

The Fasting Method #182 - Hot Topic: Making The Leap From a 24-Hour Fast to Overnight

Megan [00:00:06] Before we get started with today's episode, I would like to quickly read you our podcast disclaimer. This podcast is for educational purposes only, and it is not a substitute for professional care by a doctor or other qualified medical professional. You should always speak with your physician or other healthcare professionals before doing any fasting, changing your diet in any way, taking or adjusting any medications or supplements, or adopting any treatment plan for a health problem.

[00:00:42] The use of any other products or services purchased by you as a result of this podcast does not create a healthcare provider-patient relationship between you and any of the experts affiliated with this podcast. Any information and statements regarding dietary supplements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration and are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.

[00:01:13] All right. And now we'll get started with today's episode.

Terri [00:01:19] Welcome back to another episode of The Fasting Method podcast. This is Coach Terri Lance and I am joined today by Coach Heather Shuker. Heather, how are you doing today?

Heather [00:01:30] I'm doing great as usual, Terri. How are you?

Terri [00:01:33] I'm good. I'm just guessing people kind of know by now that we wouldn't be recording if one of us weren't doing well because it's like, what are you going to say, "Terri, I'm doing horribly today." [laughs] And I say, "All right, well, let's go ahead and keep recording." [laughter]

[00:01:46] So anyway, Heather, I'm very excited about today's podcast because I think this is a topic that comes up so frequently in The Fasting Method Community, in our work with clients, and sometimes I forget that, because something is so commonly brought up, I just think, "I'm just going to keep saying it," but maybe a larger audience needs to hear it. So today's topic is 'Making the Leap From a 24-hour Fast to an Overnight Fast'. Heather, you brought this topic up to me. What do you think goes on here that makes this such an important topic for us to cover?

Heather [00:02:27] Well, Terri, I think the reason it is such a critical topic is because, I think when people come to fasting, this is what they're most afraid of - going an entire day without eating. So I think part of it is they have this big fear, this big wall of something that is very unknown that they've never done before, and so that's weighing on them. But then also, they get to that 24-hour mark, which happens to be what we call the 'witching hour', and sometimes the most severe hunger pains that we're likely to feel, and it feels insurmountable. And so they find themselves stuck in this place between these 24-hour fasts, which are really powerful, but don't necessarily pack the punch of an overnight, and they really want to advance to that level in order to reach their goals.

Terri [00:03:17] As you've probably heard me say before, Heather, I think the 24-hour fasts are what I call the 'cruel irony' of fasting. That's the hardest part of the fast right there - getting to hour 24 - and then the idea of moving past it seems insurmountable to so many people. And the reality is that you touched on, you've been going through the hard part and now these people expect you to believe that you can keep going. But both you and I

have found personally, and with clients, and Community members, it does actually get easier once you get past that. But so many people see that as a barrier that they don't feel able to get past.

Heather [00:04:03] Exactly. What I like to remind people of is that if it was impossible, if the hunger got so bad that you were going to explode from discomfort, none of us would be able to do it. You and I wouldn't be sitting here, you know, talking about this, we wouldn't have been successful, nor would the hundreds of other people who have done it. If it was something you can't do, none of us could do it either. And I think that's the key thing to hold onto. For that first overnight, you have to have like a leap of faith that you're capable of doing it, and you need to lean on the rest of us who have done it and just believe us [laughter] when we tell you, "I promise you it's possible." I promise you will survive. You will wake up the next day and you will just be so excited that you've done it.

Terri [00:04:56] You know, Heather, you highlight something that I think is so important here is that, when it gets uncomfortable, is when people are most tempted to say, "Oh, this is too hard, this isn't right for me. I don't know how those other people do it." All of that kind of fixed mindset comes in rather than, "Wow, if all of those people can get past this mark, how can I get past this mark? What can I do?" And so I think for many of us, this is not a physiological challenge as much as it is a mental challenge, based on the physiological feedback we're getting. So that idea that we have to accept that in order to get to an overnight fast, I am going to get hungry. And I try to remind people, I know it doesn't feel this way but that's a good thing. Something would be kind of broken if you didn't get hungry. That is a natural biological response. That part of your brain that is so worried that you will die if you don't eat, which was hardwired into us from the beginning, doesn't know that you have a freezer full of food, and a refrigerator full of food, and a refrigerator in the garage full of food, and three apps on your phone where you can order food, and stores within five minutes where you can buy food. And so it panics when it gets done using the easily accessible energy.

