

Lesson 9 : Troubleshooting Side Effects

(Part 1)

In today's lesson, we're going to talk about some of the most common side effects of fasting, why we experience them, and what you can do about it. The most common side effect people experience when they first start fasting is flu-like symptoms, feeling tired, really lethargic, brain fog. Well, this happens because we see our insulin levels fall down quite rapidly when we first start fasting.

Now, when our insulin levels are high, our body retains more water. When our insulin levels are low, our body releases that water. What happens is when we first start fasting, we see this huge drop in insulin levels. Well, that's accompanied with a huge water loss, and through that water loss, either through increased urination or loose stools, we also lose electrolytes. This is why it's so important to be mindful of your electrolyte intake and get in some sodium in various forms during the fast. It will help eliminate or prevent these flu-like symptoms.

Another issue that happens when we're new to fasting and we see this water loss and this sodium reduction, is gout attacks. Now, gout attacks are caused by very high levels of uric acid in the body. We don't see gout happen in individuals who don't have a history of gout, or I would say it's very rare to see a gout attack be induced by fasting if you haven't had a history of high uric acid levels or gout in the past. Not to say that it's impossible, but it does happen. So to prevent this, we can be really diligent by remembering to hydrate, getting in some salt, and making sure we're drinking plenty of water.

Now, there are some other hacks to help prevent uric acid levels from going sky high and causing these attacks. The first one is lime juice. Now, that's lime juice and not lemon juice. Taking upwards of three tablespoons of lime juice every day, fasting or eating days, can really help ward off gout attacks. And another supplement would be cherry root extract.

Now, cherry root extract doesn't have sugar in it, nothing to be concerned about there. It comes in a variety of forms, so when you do purchase it, make sure you are reading the label and following the instructions for that particular form of cherry root extract to make sure you're taking the proper dose. And of course, if you have questions, speak to your pharmacist or speak to your doctor. Cherry root extract can be bought at any local pharmacy as well. It's very easily accessible to us, especially here in North America, UK, Australia, New Zealand. It's not something hard to find, and you can even get it on amazon.com.

Now, of course, before taking any supplements or taking any electrolytes, anything new to your diet, make sure you talk to your doctor, and make sure there's no negative reasons or any reasons in your health care why you shouldn't be taking these items. Now, with uric acid levels, we typically see them become a problem when people start to get into extended fast, but they can sometimes be problematic with a longer intermittent fast as well.

If that's the case, if you're experiencing issues with the 36, 42, and 48 hour fasts, then it would be best to scale back the fast and go low and slow with the fasting. Spend more time doing 24 hours, maybe try the 30-16 hour protocol for a few weeks and then jumping into trying the 36 hours. That low-and-slow approach tends to work well for letting the body adapt to being in the fasting state, making sure that we're not losing too much hydration at once.

Another thing that tends to flare up because we are losing so much water is loose stools. So as I mentioned, we excrete that extra water either through increased urination, but if we can't process that much urine, we will see loose stools happen when we're first new to fasting. It is important to remember to hydrate, absolutely. If you're losing a lot of electrolytes through loose stools, you've got to be diligent about rehydrating.

Now, with the loose stools, they are really unpleasant. One of the best strategies for combating these loose stools is to have one to two tablespoons of psyllium husk or chia seeds. You take the husk or the chia seed, add it to a glass of water, let it soak for 15 to 30 minutes, and then drink it. Most people will do this in the morning just to prevent any issues happening later on in the day. Some people will take a tablespoon in the morning, and then again, in the evening. And in the worst case, people find themselves taking two tablespoons in the morning or two tablespoons in the evening.

Now, usually this diarrhea or loose stools is only short term and goes away in the first week or two of consistent fasting. Now, on the flip side of diarrhea and loose stools is constipation. This also is a sign of dehydration. There's not enough water to get things moving and grooving, and if you remember back to our talk on electrolytes, magnesium citrate was the magnesium salt that often gets the digestive track moving again. Most people find they need 400 milligrams of magnesium citrate to be able to produce a bowel movement.

Sometimes people might find that this is a little bit too much though and needs a scale back, and other times people need to work with their doctor and increase their dosage. Sometimes even two or three times as much magnesium citrate is required to help get things going. Make sure to hydrate and to get in those electrolytes to prevent against constipation from developing in the first place, but it's also something that might be sticky for many of us for the first couple

of months that we start fasting. This is where maintaining magnesium levels can be really helpful at keeping the digestive track moving along and not getting backed up.

Another side effect of fasting is acid reflux. Again, like gout, very rarely do people suddenly have acid reflux issues when they first start fasting unless they have a history of acid reflux. Most people find their journey with acid reflux goes like this. It sucks. Then you make these lifestyle interventions, and it gets worse. But a few weeks later, it's better. And in a lot of cases, it almost goes away entirely, but the point is that it does get worse often before it gets better.

Now, with reflux, we've always encouraged patients that we were medically monitoring, Dr. Fung was medically monitoring, to continue to take any medication on their fasting days. They would for their reflux. We would introduce things like lemon water or apple cider vinegar to see if they would help as well. We would also cut out bone broth. We would reduce bone broth or eliminate bone broth until their reflux got better because we found that often that can make things worse as well. So just be mindful about your consumption of bone broth, if you are struggling with reflex issues.

