

Your Personal Guide to Fasting and Prayer

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| 1. How Desperate am I for God? | 1 |
| 2. Why You Should Fast | 2 |
| 3. How to Fast Safely | 3 |
| 4. What Length and Type of Fast are Right for You | 4 |
| 5. How to Prepare Yourself Spiritually and Physically | 6 |
| 6. How to Manage Your Schedule While Fasting | 7 |
| 7. Dealing with the Responses of Friends and Loved Ones | 8 |
| 8. How to Make Your Spiritual Experience the Best it Can Be | 9 |
| 9. How to Maintain Nutritional Balance and Health from Beginning to End | 11 |
| 10. What Physical Effects to Expect | 13 |
| 11. How to Finish Your Fast in a Healthy Way | 15 |

How Desperate Am I for God?

How desperate am I for God?

Fasting is one of the most powerful spiritual disciplines of all the Christian disciplines. It is a way to align our hearts with the psalmist: “My soul thirsts for God, the living God” (Psalm 42:2). “It’s a means of God’s grace to strengthen and sharpen our Godward affections,” writes David Mathis in his book, “Habits of Grace.”

Through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit can transform your life.

According to Scripture, personal experience and observation, fasting and prayer can also effect change on a much grander scale. I am convinced that when God’s people fast with a proper biblical motive — seeking God’s face, not His hand — with a broken, repentant and contrite spirit, God will hear from heaven. He will heal our lives, our churches, our communities, our nation and our world. Fasting and prayer can bring about a change in the direction of our nation, the nations of the earth and the fulfillment of the Great Commission. This is a powerful motivation in today’s unsettled world.

For those who desire both inward and outward impact, humbling yourself before God through fasting is a good place to start. His power can be released in and through you by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.

Fasting is one of the most neglected spiritual practices. When I first undertook an extended fast, I had a difficult time finding information on the nature of a biblical fast, how to start, what to expect physically and spiritually, and how to end a fast.

These pages are designed to answer your practical questions about fasting and ease any concerns you might have. In this series, you will learn:

- Why you should fast and how to do it safely.
- What length and type of fast are right for you.
- How to prepare yourself spiritually and physically.
- How to manage your schedule while fasting.
- How to deal with the responses of friends and loved ones.
- How to make your spiritual experience the best it can be.
- How to maintain nutritional balance and health from beginning to end (including specific juice and broth recipes).
- What physical benefits to expect.
- How to finish your fast and return to your normal schedule in a healthy way.

I have completed five 40-day fasts, and I want to share with you what I have learned and what has helped me. Whether you hold a one-day fast or an extended 40-day fast, I pray that the Lord’s love and blessings will be poured out on you as you take this exciting step of faith.

Why You Should Fast

Fasting is one of the Spirit's tools for strengthening and transforming grace in our lives. This spiritual practice is a gift from God meant to grow us and draw us into a deepening relationship with Him. If you do not already know this power and the importance of fasting, here are some insights drawn from God's Word and personal experience to get you started:

- Fasting was an expected practice in both the Old and New Testament eras. For example, Moses fasted for at least two recorded 40-day periods. Jesus fasted 40 days and reminded His followers to fast. He said, "When you fast," not, "If you fast" (Matthew 6:16).
- Fasting and prayer can restore the loss of your "first love" for the Lord (Revelation 2:4) and result in a more intimate relationship with Christ.
- Fasting is a biblical way to truly humble yourself in the sight of God (Ezra 8:21). King David said, "I ... humbled myself with fasting" (Psalm 35:13, New International Version).
- Fasting enables the Holy Spirit to reveal your true spiritual condition, resulting in brokenness, repentance and a transformed life.
- Through fasting, the Holy Spirit will imprint God's Word deeper on your heart, and His truth will become more meaningful to you.
- Fasting can transform your prayer life into a richer and more personal experience.
- Fasting can result in a dynamic personal revival and make you a channel of life change to others.

If you fast, you will find yourself being humbled as I did. You will discover more time to pray and seek God's face. And as He leads you to recognize and repent of unconfessed sin, you will experience God's grace to grow and mature you.

How to Fast Safely

As you begin your fast, you may hear from concerned loved ones and friends who urge you to protect your health. And they are right — you should protect your health. But I assure you, if done properly, fasting will prove to be not only a spiritual blessing but a physical blessing as well.

