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Your Vegan Nutrition Questions Answered

By Veronika Powell

Your vegan nutrition questions answered.

As part of this series, we took to the [One Bite Vegan Facebook](#) Group to find out what you'd like to put to our nutritionist, Veronika Powell from Viva! Here's this issue's question...

Fasting and intermittent fasting on a vegan diet... What are your thoughts?

There are many types of fasting, which is the voluntary withholding of food (unlike starvation), and usually lasts hours or days. Intermittent fasting is, in a sense, a normal part of our daily lives - for example between dinner and breakfast. However, 'proper' fasting means not eating for a period of time longer than it takes your body to merely digest the food you had just eaten. During true fasting, your body uses its own stored energy, first from glycogen (carbohydrate stored in the liver and muscles) and it also makes glucose from other molecules, and eventually from body fat if the fasting continues for longer or if you're physically active.

The upsides of fasting are that your insulin (blood sugar regulating hormone) levels decrease, your body gets a chance to not be constantly digesting and storing food, and you burn up some extra energy. It's a natural state for us because during our evolution we didn't always have food readily available so we're well adapted to going without

food for a while and it can make you feel good.

Downsides? You'll most likely feel hungry, may experience constipation, headaches and there's a risk you'll end up bingeing afterwards and eat more energy than your body just burned up.

If you'd like to try it, daily patterns of fasting, such as 16:8 or 20:4 (16 or 20 hours of fasting a day with an eight- or four-hour window in which you eat) are best to start with to test how your body responds. If you'd like to do fasts that last 24-36 hours, plan ahead so you don't do too much exercise in those days. It's perfectly fine to fast and exercise at the same time but if you're not used to it, go easy on yourself. If you do intensive training, you'll need to replenish electrolytes - a small pinch of natural sea or Himalayan salt in your water should do the trick.

The 5:2 pattern is very popular as it's flexible, manageable in the long-term and produces good results. It means eating as usual five days a week and fasting or limiting your calorie intake to 500 calories on the remaining two days.

Fasting for more than a few days at a time can be dangerous in terms of nutrient deficiencies and is only recommended under medical supervision. There are several scenarios in which any kind

of fasting should be approached with caution - if you have any type of diabetes, suffer from migraines or other serious medical conditions. It's impossible to predict how your body may react - it could be a welcome change or it might make you suffer unnecessarily. If you have diabetes, your doctor may need to adjust your medication for the duration of the fast.

And then there are situations when you absolutely shouldn't do any fasting - if you are underweight, have a history of eating disorders, are pregnant, breastfeeding or under 18 (your body is still growing).





Viva!Health is a part of the charity Viva!, Europe's largest vegan campaign group best known for its undercover campaigns to end intensive farming. We also monitor scientific research linking diet to health and provide accurate information on which you can make informed choices about the food you eat - www.vivahealth.org.uk.



About the author...

Veronika Powell, MSc Biology, Viva! Health Senior Campaigner & Researcher - www.vivahealth.org.uk. Veronika is a biologist and for the last eight years her work's focus has been vegan nutrition and health. She's an expert on vegan food issues and a major part of her work is helping people live a healthy and sustainable vegan life.