



Therapeutic Water Fasting

Dr. Andrew Iverson, ND

Just the word *fasting* can evoke an unpleasant response that people associate with the abstinence of food. In America, we feel we couldn't possibly go a day without eating several times. We are led to believe that food is an absolute daily must and often we will eat when we are not hungry or even when we are sick.

Fasting is actually a common natural state that wild animals undergo more intuitively than humans when they are ill. This state of physical rest allows the body to refrain from digestion and assimilation of nutrients to focus on healing the body. It is a powerful treatment that is less utilized today because of modern medical advances, the inconvenience, the challenge it imparts on the faster, and, of course, fear. The fear of fasting is usually associated with starvation and the consequences of what may happen if we don't take in food daily.

Fasting and starvation are two very different processes. Fasting is the intentional abstinence of all food, except water, where the purpose is to undergo the fast for health or spiritual purposes. Under proper conditions it is a very beneficial tool for treating numerous health related issues. Starvation, on the other hand, is usually not done with intent and thus has an entirely different mental state attached—mostly the fear of not obtaining the next meal. During starvation a deadly physiological process occurs as the body breaks down the essential organ structures such as the heart, glands, and nerves.

During a state of complete fast, taking in nothing but water, the body switches to another source of fuel so that it can preserve life. Now, rather than breaking down the food that is being taken in through the diet, the body turns to its own tissue stores for fuel. The body inherently recognizes the importance of preserving the most essential tissues like glands and nerves and thus will break down what is considered “non-essential” tissue for fuel first.

This non-essential tissue is quite abundant in the average American, and is mostly comprised of FAT. This fat can be in the form of cellulite-filled “love handles” or “saddlebags” that many carry around unnecessarily. It may also be the lipids, known as atherosclerosis, that accumulate inside the artery walls, contributing to blockages, strokes and heart attacks. Another example of non-essential tissue would be scar tissue or fibrous tissue that is formed after an injury. People who have sustained multiple injuries have seen benefit from a longer fast, as the body cleans the old injury of scar tissue. The catabolism, or breakdown, of these non-essential tissues is, in essence, where the magic of fasting is perceived.

With this in mind, one can imagine the benefits for those undertaking medically-supervised water fasts. Weight drops rather quickly, which is a sign not only of fat cells being converted into energy but also the loss of excess salt and water retention. In longer fasts, the fatty plaque within our blood vessels (consisting of cholesterol and triglycerides) is also broken down, opening up clogged arteries and freeing blood flow. The benefit of both losing excess fat and unclogging arteries is an incredibly powerful method of treating America's most common diseases of excess: heart disease, cerebral vascular disease and diabetes.

In my clinical practice, it is very common to see blood pressures drop 20-30 systolic points following a fast and dietary regime. These values will maintain healthy levels as long as they continue practicing the lifestyle changes. Cholesterol and triglyceride levels, as well, can experience considerable drops, and are far more effective than most medications or statin drugs. Lowering blood pressure and blood lipids through fasting takes the two most common risk factors for heart disease out of the equation and promotes drug-free wellness.

Non-insulin dependent diabetics also see significant changes because the water fast makes insulin more sensitive to the tissues. This means blood sugars normalize and the deadly long term effects of high blood sugar are avoided as long as the healthy lifestyle is maintained. Patients that are diagnosed as hypertensive, hyperlipidemic, and insulin resistant (diabetic) before a fast commonly find that afterwards, with dietary modifications, their lab values are within normal range. They are no longer classified by the medical society with the previously-diagnosed condition. Miracle? Not really, just the body's response to the Laws of Nature.

Even those that are otherwise healthy could consider fasting for one or two days, if not for all the benefits just reviewed, then for the cellular cleansing that fasting promotes. Fat cells are the storage units of not only fats but also fat soluble chemical poisons and toxins. During a fast, as the body breaks down these fat cells, it liberates and removes these toxins, which have been known to be causal in numerous disease processes. This is a whole topic in itself but should be considered a "side benefit" of conducting a fast for general health maintenance.

I am truly amazed at the potential of the body to heal itself if given the proper conditions. In my practice, I have seen amazing transformations that some would consider miraculous. What we see as a miracle the body sees as a possibility—we simply need to provide the space and time for the "miracle" to happen.

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