By all means, consult your doctor before you begin your fast. But be aware that many doctors have not been trained in this area, so their understanding may be limited. Even so, it would be wise to ask your doctor for a physical exam to make sure you are in good health. You may have a physical problem that would make fasting unwise or dangerous. Also, if you are taking any type of medication, make sure to talk to your doctor before changing your regimen. Prudence and caution are in order.

When you are assured that you are in good health, you are ready to begin your fast. Follow the guidelines in the pages on physical preparations and maintaining nutritional balance and health.

In spite of the safety and benefits of fasting, there are certain people who should never fast without professional supervision. For example:

- People who are physically underweight.
- People who are prone to anorexia, bulimia or other behavioral disorders.
- People who suffer from weakness or anemia.
- People who have tumors, bleeding ulcers, cancer, blood diseases or heart disease.
- People who suffer from chronic problems with the kidneys, liver, lungs, heart or other vital organs.
- People who take insulin for diabetes or suffer any other blood sugar problem, such as hyperglycemia.
- Women who are pregnant or nursing.

What Length and Type of Fast are Right for You

If you have never fasted before, I am so glad that you are seeking to learn more about it. Though it is seemingly countercultural today, this discipline has been a major emphasis in the lives of many of the great spiritual leaders throughout history.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist denomination, fasted every Wednesday and Friday and required all of his clergy to do the same. Effective ministers of God from the apostle Paul to Martin Luther to John Calvin made fasting a continual part of their walks with God. And there are numerous Christian leaders today, such as Tim Keller and John Piper, who relish and teach of a deepening hunger for God through fasting.

Though convinced of its great value, none of these men had a formula for fasting that they considered to be the only right way. Fasting is about the condition of the heart, not the number of days. Each time that I have fasted for forty days, it was because I felt impressed by God to do so.

So, start slowly. Fast for one meal a day or one day a week or one week a month. Build up your spiritual muscles so that you will be prepared in a period of several months to fast for an extended 40-day period.

Types of Fasts Described in the Bible

A partial fast is described in the book of Daniel. Although the water fast seemed to be the custom of the prophet, there was a three-week period in which he only abstained from “delicacies” — meat and wine (Daniel 10:3).

The two primary types of fast mentioned in the Bible are the “absolute” and “supernatural absolute” fasts. These are total fasts — no food (solid or liquid) and no water. Paul went on an absolute fast for three days following his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:9). Moses and Elijah engaged in what must be considered a supernatural absolute fast of forty days (Deuteronomy 9:9; 1 Kings 19:8).

I strongly advise you to drink plenty of liquids as you fast. Obviously, if God leads you to undertake an absolute fast, you should obey. If so, be certain, to the best of your ability, that God is leading you.

[Editor’s note: If you are new to fasting, never undertake an absolute fast before consulting both a spiritual mentor and a medical professional. If you have questions about what it means for God to lead you, see “How to Do a Biblical Fast.”]

Water-only fasts that last for more than several days need to be undertaken with complete rest and under medical supervision because of the extreme danger of over-toxication, breakdown of vital body tissues and loss of electrolytes.

I personally practice and recommend water and juice fasting, especially if you are going to fast for an extended period of time. This type of fast will provide you with more energy than absolute or

water-only fasts and still lead you into the humbling experience of denying your desire for solid food that you can chew.

When it comes to making your final decision about what type of fast is right for you, the best advice I can give you is to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. He will guide your heart and mind as to what is best for you. Remember, the most important consideration in fasting is your motive. Why are you fasting — to seek something personally from God's hand or to seek His face in worship, praise and thanksgiving?

How to Prepare Yourself Spiritually and Physically

Spiritual Preparation

In preparation for this special time with God, I urge you to examine your heart through prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any unconfessed sin. Scripture records that God always requires His people to repent of their sins before He will hear their prayers. King David said:

**Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what He did for me.
For I cried out to Him for help, praising Him as I spoke.
If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.
But God did listen! He paid attention to my prayer.
Praise God, who did not ignore my prayer or withdraw His unfailing love from me.
(Psalm 66:16-20, New Living Translation)**

In your prayers, do not only confess the obvious sins that come to mind, but allow yourself to linger in His presence, giving Him time to show you the less obvious ones as well. You may want to ask God if you are experiencing any of these signs of leaving your first love: worldly-mindedness, self-centeredness, spiritual indifference, unwillingness to share your faith in Christ with others, not spending sufficient time in God's Word and in prayer, or a poor relationship with your spouse, your children, your friends, or other members of your church community.

