

Eight Steps to Effective Fasting

1. Fast **SENSIBLY**. Don't feel that you must do a certain fast to appear to be more "spiritual". Many biblical fasts were limited time periods. (Judges 20: 16; 2 Samuel 3:35; Acts 10:30)
2. Fast **SENSITIVELY**. When Israel fasted before a crucial battle, the bible says that they "inquired of the Lord." (Judges 20:23; 1 Samuel 23). When we fast we should take special time to hear God speak (Acts 13: 1-2).
3. Fast **SYSTEMATICALLY**. When Jesus taught His disciples about fasting, He began with the words "when you fast" (Matthew 6:16). He was suggesting that believers should have regular times of fasting, whether one day a week or a portion of a day each week. Fasting should become a part of your regular lifestyle.
4. Fast **SACRIFICIALLY**. If we normally do not eat breakfast it is not really a sacrifice to fast breakfast. A true fast must be a sacrifice. David said, "My knees give way from fasting; my bond is thin and gaunt" (Psalm 109:24). True fasting must have a humbling effect on us. (Ps. 35:13).
5. Fasting **SPECIFICALLY**. God said to Israel, "Is not this the fast that I have chosen?" (Isaiah 58:6). We must ask God to direct us in the focus of our fasting.
6. Fasting **SUPERNATURALLY**. The very nature of fasting requires dependence on God's supernatural power to see us through. When the early church fasted before sending out workers, the Bible says, "The Holy Spirit came" (Acts 13: 2, 3). We need God's Spirit as we fast.
7. Fast **SOBERLY**. Jesus cautioned His disciples not to make a spectacle out of fasting like the religious leaders did. This type of fasting only gets the attention of men and not of God. (Matthew 6: 16-17).
8. Fast **SACREDLY**. Jesus cautioned His disciples never to boast about our times of fasting but rather to keep our times of fasting as a personal commitment (Matthew 6:18).

Fasting Safely

As you begin your fast, you may hear from concerned loved ones and friends who urge you to protect your health. And they are right. You should always protect your health. But I assure you, if done properly, fasting will not only prove to be a spiritual blessing, but physical blessing as well.

Depending on your physical health condition or being under the doctor's care, some kinds of fasting may be unwise or dangerous for you.

By all means, consult your doctor before you begin your fast. But, be aware that many doctors have not been trained in this area and so their understanding is limited. Even so, it would be wise to ask your doctor for a physical exam to make sure you are in good health. Also, if you are under any type of medication, make sure you talk to your doctor before changing your regime. Prudence and caution are in order.

When you are assured that you are in good health, you are ready to begin your fast. Follow the guidelines in the Physical Preparations and Maintaining Nutritional Balance and Health parts of this website.

In spite of the absolute safety and benefits of fasting, there are certain persons who should NEVER fast without professional supervision. For example:

- Persons who are physically too thin or emaciated.
- Persons who are prone to anorexia, bulimia, or other behavioral disorders.
- Those who suffer weakness or anemia.
- Persons who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases, or who have heart disease.
- Those who suffer chronic problems with kidneys, liver, lungs, heart, or other important organs.
- Individuals who take insulin for diabetes, or suffer any other blood sugar problem such as hyperglycemia.
- Women who are pregnant or nursing.

Fasting while nursing or pregnant:

Strict fasting while nursing or pregnant is not recommended. If you are in this season of life, here are some great options for you to consider – with the approval of your physician:

- A modified Daniel fast including whole grains, legumes, protein, calcium, and iron supplements
- Fasting sweets and desserts
- Fasting red meat
- Fasting non-food activities like television, Facebook/Twitter, movies, etc.

How to Prepare Yourself Spiritually and Physically

Spiritual Preparation

In preparation for this special time with God, I strongly urge you to examine your heart, and detect any unconfessed sin. Scripture says that God expects His people to repent of their sins before He will hear their prayers. King David said:

Come and hear, all of you who reverence the Lord, and I will tell you what he did for me: For I cried to him for help, with praises ready on my tongue. He would not have listened if I had not confessed my sins. But he listened! He heard my prayer! He paid attention to it!

Blessed be God who didn't turn away when I was praying, and didn't refuse me his kindness and love. (Psalm 66:16-20)

In your prayers, confess not only obvious sins, but less obvious ones as well. The sins of omission as well as the sins of commission experiences. These may be experiences leaving your first love for our Lord: worldly-mindedness, self-centeredness, spiritual indifference, and unwillingness to share your faith in Christ with others, not spending sufficient time in God's Word and in prayer, a poor relationship with your spouse, your children, your pastor, or other members of your church.

