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For Better Health Series (8) Immunity, Body Well-being When Fasting

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Several years ago, I carried out experiments to know the effect that fasting for long periods may have on the immune system. The experiments showed that long fasting results in the regeneration of Lymphocytes. After a temporary drop of Lymphocytes during fasting, they are regenerated and increased in number due to the fact that long fasting leads to a decrease in the body's reservoirs of carbohydrates (Glycogen) which is a component in which excess carbohydrates are stored in the liver and used to produce energy for cells. When this reservoir is consumed, the body shifts to using other sources for energy called Ketones, which are formed as a result of fat breakdown. It appears that this process leads to major modifications not only in lymphocytes that protect us against infectious diseases and cancer cells, but also has a positive impact on aging-related genes and proteins and the body metabolism in general.

What about fasting for short periods?

Fortunately, a successive high-profile study showed that the same benefits for the immune system were obtained from fasting for shorter periods not necessarily for several days in a row. Other two types of fasting have the same benefits: First type: Fasting for approximately 16-18 hours a day where eating and drinking are moderate and concentrated for a period of 6-8 hours. This resembles to fasting the holy month of Ramadan in many regions especially in summer or spring when having Iftar and Sahour in moderate amounts. This can also be done in normal days by postponing the first meal of the day until noon and having the last meal of the day before 8 pm, avoid snacks afterwards. Non-energetic liquids like water and black coffee are allowed in this case.

Second type: Same benefits can be obtained by fasting for longer periods, two separate days in a week where energy-consumption should not exceed 800 calories.

This last study tells us that intermittent fasting has numerous benefits like controlling arterial blood pressure, lowering heart-rate at rest, lowering levels of fat, cholesterol and sugar, lowering signs of inflammation in addition to the impact intermittent fasting has on the immune system and slowing the aging process.

It is worth mentioning that this type of fasting is not recommended for some patients for health-related reasons, like diabetics who use repeated doses of insulin or elderly people who suffer from body-weakening illnesses.