Another great way to prepare for your fast is to practice what I call "spiritual breathing." The concept is simple, but it has changed my own life and that of countless others.

Like physical breathing, spiritual breathing is a process of exhaling the impure and inhaling the pure. If you knowingly sin, breathe spiritually to restore the fullness of God's Holy Spirit in your life. You exhale by confessing your sins when you become aware of them, and you inhale by inviting the Holy Spirit to retake control of your life. As an act of faith, trust Him to empower you. During the fast, spiritual breathing — constant reliance on the Holy Spirit — will enable you to resist temptation not only to sin but also to abandon your fast.

Physical Preparation

Although fasting is primarily a spiritual discipline, it begins in the physical realm. You should not fast without specific physical preparation.

If you plan on fasting for several days, you will find it helpful to begin by eating smaller meals before you abstain altogether. Resist the urge to have that "last big feast" before the fast. Cutting down on your meals a few days before you begin the fast will signal to your mind, stomach and appetite that less food is acceptable.

Some health professionals suggest eating only raw foods for two days before starting a fast. I also recommend weaning yourself off caffeine and sugar products to ease your initial hunger or discomfort at the early stages of your fast.

How to Manage Your Schedule While Fasting

How long you fast, the kind of fast you undertake and how you adjust your schedule depends mostly on the flexibility of your daily life.

Whether you work in an office or from home, are a student or a stay-at-home mom, there is a way to manage your fast. In fact, on the basis of my personal experience, I am confident there are thousands of men and women, of all ages and life stages, who have already completed both short and extended fasts, many up to 40 days.

There are some whose work or lifestyle involves strenuous physical activity who have still enjoyed an extended fast. However, if this is your situation, you may want to consider a limited fast of only one or more days of the week. Or you may look to weekends as the prime time to abstain from food. Remember, too, fasting during major holidays is not always a good idea. Families may be inconvenienced, and temptations to eat can be overwhelming.

There are a couple of reasons to consider adjusting your schedule, especially during an extended fast:

The first is physical. Throughout your fast, you may feel somewhat weaker than normal. During the first few days, you may feel tired and irritable. Lightening your workload and cutting down on strenuous exercise would be a very good idea to maintain your health and your morale.

The second reason is spiritual. Fasting is not just denying yourself food. It is exchanging the needs of the physical body for those of the spirit. Long times of prayer and reading God's Word will be essential if you are to enter into a more intimate communion with God and maintain your fast to its completion. While fasting, if your life is continually filled with activity and busyness to the neglect of spending extended time with God, you will starve both physically and spiritually. You will find yourself discouraged and frustrated with your fast instead of benefited and blessed. I don't want that to happen to you.

The more time you spend with God in fellowship and worship, and the more you read and meditate upon His Word, the greater your effectiveness will be in prayer. This kind of focused attention will make for a more meaningful fast. So I encourage you to arrange your schedule accordingly!

Dealing with the Responses of Friends and Loved Ones

Many people are reluctant to tell others that they are fasting because they want to avoid the sin of the Pharisees: fasting just to gain recognition for themselves.

I strongly believe that attitude is a result of a wrong interpretation of Jesus' teaching, "that your fasting may not be seen by others" (Matthew 6:18, English Standard Version). His point is about avoiding self-praise, not total secrecy. Our misguided silence can be a trick of the enemy, who does not want us to fast or to share with loved ones and friends the benefits of fasting.

By isolating ourselves from the support of other Christians, we will be more susceptible to doubts and negative influences. We need the prayers of our Christian friends and family members to help us continue when we feel alone and when the enemy tempts us to give up.

Eventually, people will notice you are not eating. However, I have found that unless you see certain people daily, they do not consider your skipped meal much of a concern. If you are asked, someone who does not follow Christ may be satisfied by such a brief answer as, "I have other plans for lunch today." Christians should be satisfied when you answer that you are fasting.

If friends and family express concern for your health, ease their fears by telling them that you will stop fasting the moment you feel you are harming your body or if the Lord leads you to end your fast. Tell them you are fasting under your doctor's care, which I urge you to do if you have any questions concerning your health.

There is usually no reason for telling strangers or casual acquaintances that you are fasting. If you do, they may subject you to a lot of questions that you may not want to answer. But in any case, use your best judgment and the Lord's leading in telling people about your fast.

