

Fasting

*Summary based on various lectures by Sri Goswami on the topic of fasting
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Fasting is a purifying process. Ordinarily, the body is fed at relatively regular intervals, and we tend to think that we will get weak if we miss a meal or two. While a sick person may show aversion to food, we have the idea that healthy people must eat regularly.

When we eat, the body engages in the following processes:

- 1) alimentary digestion;
- 2) distribution of the individualized nutrients by the blood, and;
- 3) utilization of these nutrients by the tissues.

Food is utilized towards construction and reconstruction of the tissues and supplying the body with heat and energy. When more food is consumed than is necessary for these purposes, the surplus is usually converted into body fat. Proteins, minerals, water and vitamins are generally used for the construction of tissues, while carbohydrates generate the heat and energy.

The Environment of the Colon

There are two main kinds of bacterial organisms living in the colon: putrefactive (poison-forming) and beneficial (lactic acid-forming / poison-destroying) bacteria. Between these two groups there is a constant biological antagonism. When either group dominates, the other will succumb.

Given the aforesaid biological antagonism between the lactic-acid-forming bacteria and the putrefactive bacteria, we should therefore endeavor to

promote the production of the former so as to neutralize the building up of the latter. Part of the protein which escapes digestion will reach the colon, where it acts as the substrate for putrefying bacteria. A diet rich in vegetables, fruits and milk is conducive to the growth of the beneficial, lactic acid-forming bacteria, which stimulate intestinal motion. Therefore it is important to carefully limit the protein intake.

Frequency of Bowel Movements

Eating twice or thrice a day (or even more), how often do we have a clear bowel evacuation? People usually will not admit constipation, though their natural need to relieve themselves has been stopped for a few days. One motion can never empty the whole colonic contents satisfactorily. In Hatha Yoga, constipation is considered chronic if one is satisfied with a single bowel motion daily.

The time for the bowel contents to pass through the alimentary canal can be tested with the help of some additional liquids, taken along with regular meals. The time for food to pass from the stomach, through the small intestines and into the colon will be around 8 hours. The smooth muscles of the colon are usually sluggish. In a very vigorous colon, additional processing of the food may take between 2 and 6 hours. In a typically sluggish colon, it may take up to an additional 12 hours! Factoring in the 8 hours needed for the food to even reach the colon, this means that it may take up to 20 hours before the food is completely processed and eliminated.

In healthy organisms, an approximate period of about 14-16 hours is an average time, which still can be improved upon with the adoption of appropriate exercises.

Foods as Motility Boosters

Foods are generally classified as carbohydrates, fats or proteins, with further possible subdivisions based upon content of vitamins, minerals and water, the three latter requiring less digestive energy than the two former. After digestion, proteins break down into amino-acids, carbohydrates break down into monosaccharides (such as glucose, fructose and galactose), and fats break down into fatty acids and glycerin (which are absorbed and then combined again for use within the body).

The type of foods we eat may influence the colonic contents and the motility of the colon, the rate at which the contents pass through the intestines. The longer the time it takes to pass, the longer poison-forming bacteria will be allowed to grow. We must therefore see to it that the colonic environment is as healthy as possible by consuming the types of foods that support the growth of the beneficial, lactic acid-forming bacteria.

These bacteria thrive best when we consume milk and carbohydrates, while fats generally are neutral to their growth. Milk protein is the only protein that gives the essential amino acids and lactose which are necessary to help beneficial bacteria grow (large amounts of dietary protein are harmful. A reasonable protein intake would be around 40 grams daily, and 50-60 grams in advanced cases. Therefore, it is a great advantage to precede fasting by three days of consuming only fruits and milk. This prevents the colonic contents from being overly toxic, as they will be composed of milk and carbohydrate residues. When the contents of the colon have been made less toxic in this way, fasting can be started under optimal conditions.

Fasting Benefits

In fasting, we should consider:

- 1) the tonus of external muscles, their strength and functioning;

- 2) the internal system (heart, lungs, endocrine glands, etc.), and;
- 3) the nervous system.

Fasting gives rest to the smooth muscles in the abdominal tract, which otherwise are continually at work. By allowing these muscles to rest, their strength will be increased. This increased strength is a tremendous boon when intestinal disturbances or other such organic conditions may arise.

Fasting also invigorates the stomach and small intestines, thus increasing digestive and assimilative powers.

Periodic fasting may be undertaken once a month, every other month or once every third month. Above the age of 40, fasting once a month gives quite satisfactory results. After the ages of 50 to 60, one should still continue to take exercise regularly while adopting a restricted diet to keep up a well regulated colonic function.

A highly efficient fast may generally be undertaken in a period of 3 to 5 days. Through fasting, the organism becomes extensively purified, giving immediate effects such as:

- 1) return of hunger feeling;
- 2) a clean tongue;
- 3) a clean condition of breath;
- 4) disappearance of foul taste from the mouth;
- 5) recovery of clear thinking and accurate sensory operation (due to regeneration of the nervous system), and;
- 6) lowered pulse rate.

