



## DIY Detox by Sally Mathrick

# Secrets of effective fasting

Fasting is the most radical, and often most thorough, method of detoxification. Its tradition runs long. Religions, from Christian to Buddhism and Islam to Judaism, have embraced some form of fasting as a practice to cleanse the individual — mind, body and soul.

Physiologically, fasting creates an array of biochemical events that, when undertaken safely, can lead to improved levels of health and vitality. It's not appropriate for diabetics, pregnant women, people who have experienced chemotherapy or heavy toxin exposure, who have eating disorders or suffer from a mental illness to undertake a fast unless under direct supervision by a trained health practitioner. Indeed, it's worthwhile getting advice before undertaking a fast no matter who you are. I know this from personal, as well as professional, experience.

My first experience of fasting was as a first year naturopathic student. Inspired by the writings of the Nature Cure doctors and supremely confident of my body's ability, I was desperate to experience a fast. I was fresh out of the city, a smoker, wine lover, sweet-tooth and caffeine junkie. After consulting a qualified naturopath, who suggested an array of gentler cleansing methods and supports, I bull-headedly decided to plunge headfirst into a three-day water fast.

With only water and a herbal tincture by my side, I vividly recall the second day of fasting, in bed, nauseous, feeling like my head was going to explode and vomiting up every sip of water I took. I thought I was dying.

- **Lessons:** The body doesn't adapt to extreme approaches (water fasting is extreme). Remove caffeine, alcohol, sugar, tobacco, preservatives and additives from your diet one by one, over a week or two. Accept support and advice from experienced people — it's best not to go in alone.

The next fasting experience was with a group of budding naturopaths. We camped on a peninsula surrounded by fresh, powerful ocean and fasted on herbal teas, vegetable broths, water and sunlight. We did skin brushing, sand scrubs, swims, practised yoga, had deep and meaningful conversations and rested. We had a wonderful, mutually supportive time, with only half a day mired in the detox headache. We all left feeling liberated, vital and strong. To celebrate our accomplishments, however, we feasted on a huge cooked dinner followed by honey-coated macadamia and chocolate. This quickly shifted our elated vitality levels down several notches.



- **Lesson:** the method of breaking the fast is as important as the fasting itself. Slowly reintroduce foods. Follow your true cravings, maybe fruit, maybe vegetables, but in any case a small portion of raw, organic whole food, eaten slowly and mindfully. Be in a natural environment as much as possible — allow yourself to gently experience natural forces of earth, wind, sun, water and space. The energy of the natural world will re-energise you.

With such a great first experience, we set out to fast again, this time broadening our experience by embracing an Ayurvedic fasting technique from the pancha karma tradition. The idea was to keep our bowels moving to prevent the detox headache and other symptoms. The technique consisted of drinking a quarter of a cup of castor oil then eating a spoonful of watery lentil dhal, three times a day. Certainly, our bowels moved. In fact, we spent a good proportion of our time at the camp long drops, conversing from our respective cubicles. The end of the fast found us feeling exhausted and drained from diarrhoea and, although rested, not bounding in vitality.

- **Lesson:** have a fast tailored to meet your individual temperament, physical and mental condition and the season to enhance success.


The next experience of my fasting discovery was on a mountain-top silent fasting retreat. It was in the early days of the retreat's evolution and there was a strict policy of silence, with no reading, music, writing or drawing. Fasting the mind as well as the body. The schedule included juice fasting, meditation, yoga, water and herbal tea in a supportive environment amid the forest. I felt amazingly high and joyous, which in retrospect I recognise as a slightly ungrounded delusion. My mind had

nothing better to do! I also broke out in little pimples all over my face.

- **Lesson:** keep the mind engaged with information that inspires wellness and purification, without over-stimulating. Providing gentle bowel-cleansing aids, such as psyllium husks, abdominal massage, gentle herbs, water enemas and probiotics can ensure the bowel moves each day despite the lack of food, and will help dodge detox symptoms such as skin breakouts.

Another stop on my fasting journey included the Hippocrates regime of steam sauna, wheatgrass juicing, twice-daily enemas, lymphatic exercises, three days of watermelon juice soup (sipped from a teaspoon to enhance digestion), followed by seven days of raw foods. There were food preparation lessons and educational sessions. I had lots of rest during the 10 days and had no detox symptoms. I felt grounded, clear and energised at the end. The guidelines of maintaining an 80 per cent raw food diet, however, weren't followed for too long once I got back into the real world.

- **Lesson:** redesign a nourishing dietary and substance intake regime that is achievable and maintains your good health. The level of insalivation of food is crucial to good digestive practices and often needs to be re-learned.

Fasting is a powerful tool in optimising wellbeing. It provides an opportunity to rest, soak up sunlight, do gentle exercises and provide self care and the opportunity to reflect on our relationships with food. Remember, though, the body responds best to small, gentle changes, so ask a trained health professional for some advice. And heed it. 

*Sally Mathrick practises as a naturopath at Jean Hailes Clinic and Glo-Health and provides corporate wellness throughout Melbourne.*