How to Make Your Spiritual Experience the Best It Can Be

Experiencing God's best from a fast requires solid commitment. Arranging special time each day with God is crucial in attaining intimate communion with the Father. You must devote yourself to seeking God's face, even (and especially) during those times in which you feel weak, vulnerable or irritable.

Read His Word and pray during what were mealtimes. Meditate on Him when you awake in the night. Sing praises to Him whenever you please. Focus on your Heavenly Father and make every act one of praise and worship. God will enable you to experience His command to "pray without ceasing" as you seek His presence.

As you enter this time of heightened spiritual devotion, be aware that Satan will do everything he can to pull you away from your prayer and Bible reading time. When you feel the enemy trying to discourage you, immediately go to God in prayer and ask Him to strengthen your resolve in the face of difficulties and temptations.

The enemy makes you a target because he knows that fasting is a powerful Christian discipline and that God may have something very special to show you as you wait upon Him and seek His face. Satan does not want you to grow in your faith; he will do anything from making you hungry and grumpy to bringing up trouble in your family or at work to stop you. Make prayer your protective shield against such attacks.

My major reason for fasting is for personal revival, revival for our nation and the world, and for the fulfillment of the Great Commission. But praying for our own needs and interceding for others are also important reasons to fast and pray. Bring your personal needs before the Lord, and intercede for your loved ones and your friends. Pray also for your church, your pastor and your community. By your prayers, as you fast with humility, you will help the Great Commission be fulfilled (1 John 5:14-15).

However, do not become so caught up in praying for yourself and others that you forget about simply reverencing and praising God. True spiritual fasting focuses on God. Center your total being on Him: your attitudes and actions, your motives, desires and words. This posture can only happen if God and the Holy Spirit are at the center of our attention. Confess your sins as the Holy Spirit brings them to mind, and continue to focus on God and God alone so that your prayers may be powerful and effective.

A renewed closeness with God and a greater sensitivity to spiritual things are usually the result of a fast. Do not be disappointed if you do not have a "mountaintop experience" as some do. Many people who have completed extended fasts tell of feeling a nearness to God that they have never before known, but some who have honestly sought His face report no particular outward results at all. For others, their fast was physically, emotionally and spiritually grueling, but they knew they had been called by God to fast. Even so, they completed the fast unto Him as an act of worship, and God honored that commitment.

Your motive in fasting must be to glorify God, not to have an emotional experience and not to attain personal happiness. When your motives are right, God will honor your seeking heart and bless your time with Him.

How to Maintain Nutritional Balance and Health from Beginning to End

I know the prospect of going without food for an extended period of time may concern some. But there are ways to ensure that your body is getting the nutrients it needs so you can remain safe and healthy during your fast. [Editor's note: In addition to the advice below, always consult your physician before beginning an extended fast.]

For an extended fast, I recommend drinking water and fruit and vegetable juices. The natural sugars in juices provide energy, and the taste and strength will motivate you to continue your fast. Try to drink fresh juices, if possible. Off-the-shelf juice products are acceptable, as long as they are 100% juice, with no sugar or other additives.

If you are beginning a juice fast, there are certain juices you may wish to avoid and certain ones that are especially beneficial. Because of their acid content, most nutritionists do not advise orange or tomato juice (these are better tolerated if mixed with equal portions of water). The best juices are made from fresh carrot, grape, celery, apple, cabbage or beet. Nutritionists also recommend "green drinks" made from green leafy vegetables because they are excellent "detoxifiers."

Fruit juices are "cleansers" and are best taken in the morning. Since vegetable juices are "restorers" and "builders," they are best taken in the afternoon.

I usually dedicate a portion of my 40-day fast to a **special liquid formula** that I have found to be effective. A few recipes and my comments are on this page, as well as a helpful schedule.

- 1 gallon water.
- 1½ cups lemon juice.
- ¾ cup pure maple syrup.
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper.

The lemon juice adds flavor and vitamin C, the maple syrup provides energy, and the cayenne pepper — an herb — acts to open small blood vessels which, I believe, helps the body as it cleanses itself of stored toxins. (A word of caution: Although I use this formula with no ill effects, cayenne pepper could cause severe physical reactions in people with a specific allergy to this herb.)