Heather [00:06:26] Exactly.

Terri [00:06:27] And it makes you uncomfortable. And for some of us, it scares us. We've learned that being hungry is intolerable. We have commercials that tell us we're going to become like the Incredible Hulk [laughter] or this, you know, horrible character when we get hangry. So I think that's the first step, is that we all have to accept, yeah, of course, my body is naturally going to go through these phases where it uses up the stored glycogen, the easily accessible fuel. It panics. It's like it's in an escape room. It's like, "Let us out! Heather, you have to give me food or I'm gonna die." And if we can get past that point, it starts getting the other fuel resources on our body - body fat, ketone acids - and everything's okay again. The Incredible Hulk shrinks back down. He has ripped clothes on now, but we can keep going. [laughter]

Heather [00:07:30] I completely agree. And I like what you said about planning for that. Know it's coming, right? So that is part of taking on an overnight fast. It's not like Terri and I are going to give you some magical way to not feel that hunger. Oh no, you will! [laughs] It's coming. And you will have to override it. What we're saying is it will not get bigger and bigger until it's intolerable. If it does, you probably haven't planned appropriately for it (and we will talk about that), but another thing is, when it does come-- I think a really important thing to remember, which is what got me to overnight fasts in the first place, is that hunger is a liar. Just like Terri said, you want to tap into that body fat. And so that hunger, that starvation feeling, like, oh my gosh, that fear that you are in danger because you don't

have access to nutritional resources, if you have a lot of extra weight to lose like I did, I could go look in the mirror and be like, "Oh honey, nah ah, you're not starving. You've got resources right there. You can see them. So why on earth am I feeling this sensation of absolute starvation when it is so visibly obvious that there is plenty to nourish me while I'm sleeping tonight?"

Terri [00:08:52] But you're relying, then, at that point that your body is going to have to make that switch over. And the analogy that I always use for this is anyone who has parented-- and I have not, so it's so easy for me to give parenting examples since I have not parented, but I'm imagining the picture. You're sitting, you're busy doing something, maybe you're working from home, and your ten-year-old walks into the kitchen and says, "Mom, I'm starving. What are you going to make?" And you look up from your work and you say, "Oh, honey, I'm not going to make anything right now because it's not time to eat. But if you need anything, there are leftovers in the fridge." Now, most ten-year-olds are going to roll their eyes, and make a few sounds, and they're going to walk off. They're not going to eat the leftovers. They're going to wait. They're going to survive it. And that's the inner dialog that I think a lot of us need to have at that time, because I want to use those visible resources that you talked about, Heather. I'm not going to rescue that panicked part of me that thinks I must have more new food inserted, I must have new energy supply coming in. No thank you. I want to use the old energy supply that's just sitting there waiting for me. So I think this, from a mindset perspective, is really important, but, Heather, I think you have some good thoughts about what do I do with the physiological part of that? Sure, I can work on that mindset, that's great, but what do I do physiologically when my body is telling me it must have something?

Heather [00:10:34] Yeah, exactly. First and foremost, I think it's important to talk about what has led up to your fasting because how desperate and how hungry you feel is going to be directly related to how easily your body flips into fat-burning mode. So like you said, if we're that little child that is coming in and feeling hungry, depending on how big that hunger feels is going to determine our ability to think logically, like, "Okay, obviously, there's plenty of my body." But if you feel physiologically like you could eat the drywall, then it doesn't really matter what kind of emotional conversation you have with yourself, the hormones are going to win. And sometimes the reason it feels so powerful is because of what you've been eating leading up to that fast. So if your insulin beast is raging (meaning if you're following a diet pretty high in refined carbohydrates), then chances are you are going to feel incredibly hungry, and that is going to make fasting incredibly difficult. So before you even attempt an overnight fast, I think it's important to address how you're set up when you go to attempt that fast.

