Precautions for Healthy Fasting

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To engage in healthy fasting we don't need to be the picture of health and vitality. In most cases all that is necessary is average good health. There are of course, certain precautions...

• Children should never fast.

• Pregnant and nursing women should never attempt a fast. The effects on the unborn fetus are unknown and shouldn't be risked. As far as nursing, according to Annemarie Colbin, author of "Food and Healing," who fasted a couple times while nursing, her breast milk seemed to contain less nutrient density even though the volume remained the same. She says her babies complained as if they weren't getting enough nutrition.

Ideally, a woman would engage in healthy fasting well before getting pregnant, putting her body in the best possible state to support a growing fetus. The less toxins her body is carrying, the better for her baby. The pregnant woman can always, of course, improve her diet to include more nutritious foods, but check with your obstetrician before making any drastic or sudden changes.

• Those who should consult a doctor and/or be under medical care during fasting include: the extremely frail, those with a weakened immune system, those with eating disorders, medication-dependent diabetes, chronic ailments such as heart disease, especially if on prescription medication. With most conditions, it is possible to fast, but the more serious the condition, the more you need professional support during a fast to avoid any problems. If you are on any prescription medications, your requirements for that medicine may vary from day to day. For example, if you are on blood pressure lowering medication, fasting may naturally lower your blood pressure. You wouldn't want to take your full dosage of medicine or your blood pressure may drop too low. You would need a doctor to monitor you daily. You must take care of yourself. Use your best judgment, and that of your physician, if you have medical issues which leave you uncertain about the safety of fasting in your life.

• While rare, longer-term water fasting (more than 10 days), can drop an individual's electrolyte reserves too low, indicated by sudden and extreme weakness or persistent vomiting. This is the reason to have professional support during the more intense water fast. Dr. Joel Fuhrman, author of "Fasting and Eating for Health," suggests professional support for any water fast longer than 2 to 3 days.

• Remember the "healthy" in healthy fasting. Use your common sense. There was a method of fasting once promoted for losing weight that consisted of fruit juices, coffee, and tea. Diuretics and blood thinners were also used. This was extremely unhealthy fast and followed for too long and in obese patients with serious pre-existing medical conditions. One person died at 56 days, and another at 21 days. (But, of course, untold numbers lived). This is not healthy fasting, and not what is promoted by other responsible proponents of fasting.

Water, fresh fruits and vegetables, and even grains are the tools of healthy fasting. Drugs, chemicals, artificial sugars, processed foods, denatured foods, additives are avoided. Attentiveness to your body's messages is always promoted, including the message to stop the fast earlier than you had planned. Fasting is done to help the body cleanse and rebuild, not to tear it down.

One shall keep in mind that there are different levels of intensity to fasting. Fruit fasting, rice fasting, and cleansing diets (a form of partial fasting) are all milder methods of healthy fasting. And just a one day fast of that kind, performed occasionally, will deliver you a great deal of benefit and knowledge of your body and emotions and habits. They can also serve to prepare you for longer fasts if that is your goal. (www.allaboutfasting.com)