

Quick Fix Weight Loss?

If only there was a magic bullet to weight loss. Some people think that abstaining from food altogether is the ticket. This is called fasting and is the deliberate abstinence from food. There are a variety of reasons when fasting is necessary and acceptable. Some of which include religious observances or preparation for medical procedures. However, fasting in order to jump start weight loss is not sound thinking. Medical research does not endorse fasting for weight loss or as a method to 'cleanse' the intestinal track or to rid the body of toxins. Let's look at how fasting can back fire and actually promote weight gain instead of weight loss.

A short term fast is not detrimental to the majority of people, thus fasting for medical procedures or religious reasons can be relatively safe. It's always wise to consult your medical professional for any long term change in dietary habits though, including any kind of fast or 'cleanse'.

The body is designed to be 'fed' a steady supply of energy. The body's preferred energy source is carbohydrates. Simplified, when food is ingested it is converted to a usable form (glucose) and transported in the blood to the various organs, including the brain and nervous system to be utilized for energy and proper functioning. Some energy is stored as glycogen in the liver and muscles. Excess energy is stored as fat.

When you start a fast, energy from the blood is used up quickly as is muscle and liver glycogen. Rather than drawing completely from the most desirable energy stores (your stored body fat), your body will break down valuable lean muscle mass for energy. As a result, you will likely 'lose weight' but this is the least desirable weight to lose. This lean tissue is metabolically active, that is, it helps you burn calories. You want to retain as much lean weight as possible to maintain a healthy metabolism. Your body will survive on fewer calories as your metabolism slows when you lose lean mass. This is the 'yo-yo' effect of dieting: your body is so incredibly efficient that in times of perceived 'famine' your body learns to 'get by' on less. This is an evolutionary reaction that has served humans well in the past, but is the nemesis to anyone trying to lose weight on purpose. When you return to your regular eating patterns, you will become fatter on fewer calories than before.

In addition to losing lean mass, fasting will result in some dehydration. This erroneously will look like weight loss, but once your regular diet resumes, the weight will return. Many have tried a low carb or no carb diet. Carbohydrate ingestion causes more water to be stored in the body (each gram of carbohydrate stored requires an extra 2.7 grams of water) so when carbohydrates are *reduced*, water loss results. So, for those of you that think that eliminating carbohydrates from the diet will result in quick weight loss, you are also mistaken. This is a loss of fluid which will return once your regular diet resumes again. In addition, a diet without carbohydrates can be unhealthy in the long term as well as unpalatable and difficult to maintain for any length of time.

True weight loss is the result of intentional healthy food choices and adequate exercise. This is actually good news: with a little education you can work WITH your body to help it shed any extra pounds necessary and those pounds will stay off, that is, they will not come back with your next glass of water.

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Shawna is shaking up the fitness routines of several people in her Adventure Boot Camps. For more information, please visit her website.