Terri [00:11:52] Heather, I think that's so important - the whole idea of fueling yourself for your fast. Now, I will add this here because this question has come up in my groups a lot lately. Should I eat extra before I go into a fast? And I think we need to be kind of careful about that. It's not that you need more food and you don't need more fuel available (because it's not going to be sitting there available), you need to get your body into that place where it knows how to tap into the other fuel source. Like you said, Heather, how well your body knows that it can switch from burning what you've eaten recently to going in and burning the fat that's stored. Going to the bank and getting cash rather than swiping the card, you know? Going and getting the thing that it has to do a little more work for. So that's really important. Eating more food will not prepare you better for a fast.

Heather [00:12:52] Exactly. It has way more to do with what type of food that you're eating leading up to a fast. And that's why, for people that are struggling with getting themselves

off of refined carbohydrates, we talk about things like fat fasting, and using that as a bridge to get your body prepared to use fat for fuel so that when that 24-hour, witching hour comes, your body is used to switching into fat for fuel and it's less uncomfortable. And when we talk about people who, further along in their journey, are able to do overnight fasts more easily, it's because their body is just so versatile and able to switch into that fat-burning mode so seamlessly. So, whereas in the beginning we feel like we're ready to eat the drywall, later on, it's like, "I could eat," but you're able to just not, and it's not this desperate feeling anymore.

Terri [00:13:48] That's right, because it's a much more seamless process at that point. You know, the body's burning glucose, everything's feeling pretty good, that runs out, and it just shifts right into burning body fat. But at first, your body doesn't know to do that and it even resisted a little bit. Remember that stored body fat, to the body, feels like a safety net. You know, it's like-- well, Heather, you, where you live, might experience this. When I used to live in Ohio, they would get on the news and they would say, "All right, everyone. We're going to have the worst winter storm ever." And you would go to the grocery store and all of the toilet paper was gone [laughter] because I don't know how these people would think-- I mean, we're in Ohio, folks. It might last two days, but all the toilet paper is gone, all the milk is gone, all the staples are gone. So our body is like that. It's holding on to that body fat. It's holding on to that whole basement full of toilet paper just in case Armageddon comes and you'll be all set. [laughter] So our body's holding on purposely to body fat. It doesn't want to go burn that. And we're making it work to go do that. It's so much easier if we just feed it. So, again, these are mindset things, but they're the physiological part. And this is where I think another important topic comes in for us to talk about, Heather, is fasting aids.

Heather [00:15:20] Yes, And that is a hot topic, Terri. And I think the reason it is, is because there are different kind of recommendations on how we use them, based on where we are as far as how well developed our fasting muscle is and how far along we are on our journey. So, in the beginning, when you are brand new to fasting and it feels very overwhelming to do this fast that we're talking about (getting to the overnight), if a fasting aid is going to be the difference between you getting to the other side and not, then please use it. Like, it could be the thing that is the breakthrough that you need to give you this incredibly powerful tool that could change your life. That's how important I think fasting aids are. And certainly in the beginning of my journey, I used them liberally. I didn't learn that they were a problem until later. It's not that they're a problem, it's that they're something that people lean on for too long. But I don't even want you to think about that if you're early on and you're trying to get yourself to the other side of an overnight fast. We'll deal with that later. Right now, know that fasting aids exist so that you can build your muscle and use them.

Terri [00:16:42] I think another important thing with the fasting aids is that we have to be ready with them. You know, if I'm getting to hour 22, it's not a great time for me to go to the store to buy some bone broth. Better that I've made it ahead of time, that I have a bit of a supply in my cupboard, something like that, so that I have confidence going into this fast that I've got all of the fasting aids right there if I need one. And, like you said, if I'm going to even use them more liberally, I'm all set. Poor planning on this leads to people feeling like they can't make it. They crash versus get yourself well set up. Go into it with the supplies that you need.

Heather [00:17:30] I could not agree more and I will tell you exactly how I managed that when I was doing my fasting. So my fasting protocol that I followed was three 42s, and I

worked full time so Monday, Wednesday, Friday were my days. Every morning I packed black coffee, bone broth, and a bottle of water. [laughs] I had plenty of liquids! And I would leave the bone broth in the car so that, at lunchtime, if I needed it, it was there for me. And in the beginning, I absolutely used it regularly. I wouldn't drink the whole thing. I'd have some for the ride home as well, because that was also a tough time for me. Now, I was eventually able to lose a whole lot of weight, so it certainly didn't stop my progress. And for a while I was like, "Is it slowing me down?" but now I think of it in another way. I think it's what made it possible for me. It is what gave me the ability to do those overnight fasts consistently. And after I did them for a while, I didn't need it anymore. So I love that point you made about planning ahead. That is critical.