My favorite juice is a mixture of 100% pure white grape juice and peach juice. The juice is available in frozen cans under the Welch label. Most knowledgeable nutritionists recommend:

- Watermelon — just put it in the blender without adding water.
- Fresh apple juice.
- Green juice — blend celery, romaine lettuce and carrots in equal proportions. (Vegetable juices like this one are important because they supply the electrolytes necessary for proper heart function.)

Some nutritionists recommend warm broth, especially if you live in a colder climate. You may find their recipes helpful:

- Boil sliced potatoes, carrots and celery in water.
 - Do not add salt.
 - After about a half-hour, drain off the water and drink.
- Gently boil three carrots, two stalks of celery, one turnip, two beets, a half head of cabbage, a quarter of a bunch of parsley, a quarter of an onion, and a half clove of garlic. Drain off the broth and drink up to two or three times daily.

You may find the following daily schedule helpful. I recommend you print it and keep it handy throughout your fast.

- **5 a.m. - 8 a.m.**
Fruit juices, preferably freshly squeezed or blended. Dilute in 50% water if the fruit is acidic. Orange, apple, pear, grapefruit, papaya, grape, peach or other fruits are good.
- **10:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.**
Green vegetable juice made from equal parts lettuce, celery and carrots.
- **2:30 p.m. - 4 p.m.**
Herbal tea (decaffeinated) with a drop of honey. Make sure that it is not black tea or tea with a stimulant.
- **6 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**
Broth from boiled potatoes, celery and carrots (no salt).

I suggest that you do not drink milk because it is a pure food and therefore a violation of the fast. Any products containing protein or fat, such as milk or soy-based drinks, should be avoided. These products will restart the digestion cycle, and you will again feel hunger pangs. Also, for health reasons, stay away from caffeinated beverages such as coffee, tea or cola. Caffeine is a stimulant and therefore has a more powerful effect on your nervous system when you abstain from food. This stimulant works against both the physical and spiritual aspects of the fast.

Another key factor in maintaining optimum health during a fast is to limit your physical activity. Exercise only moderately, and rest as much as your schedule will permit (this especially applies to extended fasts). Short naps are helpful as well. Walking a mile or two each day at a moderate pace is acceptable for a person in good health on a juice fast. However, no one on a water fast should exercise without the supervision of a fasting specialist.

What Physical Effects to Expect

Although fasting can be an indescribable blessing, it is not always easy for everyone. In this time of discipline, self-sacrifice and reflection, do not be surprised if you experience mental and physical discomfort.

To begin, you may experience some inner conflict when you deny yourself the pleasure of eating food. Any sort of fast may sometimes leave you feeling impatient and irritable. During a three-day fast, this struggle can intensify toward the end of the second day. That seems to be a favorite time for the “self” to rise up and say, “This is as far as I want to go. I have done enough.”

Physical Effect:

Hunger pangs are usually the greatest during the first three days of the fast. Your body is adjusting from using the food in your digestive tract (which remains about three days) to consuming stored fats.

Suggested Relief:

Psyllium husk will help eliminate hunger pangs and also aid in cleansing the body. Several capsules can be taken throughout the day with plenty of water.

Silymarin tablets may also be helpful; they are believed to protect and enhance the cleansing of the liver.

Physical Effect:

Coldness, bad breath and heightened body odor are possible. Also, changes in elimination (constipation or diarrhea), light-headedness, changes in sleeping and dreaming patterns, and aches and pains are likely.

A white-coated tongue at the beginning of a fast may be a part of the body’s pattern of throwing off toxins.

Expect to go to the bathroom often (you will be drinking lots of water).

Suggested Relief:

After the first two weeks of an extended fast, many of these symptoms subside. Continuing aches in a certain area of the body usually means elimination of fatty tissue is going on in that area, which is not harmful. However, any extensive pain should be examined immediately.

YOU SHOULD STOP FASTING IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING SEVERE PAIN OR SWELLING.

Physical Effect:

Headaches or stomachaches may be a result of salt, sugar or caffeine withdrawal.

Suggested Relief:

Eliminating those items from your diet prior to fasting is the best way to avoid these pains.

Physical Effect:

Lower back pain may indicate that you are dehydrated.

Suggested Relief:

Drink more fluids.

Physical Effect:

Dizziness may be caused by a sudden change in position, such as rising suddenly from a chair.

Suggested Relief:

Stop for a second or two, then recover. Move slowly. (A word of caution: These conditions may be symptoms of other problems requiring medical attention.)