Another great way to prepare for your fast is to practice what I call "Spiritual Breathing." The concept is simple.

Physical Preparation

Although fasting is primarily a spiritual discipline, it begins in the physical realm. You should not fast without specific physical preparation.

If you plan on fasting for several days, you will find it helpful to begin by eating smaller meals before you abstain altogether. Resist the urge to have that "last big feast" before the fast. Cutting down on your meals a few days before you begin the fast will signal to your mind, stomach, and appetite that less food is acceptable.

DO NOT begin your fast suddenly. The body grows accustomed to fasting by degrees.

Some health professionals suggest eating only raw foods for two days before starting a fast. It is also recommended to wean yourself off caffeine and sugar products to ease your initial hunger or discomfort at the early stages of your fast.

Be careful not to drink too much water at one time. A glass several times a day is ideal. One should limit drinking coffee or other beverages when fasting. Drinking coffee and other beverages leans more to dieting rather than fasting. Water is a purifying agent and is necessary to wash out the poisons from the systems.

How to Manage Your schedule during the fast

How long you fast, the kind of fast you undertake, and how you adjust your work schedule depends mostly on your occupation. Persons who have more control over their schedules may find it easier to continue their duties and fast for longer periods of time.

Though there are many who engage in strenuous physical labor and have enjoyed their extended fast, if you are so engaged, you may wish to fast only one or more days of the week, limiting yourselves to partial fasting if you are so engaged. Or you may look to weekends as the prime time to abstain from food. Remember, too, fasting during major holidays is not always a good idea. Families may be inconvenienced, and temptations to eat can be overwhelming.

Reasons for schedule adjustments, especially during an extended fast, are two-fold...

The first is physical. Throughout your fast, you may feel somewhat weaker than normal. During the first few days, you may feel tired and irritable. Lightening your workload and cutting down on strenuous exercise would be a very good idea to maintain your health and your morale.

The second reason is spiritual. Fasting is not just denying yourself food. It is exchanging the needs of the physical body for those of the spiritual. Long times of prayer and reading God's Word will be very essential if you are to enter into a more intimate communion with God to maintain your fast to its completion. While fasting, if you dissipate your energy on numerous errands or busy-work to the neglect of spending special time with God, you will starve both physically and spiritually. You will find yourself becoming discouraged and frustrated with your fast instead of being benefited and uplifted and blessed. I don't want that to happen to you.

The more time you spend with God in fellowship, worship, and adoration of Him, and the more you read and meditate upon His Word, the greater your effectiveness will be in prayer and the more meaningful your fast will be. So I encourage you to arrange your schedule accordingly!

Additional Fasting Tips

Keep your fridge and pantry stocked with the items you need. Being unprepared to fast sets you up to give into temptation.

Make it a priority to attend church during the 40-day fast. Being around other believers will encourage you to keep on going when fasting gets difficult.

If you are fasting with others and/or your Life Group, you may want to meet together in a small-group setting. You can share what God is showing you in your devotional time as well as spend time in prayer together.

If you mess up, don't get discouraged. Just get right back on track and keep going. God's mercies "are new every morning" (Lamentations 3: 22-23). He wants you to finish, and he will give you the grace and strength to do it!

Dealing with the Responses of Friends and Loved Ones

Many people are reluctant to tell others that they are fasting so they will avoid the sin of the Pharisees: fasting just to gain recognition for themselves. We strongly believe that attitude is a result of a wrong interpretation of our Lord's teaching and that it is a trick of the enemy who does not want us to fast, nor to share with your loved ones, neighbors and friends the benefits of fasting.

By isolating ourselves from the support of other Christians, we will be more susceptible to doubts and negative influences (both human and demonic). We need the prayer shield of our Christian friends and family members to help us continue when we feel alone and when the enemy tempts us to give up Our Lord as he did Jesus Christ. Eventually, people will notice you are not eating.

If you are asked, nonbelievers may be satisfied by such a brief answer as, "*I have other plans for lunch today.*" Or Christians should be satisfied when you answer that you are fasting today.

If friends and family express concern for your health, ease their fears by telling them that you will stop fasting the moment you feel you are harming your body or if the Lord leads you to end your fast. Tell them you are fasting under your doctor's care, which we urge you to do if you have any question concerning your health.