[00:18:38] I would also say, on that same vein (talking about planning), is that if you're trying to get through the dinner hour, it is not a good idea to create a vacuum. Like, the only plan you have is that I'm not going to eat. So now you get to that time frame, you're sitting there twiddling your thumbs, maybe other people in your house are eating, and you're just supposed to not do anything. That's a bad strategy. [laughs] A way better strategy would be to have a plan for how you're going to distract yourself from that hunger, which isn't to say the hunger is going to be gone, but distraction mitigates its effect. We knew in the recovery room, for example (I was a recovery room nurse), that, when people were distracted, they reported less level of pain. So they would do studies where they would play music or do massage in the recovery room, and people reported less pain. So every fasting day, get a massage. [laughs] If only, right? But truly. Have a plan of attack so that, when that timeframe comes, you're not just there with nothing to do. You have a thing that you've planned to do that isn't eating.

Terri [00:19:53] On the theme of planning and being well prepared, I think another piece to address here is electrolytes. And, you know, it's hard for most of us to talk about fasting at all without talking about electrolytes. I have run into so many clients and so many Community members who think, "I only need to worry about electrolytes when I do a four-day or a five-day fast. Then I'll think about electrolytes." And, you know, I try to course correct there with them and really emphasize the importance of electrolytes from the very beginning. I think electrolytes are important even on our eating days, not just our fasting days. And then they have an even more important role on a fasting day. So having salts ready, having magnesium. And salt, I have found for so many people, it just takes the edge off of that, "I need something right now." Oftentimes, when we're starting to get a little bit dehydrated or in need of hydration, we want food. So if we're managing our hydration levels in our body better, we have less of a need to turn to hunger to get that satisfied. So having salt ready-- again, don't wait until 3 p.m. and say, "Oh, I should probably have some salt today." When you get up in the morning, have some salt. Get your salt started first thing in the morning.

Heather [00:21:23] Oh my gosh, Terri, how many times have people come to meetings and they're like, "I don't know what's going on. I just can't do the overnight. I don't know what's happening." "How's your salt?" "Oh!" Right? That's what they're missing. And I think it's because, when people learn about fasting, they learn so much stuff all at once and it feels like it's all in the same playing ground, right? So people don't know what to prioritize as far as what's important. And salt, just, for some people, doesn't even register. They don't even kind of remember learning about it. And, you know, I don't know how to fix that. [laughs] I don't know how to decide what people are going to learn. But I think that the reason you brought it up and the reason I definitely want to reinforce what you're saying about how important that is, is because I don't think you can really have a rhythm of overnight fasts and not be on top of your salt. And I know a big part of that is, especially

people new to fasting, they come with this, you know, kind of fear of salt because we're taught that. You know, we're taught that, you know, salt raises your blood pressure, it's bad for you, etc.. And certainly, here at The Fasting Method, we're not going to disagree with anything that your medical people are telling you by any means. However, if you're eating nothing all day, if you're only drinking water, then you're not getting any salt. You're getting zero. So we're not saying have an excessive amount of salt. We're saying at *least* get the standard dietary recommendations. And so that's a mindset shift in and of itself - recognizing that salt is not poison - right? It is necessary for life, and, certainly, if you're going to be a faster, you need to get a little comfortable with having salt when you're not having food. I think that that is a huge limiting factor for people that don't embrace that, and whether or not they can do overnight fasts consistently.

Terri [00:23:22] I think for some people there's even a double whammy here. We get caught up in old weight-loss messaging around, "Just drink lots of water," "Keep yourself feeling full," "Drink lots of water," and then you're fasting, so of course, "I should drink lots of water." I once had a client-- I think she reported to me that she was drinking like two gallons of water a day. That is a lot of water for the human body. [laughter] And, if we don't have enough salt, we're just washing out any possibility of maintaining some salt. So when we talk about hydration at The Fasting Method, it's not just drink more water, it's have enough sodium to maintain your hydration levels. And certainly we think people should hydrate. I also have a client who struggles getting more than one glass of water a day. That's too little. You know, so we do talk about having adequate water as part of your hydration, but having adequate sodium (so salt) is also key in staying well hydrated. The challenge that I think some people underestimate is that they don't feel thirsty maybe, they don't feel like they are getting dehydrated. You don't feel it. Sometimes you don't even know when it's too late, but you don't feel it building, usually.

