



# A Naturopathic Spring Clean: Fasting for Health

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### **PART 1: Why we cleanse in the spring and the proven health benefits of a fast**

Fasting has been practiced as a therapeutic tool for thousands of years, with many cultures using fasting as part of important religious rituals and practice. Fasting has also been used by medics throughout history, as well as by Naturopaths and other complementary medicine systems such as the Ayurveda system of healing.

The practice of fasting for health has become fashionable again recently, with intermittent fasting and restricted eating both hitting the headlines, backed by scientific research and high-profile advocates of these diets. There is good evidence of restricted eating improving blood sugar issues, and evidence to show that medically supervised fasting for 7-21 days can be an effective treatment for rheumatic conditions, chronic pain syndromes, high blood pressure and Metabolic Syndrome.

As a naturopath, I use fasting myself as a preventative tool to keep my gut and organs in tip top condition. Naturopaths believe that fasting should follow the rhythm of nature; ideally fasting should be done every year in the spring and not

in the winter (winter being a time when we should be nourishing our body with warming foods). In Traditional Chinese Medicine spring is a new beginning, a time of “yang” activities which reflect the growth and activity of spring after the winter. Traditional Chinese Medicine tells us it’s the time of year to attend to the liver, which is something I really like to focus on doing a naturopathic juice cleanse, with castor oil packs for the liver, herbal teas and small amounts of liver supporting vegetable juices.



The human body is adapted to cope with periods of fasting, it is part of our genetic makeup designed to keep us going in times of food shortage. By switching our metabolism from burning carbohydrates to burning ketone bodies, we can obtain our energy from our fat stores and our muscle proteins. This

inbuilt mechanism we have to enable us to adapt to periods of limited availability of food happens in 2 stages. In the first stage our body uses up the stored sugars in the liver and tissues. Once these energy stores start to run low, the body starts to prepare for the next stage of fasting. This process will take 12-24 hours depending on your metabolism and body type and then we switch our metabolism to using our fat stores as our energy source. You may have heard of the term ketosis, this is the body burning fat to produce energy. Studies on fasting have found that the process of ketosis lowered LDL cholesterol (so called "bad" cholesterol) raised HDL cholesterol ("good" cholesterol) and improved insulin sensitivity.



As well as ketosis, fasting also stimulates a process called autophagy, which is sometimes referred to as cellular cleansing, or our innate recycling programme! The word autophagy means self-eating, and is the way our body cleans out the debris and toxins and recycles the components of any damaged cells.

This process of cleaning up any damaged cells in your body includes destroying damaged mitochondria, which are the cell's batteries that make your energy. This is one of the reasons why we feel so much better after a fast, because our cells are making energy again from recharged batteries! Some scientific circles argue that short term fasting is an inexpensive way to protect the brain from neurodegenerative diseases, as food restriction has been found to cause a rapid and profound increase in autophagy (clean-up) activity in the brain.

Despite the claims of your favourite anti-aging pills and creams, dietary restriction/calorie restriction/intermittent fasting is the only general intervention that has been shown to improve health and increase lifespan.

### Reasons that fasting helps slow the ageing process include:

- > Greater autophagy (cellular cleansing) means fewer damaged and disarrayed cells.
- > Reduced inflammation in the body, reducing the damage this and free radicals cause to body tissue.
- > Improved and regulated levels of glucose and insulin in the body (improved by 30% by day 3 of your fast).
- > Fasting improves the way your cells adapt to stressors, which helps to slow down the ageing process.
- > Fasting generates a protective environment that reduces cellular and DNA damage and also creates a hostile environment for pre-cancerous cells.
- > Fasting can improve cognitive function (verbal memory) by cleaning up debris in the brain.

## Part 2: Why a fast is a great reset for the gut and how you might feel while on your cleanse

Naturopaths like the analogy of fasting as keeping a healthy house, and your gut is the best place to start your spring clean! The bowel is the main organ of elimination, and our first line of defence against sickness and disease. If we don't have enough fibre in our diet (or we eat a typical Western diet) it ends up preventing normal bowel function, so things might not move through the system that quickly, which encourages bacteria that flourish in this type of environment, causing an imbalance in our gut microflora.

An imbalance in the health of your gut can contribute to many symptoms such as bloating, brain fog, candida, nasty smelling wind and food intolerances. An out of balance gut, where there is an imbalance in your beneficial gut bacteria, can increase acidity in the colon, creating an environment that certain bacteria, yeasts and parasites thrive in. These then affect the health of the lining of your gut. During the cleanse you may be having a break from food but we introduce lots of fibre as a drink. Back to my healthy house analogy, the fibre acts like a broom to sweep things through the gut. Not only is this clearing and rebalancing the environment in the colon, the cells of the colon wall are also stimulated to start healing. Generally, you will notice how much better you start to feel once the environment in your gut starts to improve.

Your liver is also part of your digestive system and is working hard to detox for you every day. However, too much pressure on the liver from overeating or poor quality food, overwork, emotional stress and environmental stress can overload it and decrease its ability to clear toxins and hormones and even its ability to manufacture bile (bile helps us to digest fats and also plays a role in keeping the small intestine healthy). When the liver is struggling you may get more headaches, digestive problems, skin issues and hormone issues such as PMS.

During your cleanse you will be releasing all kinds of toxins and you will notice when you chat to your fellow detoxers that this is a very individual experience. You may have very few symptoms, but another guest might have many, or vice versa. Energy levels can fluctuate and some days you might feel amazing, but other days you might feel very low in energy and need to rest. Many of the toxic chemicals that enter the body are fat soluble, making them harder for the body to excrete, so the body stores them away in the fatty tissues of your body to deal with later. During fasting, these toxins get released as we start to mobilise our fat stores to use for energy. This is why it is important to use your castor oil pack, drink plenty of water, have daily sauna sessions and yoga sessions as you want to get these toxins out as quickly as you can. I also have

lots of extra support up my sleeve for you if you need it, having supervised many fasters and completed many myself.



## So why do a guided juice cleanse with a naturopath?

Well, you can now see that we focus on the mechanisms of what is going on in your body and supporting how you cleanse and detox. The juices are there to provide a little sustenance and cleanse support while you do your deep clean. But choosing to try a cleanse with me at Wildhive... it's about the environment we are in, the tools we have to support and cleanse the body and having time to rest the mind and reset. Yes we are focusing on the digestive system, giving it a really good rest and a good clean out, but we also think about clearing the skin (saunas, body brushing), the lungs (breath work and breathing) and resting the mind (meditations, nature walks, rest, rest and more rest).

### Main References:

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