

To fast or not to fast...

A recent article in Men's Health highlighted the benefits of fasting for 24 hours. Is this a good practice? Should we all do this for our health?

Here is the link to the article →

<http://blogs.menshealth.com/health-headlines/fast-to-burn-fat-not-so-fast/2011/04/18>

When I read articles like this I like to ask a lot of questions before following the advice.

I also want to say that I have also heard there are benefits to fasting and I don't think there is a black and white answer to this.

Here are my criticisms of this article:

- 1) The author does not cite the studies. This is a major point. When the author cites the study you can go see for yourself. Many times these studies are very poorly done and with such a small group of people it isn't even statistically significant. To listen to that kind of advice can be like listening to the biggest guy at the gym because he must know something.
- 2) The survey that was done to the people that fasted vs the group that had never fasted wouldn't be considered a scientific study. There are so many variables not being considered I can't begin to list them. I think you may get the same results by asking the group who ate broccoli at least once a week. I bet the broccoli group would have better blood work and cholesterol too. The typical, out-of-shape person who doesn't exercise probably also doesn't care to eat things like broccoli or fast. But that doesn't mean broccoli is what made the difference. I may be wrong but I bet I'm not.
- 3) They also mention that by fasting you increase Human Growth Hormone levels. That's good right? Yes, HGH has many muscle building benefits and is the fountain of youth. But why not take a dose of glutamine instead? The Wellborn study shows glutamine will spike growth hormone levels to 400%. No starving required.
- 4) Cortisol is generated when we don't eat. Cortisol is a stress hormone and will help burn fat but also will burn muscle and long term elevated cortisol levels do many other harmful things to our bodies.
- 5) Another idea that I find interesting is the references to what cavemen used to do. It probably makes sense that our bodies had a lot of genetic programming done during our early history, but cavemen didn't live very long. So modeling our selves after them as the holy grail may also not be optimal. After all, just because our bodies are equipped with a survival mechanism to prevent starvation, doesn't mean we need to do it to stay healthy.

- 6) The BMI was better in the group of people who fasted. I would imagine for a group of overweight people it would make sense that those calorie restrictions may help with their BMI. After all, they are getting less calories over time. It would also be beneficial to incorporate a calorie restricted diet over a period of time as we have seen for an improved health profile. The BMI is better when people reduce their caloric intake.
- 7) Anyway, I could go on but even the author has a disclaimer paragraph at the end that says there really isn't much research on this and can't really back up the idea that long term fasting is a good thing.

So, after all of my skepticism I still don't think we know it all. I think there are probably benefits to fasting but I don't know exactly what they are and also I don't know for how long or under what circumstances. I do know there are negative consequences from not eating. And there is science to show it.

I think eating multiple times a day while maintaining a good balance of nutrients in the proper quantities makes the most sense. Do you want to shock your bodies caloric balance occasionally? Probably. If it feels good and you feel and see a benefit. I don't believe in the need to do it regularly to maintain your health. You can receive the same benefits in blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood lipids by maintaining a healthy eating style and regular exercise.

Here are a couple studies that support not starving yourself.

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1600-0838.1996.tb00469.x/abstract>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15640455>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15220950>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15699226>

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