

## **Why Fasting?**

*Reviewed by Basile P Catoméris*

The human body displays a delicate balance between metabolism and the elimination of its wastes. Here, the blood plays an important role, as it supplies the required materials for building up the cell body and providing energy. For this, food and oxygen are used, as well as a supply of endocrine secretions. On the one side blood supplies materials, and on the other it collects the metabolic wastes. Carbohydrates and fats are the source of energy while proteins account chiefly for metabolism wastes. The acid-part of the amino acids is burnt up, and the nitrogen portion is converted to urea in the kidneys.

It is important to balance the supply of material and the removal of the wastes. This balance can be easily disturbed when the cells are unable to absorb an oversupply of nutrient materials. If this extra supply becomes habitual, the blood may become saturated with food-materials. To provide full growth and efficient functioning, the cells produce wastes, but the remaining food-materials are also wastes which have to be converted into a form that is eliminable. However, the blood's waste-absorption power may be seriously hampered by this accumulation. If the blood fails to receive all the wastes produced, and is thus unable to eliminate it efficiently, the eliminatory organs will also fail to work properly.

Proper food digestion and assimilation, and increased capacity of the cells to absorb what is needed for a proper functioning, is therefore necessary. The accumulations of wastes may not always be detectable by analysis, and yet the reaction will probably start in the direction of the central nervous system. This reaction will be seen first as a weakened functioning,

and lowered efficiency of the sensory organs and of the thinking capacity. When one is not able to think clearly, the cause is often to be found in disturbed blood balance.

The term "purification" means here that both the part of the cells and the plasma of the blood are to be normalized, and certain wastes eliminated, if and when the latter have reached a certain level. The cells are not always able to absorb food excesses, nor are the eliminative organs always able to eliminate them. The only remedy will therefore be to stop eating. Under such condition, which we may call internal cleansing, no fresh food enters the blood, but the cell activity goes on and if some extra stuff has accumulated in the tissue-cells and in the blood itself, the excess-accumulation in and around the cells will be eliminated during fasting\* along with the absorption of excess in the blood.

If eating is stopped, the cells' production will still go on, albeit in a more restricted manner. Eating abundantly is not a rational habit. When fresh food-supply is stopped, the system adopts a slower pace, thus enabling the eliminating organs to catch up with their tasks. This is what we call internal purification. The dysfunction of the nervous systems is mainly due to that poor balance. It will often be felt at the level of the mind with a lack of sensory accurateness. To restore such condition, fasting (and eating properly after a fasting period is over) is highly beneficial.

Mental fatigue does not arise only because one has been working hard. Heavy mental work and the feeling of fatigue after work are often symptomatic of an accumulation of blood impurities, something often overlooked. Experiences show that, after a period of fasting, thinking is clearer and more efficient. Undertaking a measured, purifying fast is helpful for restoring the function of the whole central nervous system, and the thinking capability associated with the brain.

## **Yogic lifestyle guidance**

To successfully manage one's working day, it is noted that the best time for intellectual activities is in the morning. After a night's sleep, food has been cleared up, thus releasing a feeling of being well-rested and leaving the mouth free from bad taste. If there is some thick, bad taste in the mouth and the feeling of not being well, it indicates temporary food excess or, worse, the bad habit of overeating. This will cause a regurgitation of wastes from the colon to the upper intestines, and up to the small intestines and the stomach, from which it comes to the mouth. Regurgitation is a smooth poisoning-process.

Undertaking internal cleansing of the colon and maintaining right flora by appropriate diet results in sound, undisturbed sleep and a most positive feeling on awakening. This is normally followed by one bowel motion, cleansing the mouth and nostrils, drinking of water and, if time allows, training the nerve system and musculature by appropriate exercise. Thereafter one may take a shower or a relaxing bath before breakfast. Eating meat, coffee, and other heavy things at this moment of the day is undesirable. What is needed then is a light diet consisting of fruits, nuts of different kinds, milk, or sour-milk taken with some energy-giving honey. Students may then sit down for study until lunchtime and experience that these are the best working hours of the day. If one wishes to go on studying after lunch, it is recommended to take a light meal with milk, vegetables, fruits and cereals. It is not advisable to continue working after dinner, unless this is unavoidable, for one needs full rest in the evening.

### **Questions and answers:**

*Who should undertake fasting?*

- Fasting is recommended primarily to adults. Here, the aim of fasting is preventive rather than therapeutic, although fasting is also undertaken to cure light ailments. Fasting requires a progressive approach, and it should

be learned from an experienced teacher. To maintain a proper balance between daily nutrition and resting the whole alimentary canal, 24 hours of fasting may be undertaken monthly and/or three consecutive days of fasting may be undertaken thrice a year. For a gentle start, one's ordinary diet should be properly modified before the start of fasting, but also when returning to one's normal eating habits.

*Which are the eliminatory organs?*

- The residues of food are eliminated through the colon. Assimilated food and metabolized oxygen are eliminated through the lungs, the kidneys, the skin and via the alimentary canal.

*Is fasting indispensable for perfect health?*

- Fasting is very useful, even if athletic training may be considered to give still better results. However, not everyone may claim to be strong enough to undertake athletic exercise. On the other hand, fasting is recommended even when one may not be strong enough for athleticism but claims to eat moderately, something *that* does not prevent the whole system to feel dull.

*Is fasting necessary for the development of concentration?*

- For the purpose of mental concentration, the body should stand at a top-level of efficiency. The same applies to the mind, as the brain should not be excluded altogether from the mental system. By exercising the body, and with right diet and fasting, one may expect good results on the physical side. This is how one may contribute to the efficient up-keep of both brain and mind to an advanced age.

*Is fasting helpful in suppressing the sexual desire?*

- When a healthy person undergoes a fast, it actually strengthens the sexual desire, because that is *dependent* on the activity of the gonads, which are affected by the revitalizing process and therefore secrete more.

To be mastered, sexual desire must be subjected to other means, not just fasting or eating so-called sattvic food. Foods do not prevent arousal of sexual feelings, but rather they reinforce the whole organism, inclusive of sexual power. Control of sexual desire supposes mastering one's mind. Not even impotency helps to control sexual desire. When at a certain age the organic part is shrinking and the physical is declining, the mind may yet continue thinking in the same way, up to a very old age.

*Can fasting be continued for weeks and months?*

- Yogis generally do not undertake fasting for fasting's sake, but for special purposes. Any period of fasting in that way must be stopped in due time. But by adopting another lifestyle of a latent type, it is actually possible through certain processes to prolong fasting considerably. There was a Yogi who could fast for three months, keeping his life in a potential state. To most people this is not possible, and modern science does not know anything about it (and probably does not care to know either).

*\* In this context, fasting consists of a preliminary cleansing of the alimentary canal, followed by the abstention of any kind of nutritious food, solid or liquid, but drinking water at one's discretion.*

Editor's note- For additional information, please read *On Fasting*, under the same heading.