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Is
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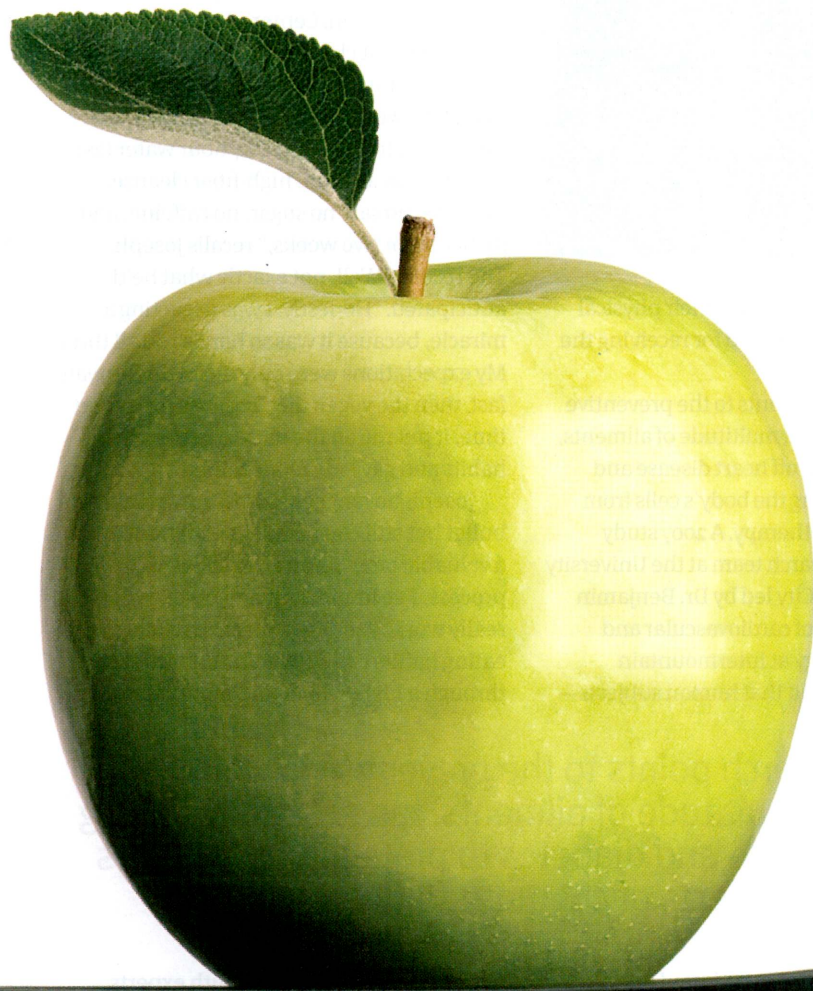
Alicia Silverstone
shares her kind diet
(cookies included)



Feast or Fast

Mormons do it, Muslims do it, and even Jews and Jains do it. But is fasting of the non-religious variety really the road to physical enlightenment, or just a no-food fad with detrimental potential? Writer **Aurelia d'Andrea** investigates the insides and outs of the modern fasting, detoxing, and cleansing craze.





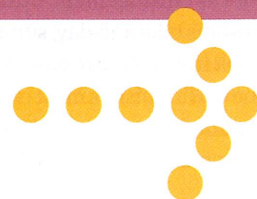
CONCETTA KIRSCHNER KNOWS WHEN IT'S time to hit the juice.

The thirtysomething hip-hop/electronica artist known as Princess Superstar usually gets the signal after a long, hot New York summer spent licking vegan ice-cream cones from Lula's Sweet Apothecary. When a dairy-free dessert mecca sits a stone's throw from your front door, it's hard to resist the sweet allure of that feel-good sensory experience; the afterglow, however, leaves Kirschner feeling a little toxic. "I want to cleanse that out of my system," says the bright-eyed brunette, who admits she's always been an emotional eater. "Fasting resets my approach to eating."

Kirschner was initiated into the world of fasting as a teenager, when her parents made a three-day juice fast a family affair. "This was right around the time we learned to meditate together," she says with a laugh. After high school, she slipped into some bad habits, eating poorly and drinking a lot. But six years ago, she had what she refers to as a "life change." She quit drinking, went veg, and decided to make a serious life overhaul, starting with a deep internal cleanse. "I wanted to do it in a consistent and dedicated way," she says, so she found a guru to guide her and began her transformation with a 10-day juice fast that helped recalibrate her lifestyle habits and give her a clean slate.

