

THE GIFT OF FASTING

THE HOLY MONTH OF RAMADAN IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CLEANSE THE BODY AND MOVE TO A MORE WHOLE, NATURAL AND PURE EATING STYLE. DURING YOUR FASTING PERIOD YOU MAY BE TEMPTED BY AN OVER-ABUNDANCE OF FOOD CHOICES (PARTICULARLY SWEETS AND PROCESSED FOODS) BETWEEN SUNSET AND SUNRISE, HOWEVER WITH GREATER AWARENESS OF THE BENEFITS OF FASTING, COMMITMENT AND PLANNING, YOU CAN REAP THE SIGNIFICANT PHYSICAL GIFTS OF FASTING.

Why fast?

Fasting is an opportunity

- to interrupt patterns and learn to manage eating habits
- to improve self-control and discipline
- to let go of food and substance addictions
- to slow down, breathe and chew while eating
- to eat more consciously, making better food choices
- to give the digestive system a rest
- to breakdown and release accumulated toxins from your body
- to increase your sense of gratitude for an abundance of food

What happens when we fast?

We fast every day! Technically the body enters a state of fasting eight hours or so after the last meal. Typically the longest time between meals is the time between our evening meal and breakfast (hence the name). During short fasts (after the body has used the nutrients from digestion of the last meal, such as daylight hours during Ramadan), the body will use glucose stored in the liver and muscles as the main source of energy, then fat becomes the next source along with small quantities of glucose which are 'manufactured' through other mechanisms in the liver. Only during prolonged fasts of many days to weeks does the body eventually turn to protein released from the breakdown of muscle (this is to be avoided).

The use of fat for energy aids weight loss, preserving the muscles, and in the long run reduces your cholesterol levels. In addition, weight loss results in better control of diabetes and reduces blood pressure. A detoxification process also occurs, as many toxins stored in the body's fat are dissolved and removed from the body. After a few days of a fast, higher levels of certain hormones appear in the blood (endorphins), resulting in a better level of alertness and an overall feeling of general mental well-being.

Eat – when & what

Suhoor – the pre-dawn meal. Eat slowly-digesting foods that provide energy for many hours (include whole grains, beans, pulses and healthy fats). Eat slowly, eat in moderation and choose high quality foods.

Iftar – the meal that breaks the day's fast. Break the fast slowly. You want to gently reintroduce food into your digestive system. A small amount of food, such as a few dates or fruit, nuts and seeds, are a good choice. Follow this shortly after with a light meal of vegetables or salad, slow burning carbohydrates (such as beans and grains), lean protein and healthy fats. Iftar should remain a meal and not a feast.

Choose these:

- Vegetables (whole & fresh pure juices)
- Fruits (whole & fresh pure fruit juices)
- Pure water & herbal teas
- Whole grains, beans and pulses
- Nuts and seeds
- Healthy fats (in moderation)
- Spices and seasonings
- Grilled, baked and steamed fish
- Optional – high quality animal products (such as organic meats and dairy)

Limit or avoid these:

- Heavily-processed, fast burning foods that contain refined carbohydrates (eg: sugar, white flour, cakes, biscuits, chocolates, sweets)
- Caffeine
- Processed animal products (such as highly-processed meat and dairy products)
- Sugar & artificial sweeteners



- Soda and soft drinks
- Deep fried foods
- High-fat foods
- Overeating
- Nicotine
- Gulping food or eating quickly

TIPS

- Plan ahead – create meal plans in advance that focus on healthy food options
- Offer to bring a plate of food with you to social gatherings (where possible)
- Eat small amounts of healthy foods before going out to social gatherings
- Eat soups and salads at the beginning of the meal, keep processed carbohydrates and animal foods to a minimum, then if you are still hungry, have small portions of other types of foods
- Manage your food portions
- Commit to a healthy habits goal – decide this at the beginning of the fasting period what you want to have achieved by the end of the fast eg: more greens or fruit in your diet, included two new grains, learned to chew chew every mouthful, gave up soda and caffeine etc
- Save sweets and processed foods for once a week
- Create a support network – tell family and friends of your intention to eat healthy
- Ask a friend or family member to help you be accountable for your healthy food choices and check in with them at least once a week
- Drink lots of water and eat high water content foods (such as fruits and vegetables) to rehydrate your cells
- Keep a food diary – this will increase your awareness of what you are choosing to eat

Follow these tips and guidelines, and remember that a period of fasting is not a time to shock your body by swinging from a famine to a feast.

Fasting is a time to slow down, make conscious choices, reinforce or create healthy habits, connect with the purpose of food as nourishment, and to increase your levels of gratitude for the abundance of food in your life.

This Ramadan give your body the gift of fasting and reap the rewards of greater health and wellbeing.



Nicole van Hattem is an Executive Health Coach, writer, speaker, presenter and corporate wellness consultant. She is also the founder and director of Art of Abundant Living (www.artofabundantliving.com) and runs a thriving health coaching practice.

Follow Nicole on twitter @balanced_nicole and LinkedIn