Fasting Myths

Myth – Fasting is dangerous/unhealthy

Fasting is merely part of a natural cycle – feeding and fasting. When we eat, we store food energy or calories as body fat. When we fast, we burn body fat. This is where the word 'break-fast' came from – it's the meal that breaks your fast. You can't break a fast if you aren't fasting. So fasting is natural and part of everyday life. Most people in the 1970s ate dinner at 6 pm and broke their fast the next day at 8 am. That's 14 hours of fasting every day without even thinking about it.

Certain people should avoid extended fasts more than 24 hours at a time. If you are under the age of 18 years, pregnant or breastfeeding, malnourished or underweight, or have a history of anorexia nervosa, you should probably avoid fasting for long periods of time for obvious reasons.

Myth – Fasting lowers Metabolic Rate

There is no scientific evidence to support this claim. In fact, the opposite is true. During fasting, our body is not running out of fuel. Most of us have hundreds of thousands of calories stored away on our body as body fat, and it's ready to use. It's enough to last for weeks and weeks and weeks. If we have this huge store of fuel on our body, why would we need to lower our metabolic rate? The key is to allow our body to access that fuel. That's what fasting does, it allows us to change our fuel sources – from the food that we are eating, to the stored food on our body (body fat). With the floodgates open, the body tends to increase or keep the metabolic rate stable.

For example, one study measured the metabolic rate after four days of fasting. Weight dropped by about two pounds per day. But what happened to the metabolic rate – it's measured here as the resting energy expenditure (REE). After four days of eating nothing, the REE increased by about 10%. Yes, subjects were burning about 10% MORE calories at the end of four days of not eating compared to the beginning. The VO2, a measure of how much work the body was doing, was similarly increased by about 10%.

A 2016 study directly compared the metabolic effect of chronic calorie restriction (marked CR) to alternate daily fasting (marked ADF). After 32 weeks, the resting metabolic rate (marked RMR) or the number of calories the body was using at rest dropped by 76 calories per day in the chronic CR group, a statistically significant result. By contrast, the fasting group only dropped their metabolic rate by 29 calories per day, which is statistically not significant. In other words, the fasting group preserved their metabolic rate far better than standard calorie restriction. This is almost completely opposite what most people will tell you. Calorie restriction is what causes a slowing metabolism. Fasting does not. That's a huge advantage for long term weight loss.

Myth – Fasting Burns Muscle

This is one of the most pervasive myths about fasting. Remember that our body stores energy as fat. If we need energy, our body will use this fat. Our body would have to be really stupid to store energy as fat, but just when we need that energy, we burn muscle. It's like carefully chopping firewood for the winter, but just when it gets cold, you chop up the coffee table and throw it in the fire. Our bodies are just not that stupid.

The reason this myth persists is because there is a period of time where the body is using a little bit of protein. At about 24-30 hours of fasting, our bodies have run out of sugar, or glycogen in the liver, and fat burning hasn't yet started in earnest. We metabolize some protein for energy, which gives rise to this myth that 'fasting burns muscle'. But remember this is protein, not muscle. Our bodies have lots of extra protein that needs to burn – skin, connective tissue, blood vessels. Some people who lose a lot of weight are left with large flaps of extra skin that needs to be removed surgically. That's all extra protein, not fat. Fasting may activate the protein catabolism that's necessary to naturally get rid of that excess skin. Of the many thousands of patients we've treated, we have not yet referred a single patient for skin removal surgery.

The other reason that muscle is preserved is that fasting increases growth hormone. Once you start eating after the fast, the increased growth hormone helps preserve that lean mass. The body builds new protein where it is needed. If it does not need extra skin, for example, it won't build it. But if it needs to preserve the muscle, it will.

In that same study where we compared calorie restriction (CR) to alternate daily fasting (ADF), we see that lean mass as a percentage of total weight increased by 0.5% using calorie restriction. That's a good result, because people are losing more fat and therefore their lean mass percentage went up. But the ADF group went up by 2.2% – more than four times better preservation of lean mass.

You'll also notice that trunk fat mass loss, which reflects the really dangerous visceral fat, was almost six times better in the fasting group. Scientific studies and clinical experience show the

same thing. Fasting is simply a much BETTER, not worse, method at preserving muscle mass. It also gets rid of the more dangerous body fat.

Myth – Nobody can do it over the long term

Literally billions of people throughout history have embraced fasting for their entire adult lives. Virtually every major religion in the world has fasting periods . Sometimes it is called purification, cleansing or detoxification, but the idea is the same. Occasional abstinence from food may have a cleansing effect on our bodies. Indeed, it cleans out the excess sugar and fat in our bodies. So, it is completely illogical to claim that nobody can fast long term when it has been done by the majority of the world's people for millennia.

Not only that, but fasting can work with any diet – whether you are vegetarian or Paleo or Keto or low calorie. It is simple. It doesn't take any time. It is available to everybody in the world. It is completely free.