

SOME NOTES ON FASTING

In relation to the article, "Perfect Health," I received some six or eight hundred letters from people who either had fasted, or desired to fast and sought for further information. The letters showed a general uniformity which made clear to me that I had not been sufficiently explicit upon several important points.

The question most commonly asked was how long should one fast, and how one should judge of the time to stop. I personally have never taken a "complete fast," and so I hesitate in recommending this to any one. I have fasted twelve days on two occasions. In both cases I broke my fast because I found myself feeling weak and I wanted to be about a good deal. In neither case was I hungry, although hunger quickly returned. I was told by Bernarr Macfadden, and by some of his physicians, that they got their best results from fasts of this length. I would not advise a longer fast for any of the commoner ailments, such as stomach and intestinal trouble, headaches, constipation, colds and sore throat. Longer fasts,[\[Pg 40\]](#) it seems to me, are for those who have really desperate ailments, such deeply-rooted chronic diseases as Bright's disease, cirrhosis of the liver, rheumatism and cancer.

Of course if a person has started on a fast and it is giving him no trouble, there is no reason why it should not be continued; but I do not in the least believe in a man's setting before himself the goal of a forty or fifty days' fast and making a "stunt" out of it. I do not think of the fast as a thing to be played with in that way. I do not believe in fasting for the fun of it, or out of curiosity. I do not advise people to fast who have nothing the matter with them, and I do not advise the fast as a periodical or habitual thing. A man who has to fast every now and then is like a person who should spend his time in sweeping rain water out of his house, instead of taking the trouble to repair his roof. If you have to fast every now and then, it is because the habits of your life are wrong, more especially because you are eating unwholesome foods. There were several people who wrote me asking about a fast, to whom my reply was that they should simply adopt a rational diet; that I believed their troubles would all disappear without the need of a fast.

Several people asked me if it would not be better[\[Pg 41\]](#) for them to eat very lightly instead of fasting, or to content themselves with fasts of two or three days at frequent intervals. My reply to that is that I find it very much harder to do that, because all the trouble in the fast occurs during the first two or three days. It is during those days that you are hungry, and if you begin to eat just

when your hunger is ceasing, you have wasted all your efforts. In the same way, perhaps, it might be a good thing to eat very lightly of fruit, instead of taking an absolute fast—the only trouble is that I cannot do it. Again and again I have tried, but always with the same result: the light meals are just enough to keep me ravenously hungry, and inevitably I find myself eating more and more. And it does me no good to call myself names about this, I just do it, and keep on doing it; I have finally made up my mind that it is a fact of my nature. I used to try these "fruit fasts" under Dr. Kellogg's advice. I could live on nothing but fruit for several days, but I would get so weak that I could not stand up—far weaker than I have ever become on an out-and-out fast.

One should drink all the water he possibly can while fasting, only not taking too much at a time. I take a glass full every hour, at least; sometimes every half hour. It is a good plan to drink a great [Pg 42] deal of water at the outset, whenever meal time comes around, and one thinks of the other folks beginning to eat. I drink the water cold, because it is less trouble, but if there is any hot water about, I prefer that. Hot water between meals is an immensely valuable suggestion which I owe to Dr. Salisbury.

One should take a bath every day while fasting. I prefer a warm bath followed by a cold shower. Also one should take a small enema. I find a pint of cool water sufficient. I received several letters from people who were greatly disturbed because of constipation during the fast. People apparently do not realize that while fasting there is very little to be eliminated from the body. (Of course, there are cases, especially of people who have suffered from long continued intestinal trouble, in which even after three or four weeks the enema continues to bring away quantities of dried and impacted fæces.)

Many of the questions asked dealt with the manner of breaking the fast; I suppose because I had been particular to warn my readers that this was the one danger point in the proceeding. I told of my experience with the milk diet, and I received many inquiries about this. My answer was to refer the writers to Bernarr Macfadden's pamphlet on the milk diet, as I took this diet under [Pg 43] his direction and have nothing to add to his instructions. I might say, however, that I was never able to take the milk diet for any length of time but once, and that after my first twelve-day fast. After my second fast it seemed to go wrong with me, and I think the reason was that I did not begin it until a week after breaking the fast, having got along on orange juice and figs in the meantime. Also I tried on many occasions to take the milk diet after a short fast of three or four days, and always the milk has disagreed with me and poisoned me. I take this to mean that, in my own case, at any rate, so much milk can only be absorbed when the tissues are greatly reduced; and I have known others who have had the same experience.

While I was down in Alabama, I took a twelve-day fast, and at the end I was tempted by a delicious large Japanese persimmon, which had been eyeing me from the pantry shelf during the whole twelve days. I ate that persimmon—and I mention that it was thoroughly ripe; in spite of which fact it doubled me up with the most alarming cramp—and in consequence I do not recommend persimmons for fasters. I know a friend who had a similar experience from the juice of one orange; but he was a man with whom acid fruit has always disagreed. I know another man who broke his [Pg 44] fast on a Hamburg steak; and this also is not to be recommended.