Whether you call it fasting, detoxing, cleansing, or juicing, the process of getting spic and span from the inside out doesn't necessarily feel fabulous, and can, in fact, be downright painful. Although the obvious hunger, crankiness, headaches, and general malaise tend to kick off any cleanse, the results keep the fasting masses coming back for more. Kirschner assures that looking great and losing weight are part of the bargain, echoing a common experience among fasting aficionados and newbies alike.

Anecdotally, fasting also offers a chance to hit the physiological "reset" button—something that holds a lot of appeal for a lot of people. After all, who wouldn't like to return to that unclogged, prettox body we all had when





we were eight years old? The challenge, say health experts, is in resisting the quick weight-loss promise many fasts offer, and instead taking a thoughtful approach that ultimately returns the focus to the healthiest baseline possible: a good, clean, whole-foods diet.

A mostly-raw vegan, Kirschner now fasts about four times a year, or whenever she feels bloated, on the verge of getting sick, or simply senses that her dietary habits are getting out of control. The experience leaves her feeling renewed, refreshed, and re-energized. "Your senses become so defined, and you realize you're connected to something cosmic," she says, sounding every bit like the child of hippie parents that she is. "It's just an amazing spiritual practice."

What (Fast) Would Jesus Do?

If fasting sounds akin to a religious experience, it's no wonder; many of the world's great religions weave spiritual fasts into their doctrines. For millennia, the pious have abstained from food or restricted consumption to free their minds and clear their mental pathways to better commune with god. Fasting has also served to unshackle believers from the grip of earthly desires, as well as offer one mode of penance for sins. In Judaism, Yom Kippur gives Jews 25 hours of food-free time to focus on atonement. During Ramadan, Muslims take a 30-day, sun-up-to-sundown break from eating to earn Allah's goodwill. One of Hinduism's most celebrated adherents, Gandhi, famously fasted for peace, and Mormons are encouraged to fast for one full

Sunday a month to transform their physical vessels into conduits primed for receiving the Lord's messages.

Medical research points to the preventive benefits of fasting for a multitude of ailments, ranging from staving off heart disease and diabetes to protecting the body's cells from the effects of chemotherapy. A 2007 study conducted by a research team at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City led by Dr. Benjamin Horne, the director of cardiovascular and genetic epidemiology at Intermountain Medical Center, found that human subjects—

Medical research points to the preventive benefits of fasting for a multitude of ailments, ranging from staving off heart disease and diabetes to protecting the body's cells from the effects of chemotherapy.

Mormons, in this case—who fasted one day per month were 39 percent less likely than their non-fasting counterparts to develop coronary heart disease. Yet, medical experts warn against the notion of calorie restriction as a panacea, and, in particular, against fasts and cleanses as regular weight-loss strategies.

"I am always concerned about individuals using such diets since the long-term evidence shows that these behaviors are not associated with weight loss over time, but rather with weight gain," says Dianne Neumark-Sztainer, PhD, MPH, RD, a professor at the University of Minnesota's School of Public Health. "They are also associated with the use of more severe

disordered eating. It always helps to look at more than one factor to determine whether use of such behaviors may be masking other problems, such as eating disorders."

Hylan Joseph, a married 42-year-old father of two from Santa Cruz, Calif., first hopped aboard the fasting bandwagon in his late 20s, seeing opportunity for a lose-weight-fast and feel-better fix after gaining nearly 150 pounds in an 18-month period. After surveying his friends who'd tried fasting, he came up with his own plan. Centered on a series of three different cleanses, he began his regime with psyllium husk six times a day for three days, followed by sea salt-spiked brown rice for 10 days, followed by a 24-hour water fast. "Then it was a vegan, high-fiber cleanse: no carbs, no salt, no sugar, no caffeine, and no booze for two weeks," recalls Joseph. The results? Well, not exactly what he'd anticipated. "Honestly, I was expecting a miracle, because it was so hard to do all three. My expectations were only met with the water fast, then the vegan diet, because for a short time, it put me on the path to better eating habits and gave me more energy."

Joseph no longer sees fasting as a magic bullet but still considers his experience a valuable one. "As an after effect of the process, I've found fasts and detoxes don't really work. They are a placebo when good eating habits can supply the detox needed through a higher-fiber and more veg-based

nutritious diet," he says. Health experts, including Susan Levin, MS, RD, the director of nutrition education for Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, support Joseph's assertion that fasts are, at best, temporary steps on a path toward a more permanent solution: healthy, balanced eating.

"Research shows that if you eat a whole-foods, plant-based, low-fat diet, you're going to feel good, energized, and you'll get all the nutrients you need. You're going to feel better, naturally, and lose weight, if you want that," says Levin. "It'll also carry you on the path to disease prevention, which is something that fasting can't really do."

