

The Fasting Method #150 - Fasting Basics with Megan Ramos: How to Eat Before You Start Your Fast

[00:00:06] Before we get started with today's episode, I would like to quickly read you our podcast disclaimer.

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[00:01:13] All right. And now we'll get started with today's episode. Hi everyone. It's Megan Ramos here with another episode of The Fasting Method podcast. Today is going to be the first episode of a brand new series on this podcast. It is called Fasting Basics. This series is intended to help individuals who are new to fasting figure out how to sift through all of the information there is online to find out what are the best practices to proceed with. Now, in today's episode, I want to discuss one of the things I see the most misinformation around out there. And that's how to eat before you start your fast. We're going to discuss two separate scenarios. The first scenario is that you must be following a ketogenic diet before you begin your fasting journey, and the second scenario is that you must eat enough before you fast. So let's circle back and kick off this podcast with scenario one.

[00:02:18] Do you need to be following a ketogenic diet and be in a state of ketosis before you start your fast? Well, let's define some terms here. A ketogenic diet is one that prioritizes the consumption of natural fats. This diet is largely (70%), in terms of calories, from natural fat. It's about 30% protein, and the remaining caloric balance does come from carbohydrates, preferably real, whole-food carbohydrates. Now, when people follow this type of diet, they're often able to achieve this physiological state called ketosis. Ketosis means fat burning or fat fueling. If you're eating a ketogenic diet, then you will be fat fueling, meaning your source of fuel will primarily be from the fat in your food, versus sugar burners who primarily fuel from glucose, carbohydrates from the standard North American diet. Now, with fat burning, you can also be in a state of ketosis, and fat burning happens when we are actively burning and fueling on our own body fat, so exogenous versus endogenous fat sources of fuel. So if we're eating primarily fat in a ketogenic diet, we are fueling on exogenous sources of fat fuel. If we are burning body fat and fueling off of that body fat, that's called endogenous fat fuel. People measure their degree of ketosis. There's something called nutritional ketosis where your ketone levels are between 0.5 and 1.5 mmol/L. And then there's fat-burning ketosis where your ketones are above 1.5, but typically closer to 3 mmol/L. People often use a device like a glucometer that also checks for ketones, and that's how we're able to achieve these measurements. A popular device is the Keto Mojo.

[00:04:27] Now, a lot of individuals think that they have to be something called fat adapted, meaning their bodies have to be optimized to fuel on fat before they can begin fasting, or their fasting journey is going to be very miserable, riddled with all kinds of fasting side

effects. And I'm here to tell you that this is not true at all. It's always been kind of this age-old question that's haunted us at The Fasting Method - do you need to be in a state of fat burning before you fast or can you allow fasting to help you get into a state of fat burning?

[00:05:05] Now, some of the side effects people are nervous about are sleep disturbances, so some insomnia, muscle cramping, feeling tired and lethargic. These symptoms we often referred to as the keto flu. So when people begin a ketogenic diet, they often experience these flu-like symptoms. And within a couple of weeks of consistency with the ketogenic diet, these symptoms often alleviate. And there's certain things you can do to help mitigate or prevent the symptoms from occurring in the first place. So things like taking magnesium or drinking some salty water, things we'll get into in an upcoming episode on Fasting Basics. When we start fasting, if we're not in a state of fat burning, we'll also experience the same keto flu, usually for one to two weeks. So, regardless, you are going to experience the keto flu and it is going to last for one to two weeks, whether you do it while you're eating a ketogenic diet or whether you do it when you're fasting. But getting into that state of fat burning and having your body fuel off of fat is still going to cause the same symptoms, just like eating the fat and transitioning from sugar burning to fat burning is. So a lot of people think that they need to eat the ketogenic diet first, get over the keto flu so they can fast and have less symptoms, but that is not true. You do not experience any more or worse symptoms while fasting and going through the keto flu than you do when you're actually going through the keto flu on a ketogenic diet. So, either way, you're potentially going to have a couple of weeks. We are going to go over strategies to help minimize these side effects in an upcoming episode. But either way, you're going to experience the same thing to the same magnitude. So you don't have to have this perfect ketogenic diet before you start fasting. You're not going to have worse symptoms when you start fasting.

