



A Dietitian's Guide to Sticking to Your Fast

Dr. Sandra Bastin, RDN, LD

Disclaimer: Individuals should check with their physician or healthcare professional before embarking on a fast.

Why should we fast?

Fasting by definition is going without food or water for a period of time. But in a spiritual sense, fasting means to take your eyes away from worldly pleasures and focus on God. Our church fast should include plenty of liquids. The National Academy of Medicine recommends letting thirst be your guide but 15 cups are recommended for the average adult male and 11 cups for the average adult female. Adequate water intake is necessary for the maintenance of bodily functions.

What happens to the body when we fast?

In a healthy person, our energy comes from foods that contain carbohydrates, protein and fats, with carbohydrates supplying the most efficient source of energy. But when the body goes into starvation mode, the body adapts by using fat for energy. Ketones are produced when there is not enough glucose (sugar) to fuel the body's energy needs. For a person with diabetes, ketones are often produced as a result of prolonged high blood sugar and insulin deficiency. Without the right amount of insulin, glucose starts to build up in the blood stream and doesn't enter the cells. The cells burn fat instead of glucose and ketones form in the blood and spill into the urine.

Will I lose weight?

It is likely that a long-term fast will cause weight loss. In the first week, there is usually a sudden drop in body weight, sometimes around five pounds, that is usually the result of water loss. This loss should slow to two pounds per week. Losing more than two pounds per week usually indicates that you are losing water weight and lean muscle mass instead of losing fat. You will most likely gain this weight back. But this fast is about being uncomfortable causing you to intentionally move that discomfort from hunger pains to placing your eyes on God, not your weight or the food you do or do not eat!

Who should not fast?

Fasting is not for everyone. Those with extreme illnesses, such as cancer, immune compromised diseases or eating disorders; chronic disease, such as diabetes or heart disease; underweight; over 80 years old; under 9 years old; or pregnant, should not participate in a food fast. You should consult with your physician before fasting.

How will I feel when I fast?

Fasting is not easy. It is surprising how jittery or anxious you may feel when you miss a meal. Headaches, heartburn, lack of sleep, dry mouth, dehydration and hunger are all common symptoms of fasting.

What if I can't fast?

If you cannot or do not want to fast, there are other ways to focus on God by giving up something you love. It doesn't have to be food. Consider television, your smart phone or social media. Remember the idea is to replace the discomfort with an open Bible or devotion to prayer.

Is fasting hard?

Absolutely! Try the following tips to stick with your fast...

Start small.

No one climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro in a day. It takes months of training and diligence to prepare to climb. Any changes in diet should begin with several weeks of thinking about giving up the foods you love to eat and drink. Take this time to think about your commitment and how important it is to you. Then start with fasting one meal a day, then two and work your way up to the day long fast. Or commit to eating just half of what is on your plate.

Make a plan.

Plan what you'll do instead of eating. You must have a purpose. Otherwise, you are just going hungry. This commitment to become closer to God might include prayer, quiet time, Bible reading, Bible study, focusing on a particular issue in your life and exploring options, walking in nature, etc. What is your spiritual purpose for fasting? The goal is certainly not to starve yourself.

Include others in your plan.

Including friends and family in your fast can be an inspiration for you. But it can also be a disruption. Think about how the fast will affect those you work and play with daily. Then decide how you will adjust.

Explore different fasting plans.

The Daniel Fast is based upon the prophet Daniel's dietary and spiritual experiences. There is a specific list of allowable and avoidable foods. Any plan will not be easy for you to follow. This congregational effort is meant to offer support.

So what if you cheat?

Days 7 through 10 will be really hard. And eating out may seem impossible. All you will be able to think about is what you are missing. You will feel hungry. You will want to break the fast. You will feel guilty. But it's ok. Don't beat yourself up. Don't dwell on your love of food; dwell on your love of God. If you cheat, just pick up where you left off! This is not about how compliant or successful you can be with not eating. It is about placing your eyes on God and staying in His word. It is about seeking guidance. It is about building stronger habits of being aware of God and seeking His will every day! The difficulty of eating is part of the fast and your commitment to God!

Stay steeped in the word.

Pray! Read your Bible! Seek to know God and feel His presence. Turn your physical hunger into an act of increasing your faith and becoming a more devoted disciple! If you skip a day though, don't despair. Just pick up where you left off! God is not judging you or asking you to be perfect. He is proud you have decided to get closer to Him!

Here is my family's suggested fast. Because several of us become hangry without food, we give up the things we truly love but eat something to prevent the headaches and meanness that goes along with a fast. There is just enough food to cause us to feel hungry and uncomfortable.

For 21 days my family will be giving up the following foods:

No sugar, real or artificial, which also leaves out baked goods, desserts or sweetened beverages. And no chocolate!

- No alcohol.
- No grains, including rice and oats.
- No legumes, including nut butters.
- No potatoes or pasta or bread.
- No deep-fried foods.
- No luncheon meats.
- Use dairy sparingly.
- Use low calorie dressings sparingly.
- Use olive oil and butter sparingly.

For 21 days my family will be eating the following foods:

- Lots of water, tea, coffee and unsweetened beverages.
- All fruits and vegetables – equivalent to 2½ to 6½ cups daily, depending on size.
- All meats and seafood – up to three ounces per day.
- Eggs – 1 per day.

Our Meal Patterns with Examples:

Breakfast

Hard cooked egg, Banana, Orange Juice/Unsweetened Yogurt, Blueberries, Walnuts/Cottage Cheese with Canned Peaches

Lunch

Chef Salad with Lemon/Vegetable Salad with Oil and Vinegar Herbed Dressing/Greek Salad with Balsamic Vinaigrette

Dinner

Broiled Salmon over Wilted Arugula with Carrots/Baked Chicken with Grilled Mixed Vegetables/
Chinese Beef Stir Fry

Other Fasting Suggestions

Judy Shrout

I was leading a Bible study in which we talked about fasting — and came up with lots of options that helped us broaden our understanding of what a fast might encompass. Food is the normal thing people consider in a fast, but the following are some options too:

- Junk food
- Sugar
- Alcohol
- Cokes
- Caffeine
- Shopping/shopping online included
- Gossip
- Negativity
- Criticism
- Unhealthy thoughts
- Satan's voice
- Overspending
- TV, radio, online, and newspaper news
- TV sports
- TV Watching
- Street drugs
- Pornography
- Wastefulness
- Time-wasters
- Laziness
- Unbelief
- Worry
- Comparisons
- Social Media
- iPhones
- Computer/video games
- House-cleaning – my personal favorite



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