

The NEW FASTING

The world's gone mad for fasting – but can it make you healthier?

The past few years have seen a huge rise in the popularity of fasting and partial fasting plans. These include the Dodo (day on/day off) or alternate day fasting, the 5/2 diet, where you eat normally for five days and keep to 500 calories for the other two, the 16/8 diet, where all meals are taken in an eight-hour window and you fast for the other 16 hours, and juice fasts that last one to five days.

When we fast, our bodies are forced to dip into our energy stores to get fuel and so we lose weight.

But now it looks as if fasting can offer huge health benefits too. Some scientists believe that when your body doesn't have to use energy digesting food, it switches from growth mode into repair mode.

So, is fasting too good to be true?



FAST BENEFITS LONGER LIFE

Studies seem to show a connection between calorie restriction and longevity. It's long been known that fasting rodents live longer.

PROTECTION FOR THE BRAIN
Boffins in the USA believe intermittent fasting may protect against Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.



STRONGER IMMUNITY

Scientists have claimed that going without food for three days is 'like flipping a switch' that tells the body to create new blood cells and regenerate the immune system.



CANCER REDUCTION

Fasting seems to reduce some hormones that increase cancer risk.

HELP WITH TYPE 2 DIABETES

Studies suggest in some people calorie cutting could reverse Type 2 diabetes – the UK's fastest growing health problem.

BETTER HEART HEALTH

Researchers believe it can reduce blood pressure and cholesterol.

So should we try fasting?

YES says nutritionist Amanda Hamilton

Fasting is nothing new. It's only in recent times we've had access to food 24 hours a day and become used to constant grazing. It's a recipe for weight gain and ill health.

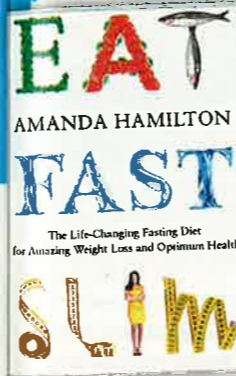
Carefully controlled fasting is a simple, effective way to lose weight – and also delivers astonishing physical and mental health benefits.

It's said to reduce inflammation, improve cardiovascular health and blood glucose control and even promote longevity.

Traditional diets make you prone to weight gain because restricting calorie intake long-term makes your metabolic rate slow and appetite hormones soar. Fasting helps retrain your appetite.

Research suggests that just anticipating mealtimes (rather than actually being hungry) is enough to increase levels of the appetite hormone ghrelin. When you're fasting, these peaks of hunger will start to level out.

Eat Fast Slim by Amanda Hamilton (Watkins Publishing)



NO says health and weight-loss coach Joanne Henson

I'm not convinced fasting is good for our general health or extends our lifespan. There simply isn't the evidence to back this

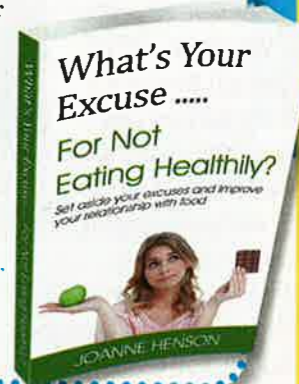
up – people haven't been following the new fasting diets for long enough.

If you eat less than you normally do, you'll lose weight. But if you use two days of fasting as an excuse for five days of eating rubbish, you could end up malnourished.

A downside of more extreme fasts is that your metabolism slows down, priming your body to store fat and reduce your appetite. When you go back to normal eating, your appetite hormones return full force and you're likely to binge and gain weight. Willpower is a problem too. If you're used to tea and biscuits in the afternoon, you're fighting hunger and ingrained habits.

Instead of fasting, I recommend a healthy lifestyle that will deliver more sustained weight loss and better overall health.

What's Your Excuse For Not Eating Healthily? by Joanne Henson (Completely Novel)



A CLAY JUICE FAST ANYONE...?

Drinking clay mixed with water is the new diet craze sweeping Tinseltown, allegedly tried by supermodel Elle Macpherson and actress Zoe Kravitz. Fans claim it speeds up weight loss, cleanses the colon and boosts the immune system.

But the US Food Standards Agency had to issue a warning after some clay-based drinks and supplements were found to contain arsenic.

'The clay cleanse is this year's version of eating as little as possible for rapid weight loss. Remember Beyoncé's lemon juice, maple syrup, pepper and water diet?' says Joanne Henson.

If celebrities who follow faddy diets manage to keep the weight off, it's not because the diets have delivered a permanent fix. It's because those celebs have armies of trainers, nutritionists and chefs!



DO IT SAFELY

Amanda Hamilton says:

- Remember, fasting doesn't mean going without food – you just eat less some days.
- When you do eat, have nutritious, natural food. Avoid anything full of chemicals and sugar.



- Include healthy protein in every meal – lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, beans, lentils, nuts or seeds.

- Cut back on alcohol and sugar.



- Limit potato, rice and pasta (choose brown) portions to the size of your palm.



- Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables.

- On fasting days, take gentle exercise such as yoga. Exercise more on non-fasting days.

- If you're eating fewer meals, you may need to increase the portion size.

• Check with your GP before starting a new eating plan.