[00:07:11] Now, let's talk about the second scenario here. Do you need to worry about eating enough before you begin your fast? Now, the intention of many of us who are fasting is to burn body fat. Whether that's for health reasons, vanity reasons, to help us reverse conditions like type two diabetes, we want to burn body fat. Now, we eat a meal, and, several hours after that meal, we enter into a fasted state. And then our goal is to stay in that fasted state for a certain period of time. While we're in that fasted state, our goal is to burn as much body fat as possible during that time, so we're fueling off of our body fat. Eating more before going into your fast, or eating longer, is just going to delay the start of your fast a bit and minimize the amount of body fat that you are going to burn during that fast. And people often worry that if they don't have enough of a meal, too, they're going to be hungry while they're in a fast. Well, if you don't eat enough going into fast, it just means you're going to start burning fat earlier on in that fast for fuel. So you will actually burn more body fat in that particular fast.

[00:08:39] So, sometimes, you'll start your fast after a day of eating quite a bit (say it's a family holiday like Thanksgiving) and you'll be hopping into your fast feeling quite full. And other days you're going to be really busy and maybe you've not had the most optimal eating day, where you were sitting at the table eating all of your meals, and having these perfectly constructed meals, and you might experience a bit of hunger earlier on, but you're just going to be burning body fat. The goal is to burn body fat and let the body fat-fuel less. When we start to get hungry, when our body starts to send signals that we need to refuel and we avoid refueling with food, our body is then going to turn to our fat stores to provide our body with fuel. That's what we want. So we need to reframe hunger a bit.

[00:09:36] Now, if we're just experiencing hunger and we would emotionally like to eat to help quench that hunger, try to reframe it as, "Oh, I'm hungry. This means I'm going to start fat burning soon." Now, of course, if you feel hungry and you also feel very unwell, then you should stop your fast or your attempt to fast, seek medical attention if necessary, have a healthy meal, and you can always start your fast again when your health practitioner gives you the go, or you feel well again if you do have their permission to proceed with fasting. We have been so conditioned to think that any sign of hunger is necessarily a bad thing that we need to fix right away. This is something throughout my journey that I really struggled with earlier on. I remember having the realization driving home one day thinking, "Hey, if I'm hungry and I don't stop at that drive thru, then my body's going to burn that body fat from my belly, from my tricep area, from my hips to my thighs to my buttocks." That's what I wanted to burn. That's what I wanted to fuel off of.

[00:10:49] So this hunger is actually a good thing. The fat burning is going to kick in. So you might not get that perfect meal. You might end up eating something that's a quick breakfast for dinner - bacon, eggs, a bit of avocado - because you haven't defrosted food or haven't had time to make a full meal. And you'll think, "This can't be enough," but it is enough if we have adequate body fat to fuel off of during our fast. What I'm trying to do here is encourage you to work on your diet, but to forget about perfection. Perfection does not have to come at the start of your fasting experience.

[00:11:29] Now, there is a time and a place where you would not want to fast after eating a certain way, and that's after really going off the rails. We all have those days. I called them our 'one last day' where we have our one last everything. Whether it's a holiday, vacation, family get together, we've been there, everyone. Now, this is one of those events that you'd go to eat and you'd come home and you'd stand on the scale, and you'd notice that it suddenly shot up 7 or 8 pounds. You know it can't all be from that meal or, say, from that long weekend of holidays. There's no way you'd gain that much body fat. You know you've suddenly put on a lot of water weight. Now, for every gram of carbohydrate or sugar we consume, our body retains about four grams of water. So if we go out and we eat a few hundred grams of sugar at a meal, well, then we're going to retain quite a bit of water. And this is why we see those dramatic fluctuations on the scale, and then the next morning, or a couple of days later, the scale's back down. So we didn't suddenly gain 7 pounds in a day, and we didn't suddenly lose 7 pounds in one or two days either. It's just water weight in response to increased sugar consumption at that particular meal or event.

