

Fasting for Better Health

by Weimin Kwauk

Fasting has been practiced by people of different cultures and religious backgrounds for a long time in our human history. One belief behind fasting is that everything we consume carries toxins or creates toxins inside our bodies; an unbalanced diet or unhealthy habits can make things worse. Based on ancient Chinese "Yin and Yang" philosophy, even if you think you have a "balanced" diet, the balance is always temporary. "Yin" and "Yang" are always changing. Your body's condition is always changing; it can only stay at a relatively balanced or "healthy" condition for some time. You can not find a diet that is always balanced for your body. As time goes by, the toxins inside your body will accumulate and have a negative impact on your health.

Fasting is a common practice for driving the toxins out of our bodies. It is a self-cleansing and self-healing process.

Fasting is also a process of body purification for many religious or philosophical beliefs, helping you get closer to your belief's highest spiritual or philosophical state through meditation or prayer.

Fasting practices, or "avoidance of food," as it is translated from the Chinese can be traced back several thousand of years in Chinese history. During this practice, people would stop eating cooked food. It was believed that this process would help you eliminate or drive out diseases, toxins, or what we call "bad" Chi. Fasting in combination with meditation also has a spiritual effect: a purified body and mind that brings you more self-awareness and focus during your meditation which helps you to achieve a "Harmony with the Universe" trance state.

There are several styles of Chinese fasting. The first kind of fasting is where you eat nothing; you get your energy from meditation. Meditation connects you to the Universe and to Nature.

The second style involves the consumption of liquids. You do not consume any cooked or manufactured food; however, you can still have some fruits and nuts. This type of fasting is more commonly practiced.

Another style of fasting is when you avoid eating food completely, taking only combinations of herbs instead. There are many herbal formulas that have been passed down from the Taoist Temples and from earlier practitioners in Chinese history. Some are simple while others are complicated and need special preparation, carefully mixing together ingredients of specific weight ratios according to a particular formula. Typically, the final products look like small marbles that can be easily stored or taken along for travel. Commonly used

herbs include Bai Zhu (*Atractylodes macrocephala* Koidz), Fu Ling (*Wolfiporia cocos*), Huang Jing (*Polygonatum sibiricum*) and Ginseng. Some formulas contain minerals like Yun Mu (Mica), Zhu Sha (Vermilion) and Xiong Huang (Realgar). Some herbal formulas use materials that are easier to be found, including pine tree seeds, walnuts, chestnuts, sesame seeds, Chinese date, mulberry, black bean and honey.

Fasting is not the same as starving.

All three styles of fasting can be forced or triggered.

Fasting is required for certain medical procedures and tests. For example, you might skip breakfast or another meal before a medical procedure, or until a test has been completed. In these cases, you have forced yourself into fasting for a short duration. Usually, your health will not be harmed by this kind of temporary fasting. Hunger strikes, on the other hand, where you force yourself into a condition of starvation for a long duration of time, can seriously harm your health, not to mention put you in a bad mood.

Triggered fasting can be passive or active.

In a passive situation—for example, after you practice meditation for a while—sooner or later, without any planning, you will find yourself in a situation in which you suddenly have no desire to eat, no matter how good the food may be. The feeling is different from being sick or losing your appetite. In this case, your meditation practice has naturally led you to the fasting state.

People with or without meditation experience can also actively trigger fasting by learning how to prepare the mind to start fasting at a particular time.

For a more common fasting practice, if you do not want to completely cut off your food consumption, water with honey, light tea, an apple and a few peanuts are the kinds of food you can consume during the fasting period. Do not force yourself into fasting when you are not ready, and do not starve yourself.

The duration of fasting can vary from one day to a few days, from a few months, to sometimes even years. During the fasting period, you will not feel hungry or eager to grab something to eat. You will feel full of energy and have no problem performing your daily tasks. Some people may become less talkative as a way for the body to preserve its energy. Weight loss is also normal.

Usually the first attempt at fasting does not last long; perhaps only one to three days when your wish for food returns. A diet of soft foods will slowly return your appetite to normal. Let your mind and actions move at the same pace.

Consult with your doctor before fasting and make sure that your health condition is suitable for the practice. Learn more about fasting or meditation from people who understand and are experienced with these arts.

Visit hsvtaichi.com for more information about the author and his Tai Chi class.