For longer fasting periods, one needs special instructions. A "finish fast" from 5 to 15 days is not easy to perform, as the system quite naturally becomes emaciated and weak. One should never go to the point of

starvation, where the tissues are disintegrated, yet a carefully- and properly-done finish fast gives two beneficial results:

- a) the reduction in size of individual tissue cells to a minimum, with no accumulation of fat or protein, and;
- b) the regeneration of juvenile growth capacities of the individual tissue cells.

Tissue cells have an inherent power to grow rightly, but growth as such is not enough; it must proceed in a rational way and up to a certain point. Thereafter, there will be eating again but with no more growth. Food is not the only issue here. When the tissue cells are reduced to their minimum size, they are expected to regain their juvenile growth capacity.

Cleansing of the Colon

The purifying effects of fasting will also extend to the colon, but careful attention must be devoted towards ensuring full cleanliness of the bowels. Generally, one only eliminates between $\frac{1}{3}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$ of the contents of the intestines, thus retaining between $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ of these contents. An incompletely-evacuated colon does not provide a healthy condition. Therefore, at least three evacuations are needed on the first day of fasting. Even after the first fasting day, faecal matter will still be left in the colon. Hence, the need to repeat intestinal lavage the following days.

When the colon is habitually constipated and overtaken by putrefying bacteria, it may be desirable to make the colon completely sterile, but this ought to be done only under the supervision of an expert.

Prolonged physiological fasting, along with drinking water, is chiefly intended for: kidney flushing, whereby the blood is cleansed and poisons are eliminated, and;

2) colonic flushing, whereby water is expelled along with faecal matter.

Even after all of this has been undertaken, there may still remain some accumulation of gastric secretions in the stomach, as well as some regurgitation of bile between the upper section of the small intestines and the colon. This area is quite difficult to affect. There is a special yogic method to help clean it most efficiently. This is accomplished with the yogic control technique called *varisara*, which consists of drinking measured amounts of water and, by advanced abdominal control, passing it from the stomach down to the duodenum, jejunum and into the colon. The water is then expelled via the rectum, along with the contents of the alimentary canal. This achieves a significant blood-purification that extends to the mental area as well. While this yogic method is the best, it is difficult since it requires an extremely good control of the abdominal muscles.

Colonic cleansing may also be done with an autolavage (called *jala vasti*), where water is sucked up via the rectum without mechanical aid. Both methods are of great use. However, before mastering these most natural yogic methods, and to take full advantage of colonic cleanliness, students are instructed to rely on drinking water in conjunction with physical exercise and actual colonic cleansing with enemas.

Selected Revitalizing Foods

Resuming food intake at the end of fasting is a most important issue. The foods taken after a fast must promote both purifying and rebuilding, so as to continue what the fasting started in the first place. The choice of food is crucial, for the positive effect of fasting is, to a great extent, neutralized by inappropriate selection of foods at its end-point. Therefore, we must learn

about the right kind of foods and how to take them.

All vegetables and fruits are important for promoting growth of the beneficial, lactic acid bacteria. A diet consisting of vegetables, fruits, milk, nuts (in other words, a lacto-vegetarian diet) is especially recommended in Hatha Yoga.

The main source for unsuitable bacterial flora in the colon is found in excessive intake of proteins, especially those found in meat, fish and eggs.

We should therefore restrict consumption of those foods so as to control the putrefactive bacterial contents of the colon. The lacto-vegetarian diet is best for achieving this end result. When the lactic acidity grows within the environment of the colon, its motility is hastened, whereas an environment saturated with putrefying bacteria will cause retardation, a slowing down of the motility, and consequent constipation. Right selection of foods will also entail a proper assimilation, so that very little will be left to go to the colon.

After the Fasting

Following fasting, the motility rate of the colon has to be kept at an optimal rate. This prevents abnormal retention, whereby the colon would again accumulate impurities. When the colon remains properly cleansed, it will be possible to escape many problems in daily life.

Once we have understood and learned how to apply these practical methods of fasting and colonic cleansing, we will be quite able to maintain the positive results by:

- 1) adopting a suitable vegetarian diet, including raw vegetables and ripe fruits with enough cellulose (grapes, fresh or dried figs, raisins, etc.);
- 2) practising appropriate physical exercises, and;
- 3) maintaining internal cleanliness for colonic health.

In Hatha Yoga, a clean colon is closely linked to achieving efficient mental concentration. An optimal physical condition can be retained when the body is trained with both dynamic and static exercises. The *asana* (body posture exercise) can then be reduced to a minimum, preferably supplemented by *pranayama* (breath control exercise) when one has first acquired a fair standard in asana exercises. All of this will provide most rewarding results!