[00:12:56] So if you have a holiday or event where you do see the scale go up with so much water retention, that is not what we want to do before going into a fast. The reason why is when our insulin levels drop so rapidly, our body's going to lose that water very quickly. And with that water loss, we're going to see a lot of electrolyte loss, too, which is going to make us feel very unwell and really heighten those keto-flu-like symptoms during our fast. So what I encourage people to do is, if you have a holiday-- you know, Easter weekend just passed and maybe you got into the kids' Easter baskets, or you had a bit of fun at the egg hunt or the brunch and you notice the scale shoot up 7, 8 pounds. What you do after events like that is to focus on something called fat fasting for one or two days. Let your body purge the water and purge it quickly, but still eat to boost your electrolytes that you are losing through increased urination. Now, a lot of times people feel really motivated after a holiday like Easter that can go down that chocolate path and they want to do a really big fast the next day or a couple of days later without much preparation, and they're still holding onto that water weight. So they start to fast and their insulin tanks. The insulin taking sends a signal to the kidneys to just flush and dump water. The kidneys also can

only handle flushing and eliminating so much water. So what happens to the rest of it? Well, loose stools, diarrhea. It just ends up being a disaster. You feel awful. You feel like you've had the flu. I've had people tell me they feel like they're hung over without having a single drink. It's not fun.

[00:14:52] So we encourage people to take this time, one or two days, and do a fat fast. Now, we will do episodes on fat fasting, and we have talked about fat fasting on previous episodes. We also have a Quick Guide for fat fasting on our website. So if you head on over to thefastingmethod.com and click on the Resources icon, you will see a dropdown that takes you to Quick Guides. And if you head to Quick Guides, you'll find all kinds of fantastic resources there, as well as a resource on how to get started with fat fasting. And we will be doing a very special episode on it. If you're interested in learning more about fat fasting and how and when you can utilize this technique, we have a special masterclass led by my co-host, Dr. Nadia Pateguana, coming up at The Fasting Method as well. You can learn more about that over on thefastingmethod.com website.

[00:15:51] So we would fat fast for one or two days and then get into our regular fasting routine. This enables us to get into our fasting routine with ease without worrying about getting so dehydrated immediately afterwards. So this is the one caveat here where I would recommend not jumping into a fast after eating a certain way, otherwise you should be good to go.

[00:16:23] And I do want to share that Dr. Fung and I had a lot of patients when we had our clinic in Toronto who were unable or not willing to change their diet. The only intervention we could implement was fasting and we got incredible results. Jason and I had physicians and healthcare providers from all over the world come into our clinic to shadow us for years, and they were all amazed at how very little we ended up discussing with our patients about nutrition. We had some patients, of course, who wanted to really optimize their diet, some who were willing to make serious compromises and changes, but the majority of them were going to maintain their current standard North American diet. Now, you can't have optimal health following the standard North American diet, but, these individuals, they were still able to reverse conditions like type two diabetes. They were still able to lose significant amounts of weight. So don't worry about dietary perfection.

[00:17:32] I started my journey, my fasting journey, with the goal of eating well once a week. I recognized that I had eaten so poorly every single day for 27 years that to strive to eat even six days a week healthily would be setting myself up for failure. So I tried once a week. That very quickly became several times a week and only one cheat meal a week. And then that cheat meal became every two weeks, and every three weeks, and once a month, once a quarter, and a lot more infrequently after that. What I saw as food before, I no longer look at and see food. Food to me is very different now. But I'll tell you, my journey, again, I didn't radically transform my relationship with food until many years after I got started. I worked at it. I worked at it. I worked with therapists to help try to figure out how I could have better stress-management skills, better coping skills. Like my coauthor from *Life in the Fasting Lane*, Eve Mayer, said, she realized food was her best friend. She celebrated with food. She consoled herself with food. Food was part of every aspect of her life, and there was such a deep and emotional connection there. The same with me, the same with so many individuals that I've worked with, too. So it took a lot of hard work to navigate that. And I got there. But while I was getting there, I still was able to lose 80 pounds. I was still able to reverse type two diabetes, fatty liver disease, and polycystic ovary syndrome.

[00:19:18] You can still make significant improvements to your health. Start making small changes with your diet. They start to snowball. Start to implement fasting. You do not have to wait to have the perfect diet before you start your fast. You do not have to have the perfect day of eating or the perfect meal to get started. You can get started today.

[00:19:42] All right, everyone, thank you so much for joining us for episode one of this new series here at The Fasting Method podcast. I look forward to the next time talking about what it is you can have on your fast.

[00:19:59] Now, if you like this podcast and want to hear more episodes like this one and the others, please make sure to like and subscribe. And always leaving a review over on Apple Podcasts really helps make sure that this podcast gets heard by many individuals, so hopefully we can spread the message about passing and change lives together. All right, everyone, thank you so much. Happy fasting and we'll see you next week.