There is usually no reason for telling strangers or casual acquaintances that you are fasting. If you do, they may subject you to a lot of questions that you may not want to answer. But in any case, use your best judgment and the Lord's leading in telling people about your fast.

How to Make Your Spiritual Experience the Best it Can Be

Receiving God's best blessing from a fast requires solid commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is absolutely crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable, or irritable. Read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes. Meditate on Him when you awake in the night. Sing songs to Him whenever you please. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship. God will enable you to experience His command to "*pray without ceasing*" as you seek His presence.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.

The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is the most powerful of all Christian disciplines and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His face. Satan does not want you to grow in your faith, and will do

anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your shield against such attacks.

Most major reasons for fasting are for personal revival, revival for our nation, for the world and for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. But praying for our own needs and interceding for others are also important reasons to fast and pray. Bring your personal needs before the Lord; intercede for your loved ones, your friends, your church, your pastor, your community, your nation, and the world. By your prayers of humility, as you fast, you will help the Great Commission be fulfilled.

However, do not become so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget about simply reverencing and praising God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him, your attitudes, your actions, your motives, desires, and words. This can only take place if God and His Holy Spirit are at the center of our attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to your attention and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective.

A renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things are usually the results of a fast. Do not be disappointed if you do not have a "mountaintop experience," as some do. Many people who have successfully completed extended fasts tell of feeling a nearness to God that they have never before known, but others who have honestly sought His face report no particular outward results at all. For others, their fast was physically, emotionally, and spiritually grueling, but they knew they had been called by God to fast, and they completed the fast unto Him as an act of worship; God honored that commitment.

Your motive in fasting must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience, and not to attain personal happiness. When your motives are right, God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him in a very special way.

Maintaining Nutritional Balance

We know the prospect of going without food for an extended period of time may be of concern to some. But there are ways to ensure that your body is getting the nutrients it needs so you can remain safe and healthy during your fast.

For an extended fast, we recommend water and fruit and vegetable juices. The natural sugars in juices provide energy, and the taste and strength are motivational to continue your fast. Try to drink fresh juices, if possible. Off-the-shelf juice products are acceptable, as long as they are 100% juice with no sugar or other additives.

If you are beginning a juice fast, there are certain juices you may wish to avoid and certain ones that are especially beneficial. Because of their acid content, most nutritionists do not advise orange or tomato juice (these are better tolerated if mixed with equal portions of water). The best juices are fresh carrot, grape, celery, apple, cabbage, or beet. They also recommend "green drinks" made from green leafy vegetables because they are excellent "de-toxifiers."

Fruit juices are "cleansers" and are best taken in the morning. Since vegetable juices are "restorers" and "builders," they are best taken in the afternoon.

We usually recommend dedicating a portion of your 40-day fast to a special liquid formula, which has been found to be effective.

Any product containing protein or fat, such as milk or soy-based drinks, should be limited or avoided. These products will restart the digestion cycle and you will again feel hunger pangs. Also, for health reasons stay away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea, or cola. Because caffeine is a stimulant, it has a more powerful effect on your nervous system when you abstain from food. This works both against the physical and spiritual aspects of the fast.

Another key factor in maintaining optimum health during a fast is to be very mindful of your physical activity. Exercise only moderately, and rest as much as your schedule will permit (*this especially applies to extended fasts*). Short naps are helpful as well. Walking a mile or two each day at a moderate pace is acceptable for a person in good health, and on a juice fast. However, no one on a water fast should exercise without the supervision of a fasting specialist.

What Physical Effects to Expect

Although fasting can be an indescribable blessing, it is not always easy for everyone. In this time of discipline, self-sacrifice and reflection, do not be surprised if you experience mental and physical discomforts.

To begin, you may experience some inner conflict when you deny yourself the pleasure of eating delicious food. Any sort of fast may sometimes leave you feeling impatient and irritable. During a 3-day fast, this struggle can intensify toward the end of the second day. That seems to be a favorite time for the "self" to rise up and say, "This is as far as I want to go. I have done enough."

Physical Effect

Hunger Pangs: These are greatest usually during the first three days of the fast. Your body is adjusting from using the food in your digestive tract (which remains about three days) to consuming stored fats.

Physical Effect

Coldness, bad breath and heightened body odor, changes in elimination (constipation or diarrhea), light-headedness, changes in sleeping and dreaming patterns, aches and pains.