[00:24:47] And I always equate that to pain medication. People, like, have oral surgery and they come home with pain meds. They've watched the documentaries about oxycodone or something and so they're very cautious about pain meds, and they say, "You know what, I'm not going to take any. I feel okay." And they wait that first four hours and suddenly the pain is so bad. And then they're like, "Oh, it's okay, I'll just take it now." But it's almost like they can't catch up with the pain because they skipped that first dose. It's a little bit like skipping salt. If you wait until four in the afternoon to start adding some salt into your day, your body's already been on its way to dehydration and it's hard to catch up. You can't just pour a bunch of salt in and think it's going to level everything out.

Heather [00:25:36] Terri, it's so funny you said that about the pain medicine because that is the exact analogy I was going to use. Like I said, I used to work in a recovery room, and the way that we taught it was that you want to treat pain like a pack of wolves that you need to stay ahead of. And it's exactly what you just described. If you wait till those wolves get you, those pills aren't gonna do much. So salt's the same way. If you wait until you're at the witching hour, you're starving, you realize you haven't gotten the salt in and that's probably what's driving your hunger because a lot of times that is (you know, you think it's hunger, but truly it's dehydration), it's too late. You've gone too far. You did not set yourself up. You didn't have proper planning. It is something that you have to start either the day before or, at the very latest, the morning of - getting that salt in. And, like you said, it's not like you can be like, "Oh, I'm behind on my salt. I'll just have a teaspoon now." Like, [laughs] okay, be prepared for your body to have an absolute revolution because that is not going to sit well. You cannot have salt in high doses like that. It's something that you *must* think about ahead of time. You must have yourself, kind of, on a regular routine of having those small doses throughout the day, which is also a better way to hydrate as well.

A little bit of salt, a little bit of water as the day goes on. Bolusing, as we say in the medical field, is not how you want to do hydration or electrolyte replenishment.

Terri [00:27:05] Absolutely. Heather, I think there's one area that we haven't really addressed yet that might be really key for a lot of people, and that is really exploring why are you wanting to leap from this 24-hour fast to an overnight. And anyone who's listened to me here, or listened to me in the Community, or works with me as a client, you know, for many people, I am working hard to get them to this place where they can do these longer fasts effectively, but it's not necessary for every person. And I watch some people who are just wringing themselves out trying to figure out how to get past the 24, and yet they're losing the weight they want to lose, or their blood sugar numbers are leveling out, or their blood pressure numbers are looking good, whatever it is that they're really aiming for. And so then I always kind of question, well, why do you want to go to this longer fast? Not because you shouldn't, but I think it's important to understand that this is of value to me. If I'm going to push myself to do these things that are complicated (that Heather just talked about how complicated it can be), I'm gonna have a good reason for wanting to do it.

Heather [00:28:22] I couldn't agree more. We think about our big WHY a lot and I talk to clients about that. What is your big WHY? What is your vision for yourself? So that when you're going through those tough times, you can kind of fall back on that as, you know, wind on your back, as part of the determination that helps you keep going. So we think about it on that macro, like broad-view, level, but, like you said, we need to take it down into this micro level. Why this fast now? So what is this fast for? What am I trying to accomplish with this particular fast? Now, like Terri said, if you're cruising along with where you are, why are you adjusting your fasting dial up? Is it because you're hearing everybody else, you're getting fear of missing out, you know, you just you feel like you're not a real faster if you're not going overnight? Like, is that what's driving you? Because that's not a very powerful reason. You know, we can be affected by those around us, but we really need to think about ourselves, where we are, how strong our fasting muscle is, and what goals we're trying to achieve, and, with each fast, is this going to help me? Is this what I need right now in order to achieve that goal? And so having a WHY, not just on a global scale but on a micro scale for fast to fast. Do I need this right now? Am I up for this right now? And I think continuing to answer that question for yourself and check in in what you're capable of is important. And one of the reasons I think that is important is because a lot of times people beat themselves up don't they? They get themselves all in a lather because they can't do that overnight fast. You know, their stress is too high, there's too much going on, and it's just not happening for them. And that makes them feel bad about themselves. And they have that negative self-talk and all of the things that make everything harder. Whereas, if you do that check-in for every fast, like, first of all, "Is it necessary?" Second of all, "Am I up for it?" third of all, "Have I planned for it?" and then fourth of all, "Is it going to help me reach my goals?", then, okay, let's do this thing. And you know, once you've kind of checked in and you know that it's what you want, you know that you're capable, you know you're ready, boom, you're just fortified to do it.

