

## **Fasting - A Modern Yet Ancient Approach to Health**

I'm going to talk about a recent breakthrough in the nutritional realm. It is a concept that is so new and radical, that you may not even appreciate it. Well, at least not as much as your grandmother will.

You see a lot has changed over the last five hundred years. We've gone from living amidst greenery to living virtually via green screens. We're forced to call food, real food. Quantity has overtaken quality with respect to health and life. Processed food, overstressed lives, complete lack of activity and diabetes at 40 are considered normal. But the one thing that hasn't changed is our genetic makeup.

Today we possess the same genetic makeup that we did many tens of thousands of years ago. Stated differently, as far as the optimal functioning of the human body is concerned, not much has changed. We are genetically programmed to eat and metabolize food just like we did a hundred thousand years ago.

Back when TV dinners, fast food and home deliveries didn't exist, we humans had to hunt and gather. Food was not easily or abundantly available and there existed no means of storage. As a result, we had only 2 options - feast or fast. If we hunted big game and/or gathered much food, we sat down and stuffed our hominid faces stopping only when there was nothing left. Portion control and saving for later weren't in style back then. Once the gluttony was over, we fasted till another such episode presented itself. Between episodes of feasting, we had no choice but to fast.

From that day to today, our bodies have been designed to deal with such feasting and fasting cycles. Blood sugar levels, stomach acid generation, sleep cycles, leptin signaling, insulin secretion etc., were developed to deal with such a feeding schedule.

Our ancestors from the early past (200-2000 years back) understood the importance of fasting too. Be it for Lent or Ramadan or Vaikunta Ekadasi, every ancient religion and culture in the world promoted fasting in one form or the other.

Our present day researchers also have slowly started realizing the importance of fasting. Termed as 'intermittent fasting', more and more research is being presented everyday emphasizing it's effectiveness. Today, we have studies (both human and animal) that prove intermittent fasting promotes longevity, reduces triglycerides and LDL, increases growth hormone secretion, increases neuronal plasticity and promotes neurogenesis, increases fat burning capability and more.

And as far as anecdotal evidence goes, it is only fair to say that fasting has worked wonders on my health and fitness and that of the thousands of people I work with. But realize that intermittent fasting, like everything else, is just a tool and needs to be used smartly.. So before dive head first, keep the following in mind.

1. Firstly, eat real food. Vegetables, fruit, meat, eggs, milk, curd, cheese, lentils, legumes and tubers should form the bulk of your diet. Supplement with starch (rice, roti, oats etc.) based on activity level. More activity = more starch.
2. Forget worrying about eating multiple small meals and eat when you're hungry but only when you're hungry.
3. When you're not really hungry, skip the meal and fast. Understand your hunger patterns and slowly bring in some structure to fasting.
4. Quit obsessing about how many calories are on your plate and enjoy the meal. Eat till you're satisfied.
5. If you're diabetic or have any clinically diagnosed health conditions work with a fitness and nutrition professional who can help you with a structured fasting approach and talk to your physician before making any drastic changes.

When it comes to intermittent fasting, here's a simple infographic you can use a template on when to eat. Talk to your coach before you begin or make any drastic changes.

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Remember, food is fuel to the human body. It isn't about the number of meals you eat but the nutrient density in the food you consume and the ability to monitor and feed your body with nutrients **only** when it truly needs it.

*Note:* This article was originally published on The Hindu Metroplus. It has been slightly modified for this website.