

Fasting is beneficial in the case of many pathologies

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Interview

Stopping eating for a few days to improve, or even cure, a health problem: considered as nonsense until recently, therapeutic fasting is gaining in popularity, supported by studies. Focus with Dr Lionel Coudron, who accompanies patients in this approach.

Alternative Santé Many people come to you to be accompanied through a therapeutic fasting. What is their feedback on this experience?

Dr. Lionel Coudron As a doctor with a global vision of the pathology and therapeutic solutions, I began to actively integrate fasting into my prescriptions about 15 years ago. But I have been observing its effects for even longer, perhaps thirty years, through precursor patients who have regularly fasted. In my practice, I have several cases of patients who have benefited from the positive effects of this approach on various pathologies such as depression, overweight, eczema, joint pain and hypertension. In general, therapeutic fasting is beneficial for disorders related to excesses linked to our civilization, such as affections of the cardiovascular system or metabolic disorders. In particular, concerning high blood pressure which is considered as “essential”, I observe that fasting practised regularly, i.e. two to three times for ten days over six months, can lower the blood pressure by one or two points, without medication. The other indications are for inflammatory diseases and for certain autoimmune diseases, whether rheumatic - such as polyarthritis and ankylosing spondylitis - or intestinal - such as Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis - as well

as neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's disease.

A.S. How do you explain the effects of fasting on one's health?

Dr. L.C. For several years now, basic research has been accelerating. *Le jeûne, une nouvelle thérapie*, a documentary by Thierry Lestrade aired on Arte in 2012, has moved consciences. It reveals the work carried out in Russia during the Cold War (1945-1991) on strict and long water-based fasting, which consists of drinking only water over a period of fifteen days to three weeks, with patients suffering from serious digestive and psychiatric disorders. Pure remission was observed in these people, who elsewhere failed to respond to all other treatment. These results were obtained on hundreds or even thousands of patients, but they could not be published because of the political context at the time. Today we know that therapeutic fasting has an anti-inflammatory effect. It reduces all the markers involved in inflammation such as the synthesis of C-reactive protein, the secretion of cytokines and interleukins by T and B lymphocytes, but also the production of prostaglandins, leukotrienes, histamine and lysosomal enzymes. However, many recent theories tend to show that inflammation is a major contributor to conditions such as

depression, cardiovascular disorders, high blood pressure, obesity and allergies. Fasting also has a favourable impact on the microbiota. During the period of food deprivation, there is a regression of intestinal vilosity, and then a rebound effect with a regeneration of the mucous membrane and an improvement of the saprophytic intestinal flora. Finally, a recent study conducted at King's College in London shows that fasting allows a renewal of the tissues of the central neuronal nuclei and improves synaptic connections in the brain.

A.S. There has also been a lot of talk, these past few years, about the effects of fasting on cancer. What is it really about?

Dr. L.C. Attitudes have changed a lot on this point. Fasting is now encouraged by some oncologists. This practice is no more dangerous in the case of cancer than for other pathologies. In any case, it must be carried out under medical supervision, and remains prohibited in cases of cachexia (advanced weakness of the body), low muscle mass or osteoporosis. On the other hand, its benefits are, in my experience, quite interesting, which is also suggested by recent studies. Valter Longo is responsible for the most remarkable discoveries. This Italian-American gerontologist, who in the 1990s took up Dr. Roy Walford's work on increasing life expectancy, showed that mice exposed to chemotherapy products and having previously fasted all survived, while those that had been fed normally before treatment died. It appears that therapeutic fasting promotes the ability of healthy cells to protect themselves, while it weakens cancer cells. Used as a complementary "tool", it would make it possible to limit the side effects of chemotherapy, but also to potentiate its effects.

It could even be beneficial in prevention, to reduce or even destroy the tumour mass when it is still at a microscopic stage. Indeed, it has been observed that, during fasting, the production of the growth factor IGF-1 decreases - yet it has been proven that it is a fertilizer for all cells, including cancerous ones.

A.S. What would you say to those who are worried by this idea of fasting ?

Dr L.C. Contrary to some preconceived ideas, our organization is designed to fast. It is a natural mechanism, inherited from our distant hunter-gatherer ancestors who fed intermittently and who, despite this, had to continue to make efforts. Spontaneous fasting is found in all large animals. It is also a therapeutic approach in many spiritual traditions such as yoga, Buddhism and Christianity. During fasting, an internal process is set in motion to give us energy. At the end of the third day, the body stops drawing on proteins to produce energy directly from fat reserves. Some of the fat is converted into glucose, which is used to produce ATP - adenosine tri-phosphate, the "fuel" of our organism - then into ketone bodies, the body's "backup" energy substances. Hormones such as leptin (which moderates the feeling of hunger) and neurotransmitters such as dopamine, adrenaline and neuroadrenaline are then produced. The latter have stimulating effects on cognitive and emotional brain function. They allow us to feel good, motivated, concentrated, dynamic: a real "state of grace" that we can sometimes experience during a fast. However, there are also disadvantages: fatigue, cramps, headaches and worsening of pain, usually in the first few days. Supplementation with alkaline basic mineral salts usually helps to alleviate these

problems. In my practice, I observe that 10% to 15% of people cannot tolerate fasting. This is often linked to a lack of motivation. It is not so simple to involve patients in such a practice.

A.S. How can you start a therapeutic fast when you have never experienced it before?

Dr L.C. One must be motivated, precisely, and animated by the spiritual dimension of fasting, in addition to its purely therapeutic aspect. It is indeed a moment to find oneself, to reconnect with the essential, to slow down the pace in a hyper-agitated society, and to enjoy silence and calm. When you have no experience, I advise you to start with a short fast of two days, the length of a weekend for example. Rather than a strict water-based fast, I recommend a very low calorie fast. That is, consuming less than 450 calories per day, which corresponds to a bowl of vegetable

soup. In this way, we keep a meal ritual and provide the mineral salts necessary for the body to avoid tiredness. It is also possible to regularly practice short sequential fasts, from fourteen to sixteen hours (skipping a meal, like breakfast) until twenty-four hours (eating in the evening and then eating again the next evening). Many people do this spontaneously and, contrary to popular belief about the sacrosanct breakfast, it is beneficial for the body. Moreover, fasting does not rhyme with immobility. It is important to practice a regular adapted physical activity during this period. Finally, when you come out of a fast, it is important to take care of the way to start feeding yourself again by turning to healthy foods and avoiding snacking between meals. In any case, it is essential, in a therapeutic fast, to be followed by a doctor who will be able to assess contraindications, ensure follow ups, adapt the practice and prescribe medication or food supplements if necessary.

About Dr Lionel Coudron

Lionel Coudron is a doctor with degrees in nutrition, nutritherapy, acupuncture, biology, sports medicine and EDMR psychotherapy. Teaching yoga for about thirty years, he founded the Institute of Yoga Therapy in 1993. He consults in Paris and accompanies many patients in their fasting process for therapeutic or well-being purposes.

To go further

- Immerse yourself in the reading of *Guide pratique du jeûne*, ed. Terre Vivante (2017), 19€
- Dr Lionel Coudron also wrote many books on yogatherapy, all published by Odile Jacob editions. Here are a few, among others: *Soigner la dépression*, *Soigner la douleur et la fibromyalgie* or even *Soigner l'hypertension artérielle*.