Fast Physiology

While the nearly universal sentiment among fasters is that the process promotes greater mental clarity and a sense of connection to the universe, proponents of the Master Cleanse and other diet detoxes also swear by a profound physical renewal that matches the mental. The Master Cleanse promises to give the digestive system a rest and allow it to “heal” and “eliminate toxins.” And of course, it holds the allure of safe, speedy weight loss. But medical experts warn that these claims generally result in temporary benefits that do little in the way of supporting long-term health and sustainable weight management.

“Let’s say you do a cleanse for three weeks—that’s only six percent of the year,” says Mark Berman, MD, a Harvard- and Yale-educated expert on obesity. “It’s what you do for the other 94 percent of the time that’s going to determine your weight at the end of the year. It’s very easy to regain the water, fecal material, fat, and lean tissue that you lost during the three-week cleanse. And for some, the calorie restriction will produce the same effect as dieting, causing a rebound in weight, which contributes to the so-called yo-yo dieting syndrome.”

That feeling of a squeaky-clean intestinal tract is rooted in a genuine physical phenomenon—after all, if you’re limiting the solid matter you ingest, there’s going to be very little solid matter to clog your internal plumbing—but whether this acts as a “system recalibrator” remains up for debate. “You could argue that the dramatic change in diet many cleanses invoke helps to ‘clean the slate’ and allow people to adopt completely new dietary habits when they return to eating,” says Berman, “but I’m not sure there is much evidence to support this as the best approach to break bad habits.”

And what about that sense of clear-headedness and universal connectedness that so many fasters feel? “These phenomena are likely real,” says Berman, “but this doesn’t prove that fasting or cleansing is beneficial. Rapid intake of pure sugar can produce euphoria and increase concentration and cognitive function, but that doesn’t mean we should advocate for more sugar consumption.”

Dietary changes, explains Berman—especially drastic ones like calorie restriction—are capable of altering our mood and our cognitive function, providing one possible explanation for why we feel high on life when

Mastering Cleanses

Don’t know your Beyoncé lemonade diet from your bentonite clay? Here’s a breakdown of six popular detox diets.

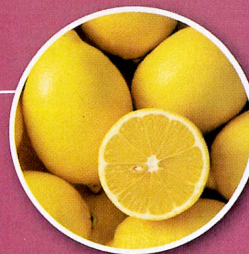
Juice fasting

Traditionally, only juice is consumed during this fast—at least a gallon per day. Choose fresh, organic juices and water, and also include herbal teas, if desired. Use a juicer to whip up wholesome fruit and veggie drinks from the comfort of home.



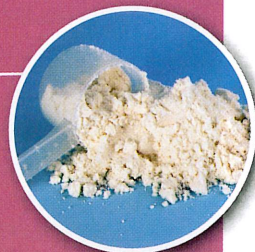
Master Cleanse

Also known as the lemonade diet, this cleanse involves a simple lemonade recipe: fresh-squeezed lemon juice, purified water, grade-B maple syrup, and cayenne pepper. Begin each day with a salt-water flush and drink a laxative tea every night.



Bentonite clay and psyllium husk bowel cleanse

Mix one tablespoon of liquid bentonite clay and one tablespoon of whole psyllium husk in a cold glass of water and stir. Drink as many times a day as desired on an empty stomach and always follow with a glass of water. Eat normally and drink up to two liters of warm water per day.



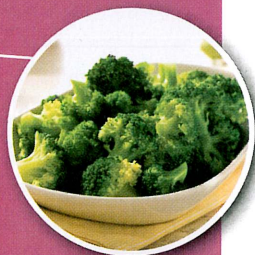
Water fasting

During this detox diet, the body subsists on water, lemon water, and sometimes fresh juices. Alternate-day water fasts are a less restrictive way to detoxify the body while still allowing solid foods every other day. Doctors warn against water fasts that exceed one week.



Liver detox cleanse

Foods high in antioxidants such as milk thistle, vitamin C, selenium, beta carotene, and vitamin E are great for cleansing the liver. A diet heavy in vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, and cabbage, along with B vitamins, including riboflavin and niacin, can enhance liver detoxification.



Gallbladder detox cleanse

Comprised of two parts, this three-day cleanse calls for a special detox drink. Mix one cup of lemon juice with one cup of olive oil, and drink three times a day. During this cleanse, consume only apples, fresh-squeezed apple juice, and apple cider vinegar, but take in enough to feel full.



