mainly because less sugar is directed to the brain. In the same time, all perceptions are raised, in particular smell, taste and hearing, this is the body's answer to enable to find food more easily, certainly a proof of our adaptation to this state through our evolution. In the case of food proximity, you'll be amazed to see your full forces coming back, another proof, if needed to be. In the same time again, the unstacking of natural grease and nutrients uncovers toxins that were associated (generally with the sub-dermal greases and liver), so it is advised to drink and urinate a lot, because the release of toxins is higher than usual. Lots of people report a foul smelling breath, perspiration, and urine, which considering what is happening is normal. It is possible during that phase to do low energy consumption tasks. It is by example possible to walk 5 to 10 miles a day at low or normal pace. Moving heavy charges would prove to be impossible or extremely hard. Most energy consumption is targeted at maintaining the core temperature, so in cold (under 15 degrees C) weather extremities mainly, but the whole body in general, suffer coldness, shivering, and in the extreme, are more sensible to frostbite, as circulation is reduced in the extremities to avoid calorie loss.
- **Eating**. Eating normally immediately after a period of fast is not possible. Eating again is a progressive work, little by little, as the body will reject too much food. A normal transition period from a starvation period to a normal nutrition is between 3 to 4 days. Soups and vegetable nutrition is recommended to restart the digestive physiological processes. This is a difficult time, because hunger comes back in the same time.

15 days for these three phases is the maximum generally accepted while being safe and damageless to the body. After that, it is still possible to be safe for a long time, but preferably under medical supervision.

The replacement of salts lost through body fluids at any time is strongly recommended. So even if there is no food, salts should be replaced in order to avoid any major dysfunctions.

Understanding what it means

An inference of this is that in a short term survival situation food is not a priority (cf the rule of three in the survival section), while water and salts are. A second inference is that a person's physiology being different from another one, people that are interested in survival should do the experience in a controlled situation to understand what it can mean to them in a real survival situation. The main question one has to solve is which tasks can or cannot be accomplished in such a state. You'll be amazed to find it is much more than what you thought.

While fasting is when no food is absorbed at all, starving can always happen if the quantity of food is not nutritional enough, or not available in sufficient quantities. Fasting-like states can be reached when the amount of ingested food does not match the energy output, or lacks certain nutrients, I am thinking of very cold weathers, like polar conditions, where indeed the daily calorie consumption is much higher than normal, the time one can spend without eating is much shorter.

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As a side note, you have to know that while you fast, your body will attack, use or get rid of any useless stuff it carries, from cysts to grease, stored toxins, sick cells, even cancerous cells (fast is used in Germany on the treatment of some cancer, on periods between 1 and 2 months under close medical attention.) During fast, cells are replaced at a higher rate than normal, older or sick cells are replaced by newer ones which is the body's way to reduce its energy output, as young cells are more efficient. The first time we did that 10 days with my wife I was amazed that her wrinkles disappeared on her face, interesting side effect, and much cheaper than the commercial creams they sell you![:)]

All these comments apply to people in good health, as it is certain that some health conditions are not compatible with fasting. Indeed also the numbers I gave are averages; a skinny person will not last as long as an obese one. Also a person that has never fasted does not use its internal reserves as fast as a person that does it on a yearly basis. I can go a whole day doing sports without feeling the need for food, when some of my friends are already under hypoglycemia, but I am used to eat once a day only. The same happens for longer periods.

A last word, fasting is not the way to lose weight, as once the metabolism restarts normally, it will have learned the lesson, and try to make more reserve, for at least the few first times.

Indeed, I expect strong criticism, but indeed there is theory and practice, and those that have tried do know what I am talking about. I can only recommend the rest of the people to try once.