Physical Effect:

Minor fasting discomfort.

Suggested Relief:

Take one teaspoon of psyllium seed powder morning and evening. Mixed in lukewarm water, it becomes like Jell-O. This powder will hasten the elimination of toxins from your colon and help to prevent headaches and dizziness for most healthy people. Alfalfa tablets can help control bad breath and cleanse the system. Two tablets at a time can be taken several times a day.

In my desire to be absolutely faithful to my first 40-day fast, I stopped taking my usual vitamins and minerals. However, during subsequent fasts, I have felt strongly impressed to continue my vitamin and herbal therapy and also to use psyllium. I do this to keep my body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), healthy while continuing to deny myself the pleasure of eating solid food.

During your fast, you may have your struggles, discomforts, spiritual victories and failures. In the morning, you may feel like you are on top of the world, but by evening you may be wrestling with the flesh — sorely tempted to raid the refrigerator and counting how many more days are left in your fast. This is especially true if you are new to fasting. To counteract temptations like these, take extra time with the Lord. Step outside for some fresh air and talk to Him as you walk along. And in the process, always keep on sipping water or juice frequently during your waking hours.

How to Finish You Fast in a Healthy Way

All the experts agree that breaking the fast is the critical phase of fasting.

While your body is in the resting mode, your stomach shrinks and your intestines become idle. So, solid food must be reintroduced very slowly to avoid digestive distress or kidney failure. In fact, after a 40-day fast, you should make a careful transition for at least three days before returning to eating meats, fats or normal foods.

Further, if you end your fast gradually, the beneficial physical and spiritual effects will linger for days. But if you rush into solid foods, you may lose much of your deep sense of peace and experience physical problems such as diarrhea, sickness and fainting. Frankly, even death is possible in some cases due to shock.

Dr. Paul Bragg and his daughter, Patricia, have conducted fasting clinics for many years. Their book, "The Miracle of Fasting," gives a specific daily food plan for breaking a seven-day fast that could be adapted and stretched out over several more days for a 40-day fast.

Breaking a 7-Day Fast

5 p.m. as you end your 7th day of the fast

Peel four or five medium-sized tomatoes. Cut them up, bring them to a boil and then turn off the heat. When they are cool enough to eat, have as many as you desire.

Morning of the 8th day

- Have a salad of grated carrots and grated cabbage, with half an orange squeezed over it.
- Have a bowl of steamed greens (spinach, Swiss chard or mustard greens) and peeled tomatoes. Bring the greens to a boil, then turn off the heat.
- You may eat two slices of 100% whole-wheat bread that has been toasted until it is thoroughly dry — this is called "Melba toast." After it has been cooled, the toast should be so dry that it would powder if you squeezed it in the palm of your hand. This first food should be in the morning.

During the 8th day

- Continue to drink lots of water.
- For dinner, have a salad of grated carrots, chopped celery and cabbage with orange juice for dressing. This salad will be followed by two cooked vegetables: one should be something like spinach, kale, chard or mustard greens and the other something like string beans, carrots, steamed celery, okra or squash. You may have two pieces of whole-grain Melba toast. These meals are not to contain oils of any kind.

Morning of the 9th day

Have a dish of any kind of fresh fruit, such as banana, pineapple, orange, sliced grapefruit or sliced apples. You may sprinkle this with two tablespoons of raw wheat germ and sweeten it with honey, but not more than one tablespoon.

Noon of the 9th day

At noon, have a salad of grated carrots, cabbage and celery with one cooked vegetable and one slice of Melba toast.

Evening of the 9th day

At dinner, have a salad dish of lettuce, watercress, parsley and tomatoes and two cooked vegetables.

Most experts agree that breaking a fast with vegetables, either steamed or raw, is best. Your stomach is smaller now, so eat lightly. Stop before you feel full. Stay away from starches like pastas, potatoes, rice or bread (except for Melba toast) for at least a week. Also avoid meats, dairy products and any fats or oils for a week or more. Introduce them very slowly and in small amounts.

Extended fasts are not the only fasts that need to be ended with caution. Even a three-day fast requires reasonable precautions. It is wise to start with a little soup — something thin and nourishing such as vegetable broth made from onion, celery, potatoes and carrots — and fresh fruits such as watermelon and cantaloupe.

In terms of resuming any sort of exercise routine, the advice is the same. Start out slowly, allowing time for your body to readjust to its usual regime.