



The Health Effects of Fasting

First Faith Church

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We all know that Jesus fasted 40 days and nights in the wilderness after being baptized by John the Baptist, and Moses fasted 40 days and nights in Mount Sinai when receiving the 10 commandments from God. Fasting has been done to put the flesh under subjugation to God and to help us in our pursuit of holiness. But did you know there are definite health benefits from fasting (even for a short time)?

Cornell University nutritionist Clive McCay discovered that rats subjected to stringent daily dieting from an early age lived longer and were less likely to develop cancer and other diseases as they aged, compared with animals that ate at will. Research on calorie restriction and periodic fasting intersected in 1945, when University of Chicago scientists reported that alternate-day feeding extended the life span of rats as much as daily dieting in McCay's earlier experiments.

A study presented to the American Heart Association indicates that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who regularly fast are less likely to have coronary heart disease. The day-long, once-a-month fast many Mormons undertake as a part of their faith may help explain the lower rates of coronary artery disease in this population, according to a study presented at the American Heart Assn.'s scientific sessions in Orlando, Fla., in November 2007.

"People who fast seem to receive a heart-protective benefit," said Benjamin D. Horne, PhD, MPH, the study's senior author and director of cardiovascular and genetic epidemiology at Intermountain Medical Center in Salt Lake City.

Dr. Horne and his team analyzed data on 4,629 people who had coronary angiography from 1994 to 2002 and another 515 undergoing this procedure from 2004 to 2006. In the first group, 61% of those who were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were diagnosed with coronary artery disease in comparison with 66% of those who were not of this faith. The later group of patients also was surveyed about religious practices. Approximately 59% of those who fasted occasionally were diagnosed with a significant blockage compared with 67% of those who did not.

Mattson and other researchers have championed the idea that intermittent fasting probably lowers the risks of degenerative brain diseases in later life. Mattson and his colleagues have shown that periodic fasting protects neurons against various kinds of damaging stress, at least in rodents. One of his earliest studies revealed that alternate-day feeding made the rats' brains resistant to toxins that induce cellular damage akin to the kind cells endure as they age. In follow-up rodent studies, his group found that intermittent fasting protects against stroke damage, suppresses motor deficits in a mouse model of Parkinson's disease and slows cognitive decline in mice genetically engineered to mimic the symptoms of Alzheimer's.

So next time you decide to fast consider that you may not just be getting holier but you may be getting healthier.

God Bless!