DetoxRedux

Call it cleansing, detoxing, or fasting, this ancient schema for restoring health and wellness means many things to many people. Meet the modern faces behind the centuries-old practice of physical purification.

Jada Delaney, 41, ○

Massage Practitioner, San Francisco, CA

Cleansing frequency: Once a year, minimum

Why fast? "To recalibrate, because when we're always feeding, it's a really hard situation for the body to heal itself."

Savrah Kramer, 37, ○

Chef, Los Angeles, CA

Fasting guru: David Rainoche

Why fast? "You feel crystal clear and connected to people and community. I once did a 30-day juice 'feast' and was able to stay active. It was a really phenomenal feeling."

Dominique Holz, 52, ○

Bookkeeper, Grand Marais, MN

Fasting guru: Lalitha Thomas

Why fast? "I usually do a 21-day Chapparral tea cleanse after the holidays, when I've eaten a lot of sugar and there's a heaviness inside. After a few days of the tea, it's almost as if it's pushed everything through."

D'Arcy Drollinger, 40, ○

Writer, New York City, NY

Cleansing menu: Liver detox, gall-bladder flush

Why fast? "It feels so amazing to bounce out of bed, looking good, feeling good, and losing weight without losing muscle."

Susan Hellein, 40, ○

Writer, Berkeley, CA

Cleansing menu: The Master Cleanse

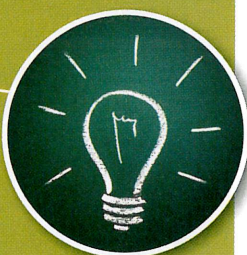
Why fast? "We don't realize how much time we spend thinking about food and drinks, socializing around food and drinks, and preparing and shopping for food and drinks. Overall, a fast is a great boost for creativity and creative thinking."

Kirk Minthorne, 42, ○

Teacher, Kailua-Kona, HI

Fasting guru: "Auntie Margaret. She ran a lomi lomi massage school on Kei Beach. She's been known to cure people of all kinds of cancers by having them fast."

Why fast? "Because things work a little slower the older we get!"



juicing or fasting. "Glucose—the sugar that the brain feeds on—activates the brain's complex systems of reward and learning, in a similar way that many drugs do. Juice fasts likely maintain glucose levels so the brain has enough food and can think clearly, but the brain senses a sharp drop in overall calories, and this can invoke a change in mood. For some people it can be dysphoric and for others euphoric. Typically, we only read anecdotes from the euphoric ones."

Medical Miracle or New Age Quackery?

Liz Campanella is a cleansing pro. In the last five years, the 30-year-old Chicago resident and self-described "sugar freak" has tried the Master Cleanse, the Ejuva cleanse, the Rise and Shine cleanse, the bentonite clay cleanse, and a heavy-metals detox. "There's no reason *not* to try new things," says Campanella, whose zest for life is matched by her zeal for adventure. "Every time I do it, I become more in touch with my body. It's revolutionized my eating habits."

Cleaning out her system and getting off sugar were Campanella's early goals when embarking on her various cleanses, fasts, and detoxes, but she fully embraced the side benefits, including a sense of physical and mental clarity and permanent weight loss. "My system felt less clunky," she says. "I used to weigh 160, and now I'm at 130. My energy increased, my eyes changed color, and my skin texture changed. All of that is from changing my diet and doing cleanses."

Just days before her 29th birthday in late 2008, Campanella was diagnosed with stage-four cancer. "I had three sizeable tumors and the cancer had moved into my bone marrow," she says matter-of-factly. "But I always knew I would survive. Hodgkins lymphoma is one of the most curable cancers out there." While armed with a positive attitude, Campanella still knew she needed to be in the best physical shape possible to endure a rigorous chemotherapy regimen, which involved having a matchbook-size "port" inserted into her chest to pump the cancer-fighting drugs directly into her heart.

In the middle of a blustery Midwest winter, she boarded a plane to sunny Southern California, where she planned to visit a well-known health institute for a pre-chemo detox. Her oncologist was none too pleased about it. "He said if I went there, I was going for a death

sentence, and he hoped that I would return alive to Chicago with enough time for him to save me. I fired him pretty much on the spot." Once she arrived at a friend's place in San Diego, she opted to do an independent detox instead of a clinically supervised one, so for the next 30 days, she drank six ounces of wheat-grass juice per day, had regular acupuncture treatments, kept up with her yoga practice, and spent hours inside a hyperbaric oxygen chamber. Just four months after "rebuilding her system" and facing chemo head-on, she is cancer-free.

