

Fasting and Fat Loss by Courtney Townley

Throughout history people have fasted for a medley of religious and health reasons. Fasting can aid and promote detoxification processes in the body, which often result in many physiological benefits. For the purpose of optimizing fat loss efforts, however, fasting falls short of being able to deliver results. The best way to burn fat is to maximize the bodies total energy expenditure and to create new skill sets that will allow the fat loss to be maintained long term.

Metabolism is basically the energy required to sustain life and its complexity can be broken down into three parts: the resting metabolic rate (energy required to sustain life at rest), the energy required for activity and the energy required to process food for storage and use, commonly known as the thermic effect of food. It is the sum these parts that determine an individual's total energy expenditure, or what we commonly refer to as metabolism.

The resting metabolic rate, RMR, is an estimate of how many calories an individual would burn if they were to stay in bed all day and accounts for 60-70% of total energy expenditure. The human body requires energy to keep the heart beating, lungs breathing and body temperatures stabilized. To guesstimate RMR multiply your weight in pounds by 10. If a woman weighed 150 lbs, her body would burn roughly 1500 calories just to maintain her biological functions. Again, this is the energy requirement her body has BEFORE performing ANY of her daily activities, including eating.

When an individual consumes fewer calories than their RMR demands, be it due to the latest fad diet or an extended fast (beyond 2-3 days) the body receives messages to slow the metabolism in order to conserve energy. As a result of a slowed metabolism, the body will ultimately store fat for energy reserves. A decrease in activity usually accompanies a slower metabolism, which does nothing to help build or preserve muscle mass. In fact, muscle is a very expensive tissue to maintain, and is highly expendable when the body is under the stress of trying to maintain function with little or no fuel. According to Mark Hyman M.D., author of "Ultrametabolism", "muscle burns about 70 times more calories than fat." So clearly the more muscle mass an individual maintains on their body, the more calories they will expend during rest and during activity, which is ideal for fat loss. A decrease in muscle mass contributes to a slower RMR, and if a fasting individual fails to establish new eating and exercise habits upon completion of a fast, their body is likely to store even more fat when regular eating habits are resumed.

It is surprising to many that we actually burn calories when we eat. The thermic effect of food actually accounts for 10% of total energy expenditure, and can be increased by focusing on quality protein, high-fiber fruits and vegetables, and some high fiber grains.

The bottom line is that there is not a “quick fix” for epidemic that is sweeping our nation, including fasting. Fat leaves the body the same way it got there.....gradually. Lack of patience is one of the biggest obstacles individuals have to overcome when it comes to losing fat. A loss of 1-2 lbs of fat per week is what has long been considered “healthy fat loss”, and it is the rate of fat loss that most nutrition and health organizations recommend, including the American College of Sports Medicine. If an individual loses more than 1-2lbs of “weight” in a week, it is often due to water loss and/or the loss of muscle tissue. Increasing the level of daily activity, building muscle mass and eating a clean diet is, by a long shot, the best recipe for fat loss and fat loss maintenance.