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Newsletter

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Facts About Fasting

In January of 2013, CNN ran an article about NBA All-Star Carmelo Anthony and his 15-day fast that he started in December. Many of his closest friends and companions, including his coach, had no idea he had been fasting and many more were confused and skeptical as to the benefits. After he explained that he was fasting meat and carbohydrates but didn't stop eating completely, it became less of a controversy.

The problem is that the term fasting can be misunderstood. It has long been associated with a demonstration of faith or opportunity for spiritual reflection. It is also commonly considered a form of protest or political expression. Both of these instances generally involve not eating or drinking anything at all, or just drinking water. While these are accurate descriptions, fasting can be so much more.

What is Fasting?

As previously mentioned, the accepted definition of fasting is to abstain from all or some kinds of food or drink, especially as a religious observance. Another definition is voluntarily not eating food for varying lengths of time; used as a medical therapy for many conditions or as a spiritual practice in many religions.

For thousands of years, fasting has been one of the oldest medical therapies. The father of Western medicine (and where we get the term Hippocratic oath), Hippocrates, believed fasting facilitated the body healing itself. Over 500 years ago, Paracelsus, another Western traditional healer, wrote "fasting is the greatest remedy, the physician within".

The general principle of fasting is that not eating gives the body a break from the processes of digestion and elimination. This provides extra energy that can be better used by the body in the processes of healing and using stored calories, making it possible for the body to rid itself of accumulated toxins.

Science Supports Fasting

A study conducted in 2007 at the Intermountain Medical Center Heart Institute (IMCHI) in Utah was presented in April of 2011 at the annual scientific sessions of the American College of Cardiology in New Orleans. Researchers conducted two fasting studies of over 200 individuals, both patients and healthy volunteers, and a second clinical trial in 2011 followed another 30 patients who drank only water and ate nothing else for 24 hours. The results were clear – fasting has many health benefits.

According to Dr. Benjamin Horne, PhD, MPH, the director of cardiovascular and genetic epidemiology at IMCHI, these new findings demonstrate that their original discovery was not a chance event. Their research has shown a reduced risk of coronary heart disease and other cardiac risk factors such as triglycerides, weight and blood sugar levels. Fasting not only lowers one's risk of coronary artery disease and diabetes, but also causes significant changes in a person's blood cholesterol levels.

He concludes, "The confirmation among a new set of patients that fasting is associated with lower risk of these common diseases raises new questions about how fasting itself reduces risk or if it simply indicates a healthy lifestyle."

The Benefits of Fasting

Joel Fuhrman, M.D., author of *Eat to Live*, believes that because 51% of the Western diet comes from processed foods and those that are low in phyto-chemicals and antioxidants, there is an increase or build up in cellular tissues of waste products called advanced glycation end products or AGE, which leads to atherosclerosis, aging, diabetes, nerve damage and the deterioration of organs. He says, "This is basic science and physiology every doctor learns in medical school."

Dr. Fuhrman encourages fasting, advocating that it is one solution to help abate the buildup of AGE, pointing out that the body was

designed to fast, “We do it every night.”

In 2003, published studies showed that mice forced to fast every other day, while being allowed to eat twice as much as they would normally on the non-fasting days, had better insulin control, neuronal resistance to injury and other health indicators than mice fed calorie-restricted diets.

Agnese Borolo, a life coach in New Rochelle, N.Y., has found psychological benefits to fasting as well, such as coping with stress and depression. She suggests that her patients fast just a few hours as a way of “learning to say no to food” but she has found that they are so encouraged by the results that many go on to try longer fasts.

Dr. Fuhrman has concluded that those who want to live longer, healthier lives should eat healthy and fast periodically. “The time may come,” he says, “when not offering this substantially more effective nutritional approach will be considered malpractice.”

Fasting for Weight-Loss

Responsible dieting always begins with a careful consideration of current health or existing medical conditions that could have resulting contraindications to any sudden nutritional changes, yet, the United Kingdom’s new 5:2 diet book craze has become the latest healthier alternative to “dieting”. Since its U.K. publication, the book “FastDiet” has become so popular that the New York Times reported it’s hard to avoid a discussion of feast/famine dieting. However, the author’s logic seems sound.

It is basically this: humans evolved to survive efficiently on a feast/famine schedule. He says that when the tribe made a kill, everyone feasted, and when the hunt was less successful, everyone went hungry. Due to this evolution, he believes our bodies don’t respond well to having so much food readily available and benefit from routine fasting.

The author suggests eating less for two days a week triggers a repair mode that heals the body and brain. As previously mentioned, research does support the fact that the body uses excess energy from not eating to repair itself.

However, the concept of eating only 500 calories a day for women and 600 calories a day for men two days of the week then

feasting the other 5 days is something that should be discussed with your Family Wellness Chiropractor or other healthcare provider.

In Summary

Regardless of the reason for fasting, science supports the benefits. A daily diet high in proteins and dark green vegetables rich in phytonutrients is going to have huge payoffs health-wise, however, it's also clear that discussing a healthy fasting schedule with your Family Wellness Chiropractor can have its own rewards and health benefits.

Remember, prior to initiating any drastic dietary or nutritional changes, be sure to have a discussion with your Family Wellness Chiropractor or other health-care provider.