"The last 10 months since I've been diagnosed were the most amazing, beautiful months of my whole life," says Campanella with her trademark optimism.

While eating a whole-foods, plant-based diet might not be as simple as the latest pop cleanse or detox, it's the direction we need to travel if we want to arrive at a healthy weight, with a vibrant body, and live a long life.

"Transformation doesn't have to be hard. It can be a joyous experience." She's careful not to confuse the beneficial effects of her detox with a cancer cure. However, she is fully aware that detoxing is a supplement to, and not a replacement for, healthy eating. Campanella is now preparing for a detox recommended by her naturopath—her first since her recovery. "I feel good," she says, "but chemo is so hard on your system that I know I have to detox again."

Ditching the Quick Fix

As a certified health and lifestyle counselor, it's Jamie Dougherty's business to keep up with the latest health trends. When she was invited to appear on the San Francisco television program *View From the Bay* this past June, she used her airtime to offer viewers a healthier alternative to dietary quick-fixes such as the Master Cleanse. While she doesn't use the words "detox" or "fast" ("it scares clients out of their minds!"), she considers her prescription for healthy eating—a diet based on whole grains, greens, and fruits—as a sensible sort of cleanse. "My goal is to help them get in touch with foods that feed them the best," says Dougherty.

In her private practice, she works with busy moms, stressed-out students, and single working women who are struggling to find balance in their diets and their lives. Her

typical client feels sluggish, lacks energy, and nearly always reaches for the wrong food source for nourishment and rejuvenation. "They tend to go for yogurt and granola instead of real food," says Dougherty, who has worked with cancer survivors like Liz Campanella, as well as those with celiac disease, eczema, irritable bowel syndrome, and asthma.

Dougherty says her clients exemplify men and women everywhere who are inundated with messages from every possible media source telling them what to eat and how to eat it. "There's too much information," says Dougherty. "They're coming to me and saying 'I have no idea what to eat. Should I eat organic or locavore? Vegetarian or pescatarian?' They're totally overwhelmed." By offering her

clients a "foundational diet," she helps them return to a healthy baseline and resume a path toward eating well without the extreme calorie restriction and unsustainable food deprivation.

Dougherty's healthy-eating approach is one that Dr. Berman can relate to. He also understands the 21st-century diet-obsession phenomenon. "Detox regimes, fasts, cleanses, and diets have been around for centuries and are regularly advocated as quick fixes for every ailment known to man," says Berman. "We live in a country where two-thirds of adults are overweight and 79 percent are actively doing something to keep their weight in control. People are genuinely struggling with their weight and will try almost anything."

Berman says that, while eating a whole-foods, plant-based diet might not be as sexy and simple as the latest pop cleanse or detox, ultimately, that's the direction we need to travel if we want to arrive at a healthy weight, with a vibrant body, and live a long life. "The real challenge," says Berman, "is figuring out how to make and sustain those changes in a world that discourages them." **VN**

Former VN Editorial Director Aurelia d'Andrea admits to having tried the Master Cleanse once or twice, but finds much more satisfaction in a diet of whole grains and veggies washed down with a glass or two of red wine.

FastingFastFacts

Want to find a supervised fasting retreat but don't know where to begin? The following destinations offer dietary guidance.

Hippocrates Health Institute

West Palm Beach, Fla.

...hippocratesinst.com

Wellness foundation: Organic, raw, vegan

Ambience: Casual, charming

Amenities: Individual health consultations, skin and bodywork treatments, colonics, fitness classes, sauna, ozonated whirlpool, sea salt pond

New Life Retreat Centre for Wellness and Eco-Living

Lanark, Ont.

...newliferetreat.com

Wellness foundation: Organic, live, vegetarian

Amenities: Jacuzzi, biking, live-food classes, massage, reflexology, reiki

Optimum Health Institute

San Diego, Calif., and Austin, Texas

...optimumhealth.org

Wellness foundation: Organic, live, raw, vegetarian

Ambience: Upscale

Amenities: Food preparation classes, prayer, organic gardening, fasting

Tanglewood Wellness Center

Correos Bejuco, Entrengra, Panama

...tanglewoodwellnesscenter.com

Wellness foundation: Organic, living, vegan

Ambience: Natural and organic

Amenities: Nutrition and wellness counseling, reiki, living foods workshop, supervised fasting

Tree of Life Rejuvenation Center

Patagonia, Ariz.

...treeoflife.nu

Wellness foundation: Buffet-style organic, live, vegan

Ambience: Minimalist

Amenities: Sunset fire ceremonies, evening meditations, spiritual gardening, food preparation classes, hot tubs