Terri [00:30:44] I love that, Heather. And, part of what you just described and made me think of, it's almost like we have to do like a check of the weather before we do certain activities. You know, if you say, "Hey, I'm going to go for a nice long run," but there's freezing rain happening, a nice long run might not be the right thing for you right then, right? Or, "I wanna go get in the pool." Okay, well, it's hailing out right now. It might not be the right time to do that. Or, "I wanna go play golf." Okay, well, there's lightning. It's not a good time to hold a metal pole up in the air in a wide open field. So knowing there are times, even if your body has been able to do this before, that it may not be the right time

right now. And I couldn't emphasize enough what you just described of, "Is this the right time?" And, again, it doesn't matter that you could do it three weeks ago. If you haven't slept well for the past four nights, it's probably not the right time. Even though it's a skill you can do, it's a skill that's not well suited for you right now. So I think people have to really give some value to exploring that when they make these decisions.

Heather [00:31:55] And I think a lot of times the reason that people try to push themselves past what they're capable of in that moment is they set some expectations for how long their weight loss is going to take, this journey is going to take, etc., and these, kind of-- I mean, these expectations that they've set for themselves, they're their own kind of prison that they've locked themselves in and it feels oppressive. And I think a nicer, more comfortable way to go through this journey is to let go of that time frame, those expectations, and recognize that a different you is showing up every day, and you have to kind of meet yourself where you are and do the best that you can with what you've got in that day. One of the best things that I've heard about this is that, if you only have 20% to give and you give all 20%, you've given 100%, you've given all you had that day. And so not every day is going to be 100/100 day. Some days are going to be a 20/20. And I love that we talk about the fasting dial a lot, right? And an overnight fast is kind of turning that dial up. But just because we can't do something with that dial turned up doesn't mean we turn it off. And we shouldn't beat ourselves up if we need to turn that dial down, do TRE, focus on our eating, focus on our sleep, focus on our stress management so that, the next time that it's a fasting day for us, we can maybe meet ourselves where we want to be. But we should always give ourselves the grace to meet ourselves where we are.

Terri [00:33:31] I love all of the angles that you've covered with this today, Heather, because I often say to people that conquering the 24 is the hardest part of fasting. And most people don't believe that. They're like, "Oh no, a 48's got to be just horrible," or, "What? 72? That must be impossible." What I always share with my clients is, if you can do the 24, you've now opened the door to any fast. Now it's about how do you get out of your own way? Do you plan for it well? Do you prep? Do you get in the right mindset? Do you assess whether it's the right time or not? If you can do a 24, you can do an overnight. There's no question in my mind. But going through all of these kind of checkpoints that you've described today I think is key for everyone. If you can do a 24, you have got this.

Heather [00:34:23] I couldn't agree more. And I think the people that feel like they can't, that really is a matter of-- it's time to just-- I don't want to say jump off the cliff. [laughs] That doesn't sound like something I want people to do. However, take a leap of faith is maybe nicer. The only way you'll know that you can do something is having done it. And we talk about this, right? There's the difference between courage and confidence. You can only be confident that you're able to do something if you've already done it. So you're not going to get confident in your ability to do an overnight fast if you've never done one. That first one takes courage.

Terri [00:35:00] Absolutely. All right, Heather, I think we have shared a lot of our thoughts about this. I'm sure we'll be coming back to lots of these topics and other ways in future episodes. So, until then, everyone, happy fasting, take good care of you, and we will be back with another episode next week.