

- Immune system

THE 'YOUNGER YOU' DIET

New eating plan claims to help you rejuvenate your immune system

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Move over intermittent fasting, Atkins, Dukan, keto, paleo, Mediterranean and all the rest: there's a new diet on the scene to make you healthier and keep you young. At least, that's according to a new study led by the University of South Carolina Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, and published in the journal *Nature Communications*. It suggests that cycles of a fasting mimicking diet (FMD) can lower risk factors for disease and reduce biological age in humans.



Developed by Prof Valter Longo and his team, the FMD involves a five-day diet high in unsaturated fats and low in overall calories, protein and carbohydrates. Mimicking the effects of a water-only fast, it provides necessary nutrients while making fasting more manageable.

Researchers studied two groups of men and women aged 18 to 70, who underwent three to four monthly cycles of the FMD. The participants followed the diet for five days and resumed their normal diet for 25 days. During the fasting period, they could consume specified portions of plant-based soups, energy bars and drinks, and tea. They were also given a supplement to ensure they didn't miss out on important vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids.

The results appear to be promising. Blood samples taken from the participants showed reduced diabetes risk factors, including lower insulin resistance and decreased average blood sugar levels. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) revealed a reduction in abdominal and liver fat, indicating a decreased risk of metabolic syndrome – a group of health issues linked to type 2 diabetes and conditions that affect your heart or blood vessels. Moreover, the FMD cycles appeared to rejuvenate the immune system.

Analysis of the data found that the FMD participants had reduced their biological age by an average of 2.5 years. "This is the first study to show that a food-based intervention that doesn't require chronic dietary or other lifestyle changes can make people biologically younger," Longo told BBC Science Focus.

He hoped the results would encourage more healthcare professionals to recommend FMD cycles. He suggested that healthy people aged 20 to 70 should consider trying it two to three times a year. Although, he cautioned that anyone with diabetes should talk to their doctor first, as there are some concerns over certain medications.