It has been my experience that immediately after a fast the stomach is very weak, and can easily be upset; also the peristaltic muscles are practically without power. It is, therefore, important to choose foods which are readily digested, and also to continue to take the enema daily until the muscles have been sufficiently built up to make a natural movement possible. The thing to do is to take orange juice or grape juice in small quantities for two or three days, and then go gradually upon the milk diet, beginning with half a glass of warm milk at a time. If the milk does not agree with you, you may begin carefully to add baked potatoes and rice and gruels and broths, if you must; but don't forget the enema.

People ask me in what diseases I recommend fasting. I recommend it for all diseases of which I have ever heard, with the exception of one in which I have heard of bad results—tuberculosis. Dr. Hazzard, in her book, reports a case of the cure of this disease, but Mr. Macfadden tells me that he has known of several cases of people who have lost their weight and have not regained it. There is one cure quoted in the appendix to this volume.

The diseases for which fasting is most [Pg 45] obviously to be recommended are all those of the stomach and intestines, which any one can see are directly caused by the presence of fermenting and putrefying food in the system. Next come all those complaints which are caused by the poisons derived from these foods in the blood and the eliminative organs: such are headaches and rheumatism, liver and kidney troubles, and of course all skin diseases. Finally, there are the fevers and infectious diseases, which are caused by the invasion of the organism by foreign bacteria, which are enabled to secure a lodgment because of the weakened and impure condition of the blood-stream. Such are the "colds" and fevers. In these latter cases nature tries to save us, for there is immediately experienced a disinclination on the part of the sick person to take any sort of food; and there is no telling how many people have been hurried out of life in a few days or hours, because ignorant relatives, nurses and physicians have gathered at their bedside and implored them to eat. I can look back upon a time in my own experience when my wife was in the hospital with a slow fever; they would bring her up three square meals a day, consisting of lamb chops, poached eggs on toast, cooked vegetables, preserves and desserts; and the physician would stand by her bedside and say, in sepulchral tones, "If you do not eat, you will die!"

[Pg 46]

My friend, Mr. Arthur Brisbane, wrote me a gravely disapproving letter when he read that I was fasting. I had a long correspondence with him, at the end of which he acknowledged that there "might be something in it." "Even dogs fast when they are ill," he wrote; and I replied, "I look forward to the time when human beings may be as wise as dogs." I read the other day an amusing story of a man who made himself a reputation for curing the diseases of the pampered pets of our rich society ladies. They would bring him their overfed dogs, and he would shut them up in an old brick-kiln, with a tub of water, and leave them there to howl until they were hoarse. In addition to the water he would put in each cell a hunk of stale bread, a piece of bacon rind, and an old boot. He would go back at the end of a few days, and if the bread was eaten he would write to the fond owner that the dog's recovery was assured. He would go back in a few more days, and if the bacon rind was eaten would write that the dog was nearly well. And at the end of another week, he would go back, and if the old boot was eaten he would write to the owner that the dog was now

completely restored to health.

Several people wrote me who were in the last stages of some desperate disease. Of course[Pg 47] they had always been consulting with physicians, and the physicians had told them that my article was "pure nonsense"; and they would write me that they would like to try to fast, but that they were "too weak and too far gone to stand it." There is no greater delusion than that a person needs strength to fast. The weaker you are from disease, the more certain it is that you need to fast, the more certain it is that your body has not strength enough to digest the food you are taking into it. If you fast under those circumstances, you will grow not weaker, but stronger. In fact, my experience seems to indicate that the people who have the least trouble on the fast are the people who are most in need of it. The system which has been exhausted by the efforts to digest the foods that are piled into it, simply lies down with a sigh of relief and goes to sleep.

The fast is Nature's remedy for all diseases, and there are few exceptions to the rule. When you feel sick, fast. Do not wait until the next day, when you will feel stronger, nor till the next week, when you are going away into the country, but stop eating at once. Many of the people who wrote to me were victims of our system of wage slavery, who wrote me that they were ill, but could not get even a few days' release in which to fast. They wanted to know if they could[Pg 48] fast and at the same time continue their work. Many can do this, especially if the work is of a clerical or routine sort. On my first fast I could not have done any work, because I was too weak. But on my second fast I could have done anything except very severe physical labor. I have one friend who fasted eight days for the first time, and who did all her own housework and put up several gallons of preserves on the last day. I have received letters from a couple of women who have fasted ten or twelve days, and have done all their own work. I know of one case of a young girl who fasted thirty-three days and worked all the time at a sanatorium, and on the twenty-fourth day she walked twenty miles.