



What Can I Eat During A Fast?

People often wonder “Can I have almonds when I fast? How about olives, pickles, or an apple?” The answer is no. These are all great food choices but during fasting, we want our bodies to use the fuel stored in our body fat, not the fuel that comes from our food. Eating increases our insulin levels which tells our body to store body fat, not burn it.

During fasting, you don’t eat, but you can drink water, tea, or coffee, any temperature. You can take flat water, mineral water, or sparkling water. Drink whenever you feel hungry but make sure you don’t add any artificial or natural sweeteners including stevia or sugar alcohols like erythritol and xylitol. Instead, you can add a dash of cinnamon or a squeeze of lime or a squeeze of lemon. A small amount of cream for coffee is probably fine.

Other than black tea, try the hundreds of different teas available. One of my favorite teas is a chocolate pu’er tea, which reminds me of drinking a cup of hot cocoa on a cold winter’s day. Matcha green tea is also great in the morning because the caffeine in matcha tea is released slowly, compared to that in coffee, which is released all at once. Green tea is an especially great choice as the chemical compounds known as catechins help suppress the appetite. The caffeine may help increase metabolic rate. Some teas are specially blended for fasting.

In the evenings, many herbal teas, like peppermint, are decaffeinated or have no caffeine. You can add some fresh mint leaves for extra flavors. Camomile tea is also a great choice and often considered soothing. Nettle leaf tea is believed to reduce blood glucose levels.

Coffee may also act as a natural appetite suppressant, but try not to drink more than six cups per day because the rapid release of caffeine can cause the jitters and raise the stress hormone, cortisol. If you are looking for something else, switch to green tea, which can be blended with matcha or things such as ginger. A fermented tea such as classic pu’er tea is also a great choice.

Does giving up all food sound a little intimidating? Well don’t worry. There are some training wheels to get you started. If you are new to fasting, try drinking homemade bone broth for the first month or two until your body fully adapts. Use bones from beef, chicken, or fish with herbs and non-starchy vegetables for seasoning. Skim the fat from the broth and save it for cooking later. Local butchers or food stores often sell fresh or frozen bones cheaply. Vegetable broth is

also great but don't add lentils or legumes if you are fasting. See the associated handouts for suggested recipes.

Sugar-free pickle juice straight from the pickle jar or homemade is also a great fasting fluid. It contains electrolytes that help some people with cramps and people find the briny taste suppresses their hunger pangs.

Electrolytes

Should you take an electrolyte supplement during fasting? When insulin levels fall, your kidneys will release the excess water, which may initially cause some light-headedness or flu-like symptoms. It is also responsible for the large initial weight loss you get but some of that may cause some loss of electrolytes as well. Taking some fluids with electrolytes may help reduce these symptoms. We recommend broths and pickle juice, which naturally contain electrolytes as opposed to processed sources.

Sodium, or salt, is an extremely important electrolyte, because it helps maintain healthy levels of the other electrolytes like magnesium, potassium, and phosphorus. Sodium can be taken in the form of broth, pickle juice, or just plain. You can just put it under your tongue and drink some water or you can add salt to water. Himalayan salt crystals are also available online. It is most useful for extended fasting during the first 48 hours to take these electrolytes. Don't take excessive amounts of salt, especially if you have kidney or heart disease and always check with your doctor first.

Potassium supplements are rarely needed, but check with your doctor. More commonly we see magnesium deficiency which can cause cramping and sometimes constipation. If you think you might be low in magnesium, consider taking 400 milligrams of magnesium supplementation every day. Look for magnesium bisglycinate or magnesium citrate and avoid the cheaper magnesium oxide, which doesn't get well absorbed through the GI system. Magnesium citrate is often used as a laxative, so it is useful if you are experiencing constipation but not so good if you have diarrhea. Magnesium can also be absorbed through the skin. If you buy some Epsom salts at the local pharmacy you can add 1-2 cups to your hot bath and soak in it for ½ an hour. The magnesium will absorb through the skin. If you don't like baths, try spraying some magnesium oil on your skin to let it absorb that way. You can check our handout on how to make magnesium oil

We've also compiled a list of our Top 10 Fasting Tips

1. Always be safe. Our number one rule. If you are not feeling well, or not feeling sure of something, then stop fasting and get some help. There will always be another day to

fast. Don't push yourself and get into trouble. Always seek medical attention immediately if you start to feel unwell.

2. Drink water. Start each morning with a full 8 ounces or 250 mL glass of water.
3. Stay busy. Fast on your busiest days. It will keep your mind off of food and give you extra time to get your work done.
4. Drink coffee or green tea. Both are mild appetite suppressants and contain caffeine, a mild stimulant.
5. Ride the waves. Hunger is like a wave. You'll get hungry during fasting. That's unavoidable. But if you simply ignore it, that hunger doesn't continue to build. It passes over you like a wave.
6. Shh. Don't tell anyone you are fasting until you are sure they will support you.
7. Give your body a month to adjust. The first few times may be difficult, so be prepared. Don't get discouraged because I promise you it will get easier with practice.
8. Don't use fasting as an excuse to eat whatever you like. Stick to a nutritious diet low in sugars and refined carbohydrates.
9. Act as if nothing unusual is happening during or after a fast. Do everything, including exercise exactly as you normally do. Work as you always do. Do all your usual activities. Don't change your routine in any way except you won't be eating. After the fast, eat as normally as you can. Don't try to eat more or less. Remember, all that's happened is that you've just fed your body using your own body fat.
10. Fit fasting into your life schedule. Don't limit yourself socially because you are fasting. It is far easier to change your fasting schedule, which is entirely your own decision.