



Why Support Can Be Challenging and How to Nurture It

Human beings are social creatures and much has been written about the role of our interpersonal connections with others in our overall physical and mental health. Our family members, friends, and wider circles within our communities provide us with valuable social interactions and support. So it is important to explore how our interpersonal relationships influence our behaviors around eating and fasting, and how implementing fasting and a new approach to eating may influence our relationships.

A common question that many of you may come to ask is--why your eating habits and decisions about what and when to eat seem to create such interest and possibly resistance or criticism from others?

It is not uncommon for the people in your life to have varied responses to major changes you are making, especially those they do not understand. Though you have educated yourself about the benefits of and best practices for fasting safely for your health and your weight management, often those close to you have not. They are likely still believing current trends and outdated ideas about the importance of eating frequently and not skipping meals. They may also lack a firm understanding of principles of eating foods that support your efforts to reach your health and weight goals, and why you eat foods they believe are unhealthy and may choose not to eat other foods. They may see your approach to eating and use of fasting as somehow unhealthy or dangerous, so of course they would be concerned and might try to convince you to stop or to eat with them, particularly foods that you may be avoiding.

Whether or not those close to you have a good understanding of the health benefits of your decisions, they may have resistance. Your behavior changes may make patterns of conversation and eating that you once shared together feel very different. This may actually be a difficult adjustment for them. Sometimes those close to us internalize our changes in behavior as somehow judging or condemning their choices.

For some people in your life, your pursuit of greater health and weight loss may somehow feel threatening, even if they are not aware of this. They may hold limiting beliefs about what is achievable health and weight wise, so your efforts and success can serve as a difficult challenge

to these beliefs. If they have health concerns or struggle with excess weight, hopefully they can see the progress you make and feel motivated knowing what is actually possible. But it is not uncommon for those who disbelieve the possibility that they can achieve their goals to feel uncomfortable with your decision to pursue the changes you are making. You getting healthier and or thinner may mean you navigate life differently and gain confidence. Although this might seem like things they would want for you, they just might concern these folks as far as how this might affect how you feel about them.

Even when your family, friends, and colleagues may be generally supportive, they may still experience confusion and frustration when they don't know what foods work for you and when you are fasting if you are socializing with them. Of course, ideally these facts are only your responsibility to manage, but food is such a common focal point in many of our social interactions that it can create challenges as you are learning to work through these issues. Even without negative intent, those close to you might be unsure what foods to offer if they are hosting you or what events to recommend if you are fasting vs eating, etc. And if you live with others, meals are often a shared experience and others aren't sure how to navigate your fasting and eating habits.

Regardless of what may prompt a challenging response from those close to you, this is an opportunity to advocate for yourself by educating them about need-to-know information, setting appropriate expectations about meals, and developing boundaries that allow you to make decisions about your own behaviors. I know that these steps are not always as easy as I just stated them, but this is an area of growth for you personally and interpersonally in your relationships. For many of us, learning to ask for what we need rather than just go along with what others are doing or expect us to do is a key part of our skill development--a great side-effect of the lifestyle changes you are incorporating now and for your future.

I find that for most people who are living with others, it is helpful to clearly communicate your eating/fasting schedule or plans if you typically share meals, including who prepares the meals. Something as simple as a visible schedule of the week that indicates which meals you will be eating with them and when you will not, and a discussion about whether responsibilities for meal prep changes with this schedule, can alleviate the tension of them being confused and you possibly feeling defensive.

It is also helpful to keep in mind that people take a lot of cues from you. If you can be at ease when you share a meal or fast while they are eating, demonstrate that you are at peace with your choices of what food you eat and which ones you choose not to eat, they will see that this is not something that needs any further attention. But if you are expressing how much you want

what they are eating or are making negative comments about their choices or going on about how unfair it is that you are not eating, they are likely going to feel tension and respond negatively and even dislike the changes you are making. This often leads to them not being supportive and possibly even doing some things to sabotage you.

Another group of individuals I encourage you to consider as far as what support you need or want from them would be your medical practitioners. It is important that you work with your practitioner to help monitor your health markers or to investigate any health problems you might encounter related to pre-existing medical issues, nutrient deficiencies, or genetic factors. However, many members in our community find that their practitioners lack much experience with or knowledge about fasting, and may have limited training in nutrition beyond a brief introduction based on outdated dietary information. This requires you to do your research about your dietary approach as well as learning about fasting. Many of you are already quite knowledgeable in these areas, and I encourage you to continue to learn as you progress through your journey. This will help you to decide what makes sense for you, taking into account your continued assessment of your health markers. It is also vital to work with your practitioner if you take medications so they can advise when adjustments are necessary as your body responds to the changes you are making and to clarify what medications you will take while fasting. Although your medical practitioner plays a crucial role in supporting you, some people find that going into great detail with them about your fasting protocols or food choices prompts messages that are uninformed and discouraging. Some of you may be fortunate enough to work with a practitioner who is supportive of fasting and eating in a generally low carbohydrate way, and possibly were the reason you started on this journey. If so congratulations. And for those who have not found a practitioner like this yet, you can continue to offer them resources if they are open to learning, show them through your example what is possible, and focus more on the ways they can support you medically with necessary testing and medication adjustments.

Lastly, I want to strongly encourage you to utilize the support that is available here in The Fasting Method community. Besides all of the videos and resources to continue to support your knowledge base and inform your practice, I believe one of the greatest benefits of this program is the community of amazing members, coaches, and experts. There are special events like question and answer sessions, special topic discussions or trainings, and weekly group fasting challenges where you can process things with others. And the resource I know so many community members come to value highly is the support groups (now called classes). Of course the information covered in groups is so valuable, but the support you receive and provide in these groups is priceless.