More often than not, though, we have to take that low-and-slow approach with reflux patients. So, just sitting in that 24-hour fast for a few more weeks than perhaps we normally would and then graduating to the 30-16 protocol, and then slowly starting to introduce 30 and 42 hour fasts. But most people find within the first four to six weeks their reflux does get to that better place, and they're able to fast 36, 42, 48, 72 hours, or multi-day fast without much difficulty. But it often does get worse before it gets better.

So, when you're brand new to fasting, taking your time, slowly increasing your fasting duration, that's usually the best route, of course, to go. And when you're doing things, when you're taking your diet and going slow with your fasting, you can really work on not snacking. You can really work on eating real foods and troubleshooting any food sensitivities that you might be having so you can make the most of that time, even though you're not jumping into longer fasts right away.

Another common side effect of fasting is stinky breath and a white film on your tongue. That's just a sign that you're losing body fat. That stinky breath is actually acetone, which is a ketone body. Ketones are a source of fat fuel, so when we burn body fat, we produce two fuel sources. One of them is free fatty acids, which fuel most of our organs, and the other one is ketone bodies. They do fuel our organs. But they also can cross the blood brain barrier, unlike free fatty acids, and they can keep our brain fueled nicely during our fasts.

There are three different types of ketone bodies. We tend to just excrete one of them, and that's the acetone. We'll breathe it out, and that's what ketone breathalyzer meters actually measure is the amount of acetone that is produced. That's how they quantify your degree of ketosis, so we'll get more into that later on. If you're experiencing the stinky breath, again, that's the price tag for burning body fat.

What can you do about it? Well, just good oral hygiene. You can even use a tongue scraper if you want, and one of my favorite strategies to help is oil pulling so using a really good anti-microbial oil like coconut oil or olive oil, and just switching that around in your mouth for 20 minutes, discarding it in the garbage, and then brushing and rinsing your mouth out with salt water. Doing that even twice a week can make a huge difference in your oral care and really reduce that foul smell that comes along with losing body fat.

Now, the oil pulling, yes, that is 20 minutes. That's what's been recommended in Ayurvedic medicine since the start. Now, I'll do it while I'm showering, washing my hair, unloading the dishwasher, starting laundry. So, you can definitely do it and multitask. Coconut oil is solid at room temperature, but it will melt in your mouth just within a few seconds. It is a preferred fat for oil pulling because of its extreme antimicrobial and antifungal properties.

Now, a lot of you might think that tastes gross, so you can actually mix in some edible essential mint oil or another edible oil of your preference just to make sure that you're making it a bit more palatable for you. And you're just, again, swish that around. Now, because coconut oil is solid at room temperature, you don't want to discard it down the drain. That can lead to some plumbing issues since it will solidify. It's always best to discard it in a waste bin, or if you're doing oil pulling multiple times throughout the week, perhaps you have an old jar that you can use to discard it in and just leave that under the sink.

Last but not least of the fasting side effects is insomnia, and this is very common for everybody, regardless of whatever health issues you may or may not have. Most people find they struggle with insomnia when they get into doing 36-, 42-hour fasts and beyond. Sometimes people don't experience insomnia till they do extended fasts, but the good news is that insomnia usually goes away within one to two weeks of consistent fasting. Every time you increase your fasting duration, say from 24 to 36 hours, that might disrupt your sleep, but it's only going to do so for a week or two. It's best to hang in there and try to push through.

For some of us who do intermittent fasting, those few times a year that we might do extended fast, it's pretty guaranteed that you're going to likely experience some sleep issues when you start those extended fasts and you get deeper into him. Now, we experience these sleep issues because our bodies are producing more noradrenaline. Now, noradrenaline is great because it

helps us produce body fat, helps liberate fat from our fat cells, and it helps maintain our resting metabolic rate; but it can leave us feeling pretty wired when we want to be in bed getting some good, deep sleep.

So, what can you do about it other than tough it out for a couple of weeks? Well, usually toughing it out for a couple of weeks is what's best, but you can also take magnesium supplementation to help counteract it. This is why taking Epsom salt baths or having Epsom salt foot soaks in the evening can help promote good sleep. Taking magnesium supplements like the magnesium bisglycinate, magnesium malate, magnesium l-threonate, those really well-absorbed magnesium supplements, taking them in the evening can also help.

Now, a lot of people will take their magnesium within the hour before they go to bed. I find that people do better taking half their magnesium around 6:00 and then their other half about an hour before they go to bed and just heavy loading their magnesium intake later on in the day.

That seems to really, really help. Now, of course, again, any supplements, you need to talk to your doctor, your healthcare practitioner to make sure they're okay for you to be taking and that they don't have any negative interactions with any of your other medications. But magnesium is your best bet; otherwise, it's just toughing it out.

I've typically have done four extended fasts ranging from five to seven days every year, and I'll never pick them to do them on weeks where I need to be completely mentally turned on, where my brain power needs to be 100% because I know come day three, day four, I am going to be very wired and having poor sleep. So, I just pick moderately busy weeks, and I recommend people who are struggling even just increasing their intermittent fasting protocols with sleep, don't necessarily jump up, say from the 24s to the 36s or 42s unless they have a more moderate week, too.

So, sometimes you need to plan increasing your fasting duration around your lifestyle. If you have a week with lots of meetings, lots of presentations, that's not a week to increase your fast or to do an extended fast. But weeks where you've got chores and you've got work obligations to do that don't necessarily require 100% brainpower, where those are the great weeks to try to kick things up a notch because you'll be just distracted enough with work. But if you have a couple of tired, rough, sticky days, it's okay. You're not going to end up falling behind.

All right, everyone, that's our talk on fasting side effects.