A white-coated tongue at the beginning of a fast may be a part of the body's pattern of throwing off toxins.

Also expect to go to the bathroom often (you will be drinking lots of water!)

Suggested Relief

After the first two weeks of an extended fast, many of these symptoms subside. Continuing aches in a certain area of the body usually means elimination of fatty tissue is going on in that area, which is not harmful. However, any extensive pain should be examined immediately.

YOU SHOULD STOP FASTING IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING SEVERE PAIN OR SWELLING.

Physical Effect

Headaches or stomachaches may be a result of salt, sugar, or caffeine withdrawal.

Suggested Relief

Eliminating those items from your diet prior to fasting is the best way to avoid these pains.

Physical Effect

Lower back pain may indicate that you are dehydrating

Suggested Relief

Drink more fluids

Physical Effect

Dizziness may be caused by a sudden change in position, such as rising suddenly from a chair.

Suggested Relief

Stop for a second or two, then recover. Move slowly. (A word of caution: these conditions may be symptoms of other problems requiring medical attention).

Physical Effect

Minor fasting discomfort

During your fast, you may have your struggles, discomforts, spiritual victories, and failures. In the morning you may feel like you are on top of the world, but by evening you may be wrestling with the flesh—sorely tempted to raid the refrigerator and counting how many more days are left in your fast. This is especially true if you are new at fasting. To counteract temptations like these, take extra time with the Lord to spend with God. Step outside for fresh air and a moderate walk of a mile or two, and talk to the Lord as you walk along. And in the process always keep on sipping water or juice frequently during your waking hours.

How to Finish Your Fast in a Healthy Way

All the experts agree that "breaking the fast" is the critical phase of fasting. While your body is in the resting mode, your stomach shrinks and your intestines become idle, so solid food must be re-introduced very slowly to avoid kidney failure or digestive distress. In fact, after a 40-day fast, you should make a careful transition for at least three days before returning to eating meats or fats or normal foods.

Further, if you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will linger for days. But if you rush into solid foods, you may lose much of your deep sense of peace and experience physical problems such as diarrhea, sickness, fainting.

Dr. Paul Bragg and his daughter Patricia have conducted fasting clinics for many years. Their book, *The Miracle of Fasting*, gives a specific daily food plan for breaking a 7-day fast that could be adapted and stretched out over several more days for a 40-day fast.

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller now, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice, or bread (except for "Melba toast") for at least a week. Also avoid meats, dairy products, and any fats or oils for a week or more. Introduce them very slowly and in small amounts.

Extended fasts are not the only fasts which need to be ended with caution. Even a 3-day fast requires reasonable precautions. It is wise to start with a little soup -- something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes, and carrots -- and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start out slowly, allowing time for your body to re-adjust to its usual regime.

Fasting Questions & Answers

Can I have salt, pepper, seasonings, milk, whole grains, soy products, eggs, protein drinks, vitamins, or butter?

The general guidelines for each fast should be framed by the type of fast that you select. However, fasting is meant to be a spiritual endeavor that requires discipline and sacrifice. It is not something that is meant to be unattainable. Decide what is feasible for you and do your best.

Can children fast?

The best way to show your children the power of fasting is to lead by example. If they want to participate in fasting or if you want to have a family fast, considering giving up desserts or soft drinks. IN addition to giving up an item of food, you could also give up television as a family and spend that time reading and discussing Bible stories.

What if I have a medical condition?

Consult your doctor before starting any fast. Decided together what is possible. If your health condition prohibits you from fasting food, try fasting something else and concentrate on prayer and Bible study.

What if I start and can't finish out the fast...have I fasted for nothing?

Seeking God through prayer and fasting is never a waste of time. When you make the effort, God takes notice. Just determine within your heart that you will make an even better fort next time. Or try finishing up with a partial fast.

I forgot and ate something that wasn't on my fast...do I need to start again?

No, think of fasting as a marathon, rather than a sprint. Don't give up! If you fall down, get up and keep trying. Conquering "King Stomach" is difficult, but you'll make it.

Do I continue to exercise while fasting?

Moderate exercise is good. But it is best to always consult a doctor about fasting and exercise. If you are on a complete fast, you may not have the energy for a high level of exercise.

What if I have a manual labor job?

If you have a job that requires you to expend a lot of physical energy, you may want to consider a partial fast that allows you to receive enough nutrition to perform your job.