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FASTING: IS IT A BOON OR BANE FOR A HEALTHY LIFE!

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ABSTRACT

Taking food every day is man's common practice. Food helps him to sustain his life and continue doing regular activities. He is said to have observed a fast on the day when he abstains from food for one reason or another. Fast has absolutely nothing to do with religion. It is true that on certain religious occasions we observe a fast by taking or abandoning certain food-items, but it cannot be called fasting in its true sense or from the scientific point of view. On the fast-day, compelled by religious sentiment, we keep control over our natural desire and avoid taking regular food (particularly made from cereals). However, in its substitution, we take other nutritious and heavy foods like milk and milk-products.

Key words: Fasting, Food, Nutritious

INTRODUCTION

A fast means absolute abstention from taking any kind of food for a definite period with a view to giving rest to the different organs of the body and their processes, thereby helping them to get cleansed. One may observe a fast even by taking only fruits, fruits-juices or water. These are the different kinds of fasting, each with its special effect. Fasting and starving are two different conditions. It is true that in both the conditions food is not taken; however, as also different.

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Functions of Food

There are two main functions of food as to provide the body with nourishment and heat also to produce new cells to take the place of the cells destroyed owing to depreciation caused by routine activities. The body stores some part of food, the nutrients of which are useful in some specific condition. During illness, the body uses its full energy in its fight against the disease. During this period as the body requires no particular nourishment, we feel a loss of appetite. During illness, the elimination of toxins and foreign elements from the body is of utmost importance. If food is taken during illness, precious energy is used up in digesting it. When the body needs no nourishment, when it is necessary to remove toxins from the body and appetite is dormant, abstention from taking food is called fasting.

Fasting and Starvation

Even during a fast the body requires fuel or heat. For this purpose the body begins to burn toxic elements accumulated in it. Besides, the nutrients stored in the body are also useful for energizing the body. The organs or cells vital to the body are not destroyed for a long time during a fast. Starvation is the condition in which the organs or cells vital to the body for its well-being are destroyed along with waste-products. If proper care is not taken, starvation will follow a fast kept for a long time. An expert physician puts a person who keeps a fast under his constant observation and as soon as he finds the symptoms of starvation, he advises the person to end his fast.

‘When a patient stops taking food, the disease and not the patient dies of starvation’, this well known quotation by Dr. Dewey is true. As a matter of fact, in illness, food, instead of giving strength to a patient, nourishes and prolongs the disease. The body needs definite food regularly. In the same way, it needs regular fasting at definite intervals. Food provides the body with energy and heat while a fast bestows health and purity on the body. Moreover, a fast gives rest to the various processes going in the body such as digestion, blood-circulation, and metabolism and revitalizes them. A balanced-diet, according to the need of the body, following the rules regarding health and keeping a fast at definite intervals, helps an individual to maintain his good health. The therapy in which diseases are cured through prolonged fasting has

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been successful in the cases where diseases are deeply rooted in the body.

Benefits of Fasting

Fasting and starvation are two different conditions. A fast is observed when the body needs no food and going without food may possibly improve health. Starvation is a condition in which the body, though in need of food, does not get food. Fasting does not do any harm to the body, but it gives mental and physical health, while starvation leads one to death. Starvation begins where fasting ends. The advantages of a fast includes the digestive system gets rest, elimination of toxins speeds up and the liver is activated. The resistance power increases and the mental power is enhanced. During the period of fasting, the body, first of all, burns foreign elements and toxins in order to obtain nourishment. Any person can keep a fast and derive its benefits provided his condition is under constant observation and body periodically checked.

Before Fasting

Cleanliness of bowels is necessary before beginning a fast. Mild purgatives like ‘harade’ (*Terminalia chebula*) or isabgol (*Plantago ovata*) or enema will be helpful in getting the bowels cleansed. This should be remembered on the first day of the fast. Stool lying in the intestine dries up and its poisonous elements are absorbed in the body which damages the functioning of the body or delay the cure of a disease. Enema is also necessary two or three days after the beginning of a fast. What should a faster Do During His Fasting Period? A faster would get the maximum benefits and get rid of disease and regain health provided he strictly follows the rules mentioned below:

The faster should drink as much water as possible during the period of fasting. A glassful of lukewarm water should be taken three or four times a day. Enema should be taken at an interval of every two or three days so that stool may not be accumulated in the large intestine, its poisonous elements mix with blood. To prevent this condition, the bowels should be completely evacuated, if necessary, by an enema.

The faster should take a bath with tepid or lukewarm water every day to remove foul-smelling perspiration. If he feels weakness, he should get his body sponged by some acquaintance. The faster should always live in open, clean air. Deep-breathing is beneficial to a faster. Even in cold season, a faster should take the advantage

of open air. He can wear woolen cloths, if necessary. A sun-bath early in the day is beneficial to the faster. He should sit, with his bare body, in the morning sunshine for half an hour.

This can be repeated in the evening, if desired. A poultice of wet-clay should be put on the abdomen once a day. It is important to do this when the stomach is empty. During the period of fasting, the faster should simultaneously undertake natural physical measures such as massage, hip-bath, steam-bath and hot foot-bath. The faster should avoid doing any activity which would entail jerky or rapid movements. During the period of fasting, the concentration of sugar in the blood decreases. Hence too rapid, laborious or jerky activities may cause undue fatigue or giddiness.

Mental rules

A faster would get more and quick benefits if he practices the following mental rules during the period of fasting:

Think positively and constructively during fasting. Stick firmly to your determination of achieving good health and continue your efforts till you get the expected result. Remember that a disease is the consequence of incorrect dietary habits and life-style, and fasting is atonement for these bad habits.

Remain cheerful throughout the period of fasting. Live a life of hope, delight and joy. Do not get angry. Avoid despair and worries. Do not be disappointed. Anger, worry, despair and disappointment are the factors which are impediments to health. Keep away from them. Cheerfulness, firmness and self-confidence are the steps which lead you to health. Also do not allow fear or fright to overcome you. During the period of fasting, concentrate on such thoughts as would sublimate your mind. Have rosy dreams. Read such books as would give you peace and inspiration. Listen to music. If possible; try to stay alone, in isolation, during the period of fasting. Keep away from noise pollution. Try to avoid the contact of those persons who do not know anything about the beneficial effects of a fast. This is because the talks of such persons may shake your faith and infuse fear in you regarding a fast. Keep your senses away from the sight of food and its fragrance. Drive away the thoughts of food from your mind. Forget the kitchen. Do not talk anything about food. Do not worry yourself about annoyance, idleness, weakness, insomnia, headache etc., the

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feelings you will experience for two or three days in the beginning of the period of fasting. All these discomforts will rapidly vanish if you have firmness and self-confidence (1-5).

CONCLUSION

It needs to be remembered that fasting is not a means of competition and imitation. There can only be two aims of fasting namely gaining health and mental development. Beasts and birds instinctively avoid taking food to get rid of illness. Man guided by logic has suppressed this instinct. Loss of appetite is a prominent symptom of almost every disease. But man gifted with logic considers loss of appetite as an independent disease! Man needs to have a second thought on his impulsive indications. Normally, a fast ranging from two to three days to one month is sufficient to regain health. A fast in excess of its not a fast but starvation which is injurious to health. It is desirable that a fast of more than ten or twelve days should be observed under the recommendation and supervision of an experienced physician.

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