



Tips To Ensure An **EASIER FAST**

By Ira Milner

While some people fast with little difficulty, most of us expect to feel more or less bedraggled after only a few hours. If fasting means headaches and assorted misery for you, it might be the fault of what you eat or drink beforehand. A few simple precautions in planning your pre-*taanit* menu could make all the difference.

Drink Plenty of Fluids

Water has been called “the indispensable nutrient” for a very good reason. Although a person can live without food for weeks, a few days without water would be fatal. Water makes up approximately 60 percent of the body’s weight and is involved in practically every bodily function. Among its essential tasks, it transports nutrients and oxygen through the blood; maintains body temperature; lubricates the joints; cushions a developing fetus and serves as a medium for the thousands of crucial chemical reactions taking place in the body.

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Much of the discomfort commonly experienced during a fast may be due to avoidable water loss. Treat yourself to a leisurely glass of a non-caffeinated beverage several times a day well before a planned fast.

Providing the body with enough fluids to function properly is a daily business. Your recommended intake is six to eight 8-ounce glasses (or their equivalent) per day, but that should be upped to eight to ten glasses the day before a fast. (Because the elderly tend to have less developed thirst sensations than younger people, they should be especially careful about getting their daily quota of water.) Don’t worry about drinking too much, since the body is highly efficient at getting rid of what it doesn’t need.

Beverages are not the only source of water. Even foods you might consider dry contain some water. Most fruits, for instance, are more than 80 percent water; bread, around 35 percent. Eggs consist of 75 percent water; meats, between 40 and 75 percent; vegetables, from 70 to 95 percent. Although coffee and tea also supply water, the diuretic properties of caffeine make these beverages inadvisable at a pre-fast meal. Diuretics produce water loss at the cell level and therefore ultimately

increase the body’s need for water.

Decrease Protein

Most Americans consume far too much protein, averaging 2-3 times more than needed. A growing body of evidence suggests that high animal protein intake can be a contributing factor in heart disease, certain cancers and may pose a problem for those suffering from kidney disease.

Eating excessive amounts of protein may also be counterproductive before a fast. Since protein attracts water, too much of it may actually leach water from the tissues. In extreme cases, dehydration could result because the unneeded protein pulls out water that will later be necessary to remove the waste products of protein synthesis from the body.

Increase Starch and Fiber

Sugars (including honey and corn syrup) are simple carbohydrates. Starch and most dietary fibers are considered complex carbohydrates because they are chemical chains of many sugar molecules. During digestion both starch and sugar break down into glucose — the simplest form of sugar. Consumption of complex carbohydrates helps to ease the pangs of a fast because they take longer to break

down in the digestive process.

A diet of reduced intake is best supplemented with additional complex carbohydrates. Increasing those carbs will also help the body retain water.

Your best bet before a fast, then, is to load up on the following foods: breads and cereals (especially whole-grain); pasta, rice and potatoes; vegetables with edible skins, stems, and seeds; legumes; fruits (especially those with edible skins and seeds); nuts and popcorn (without the added fat and salt it makes a great, healthy snack).

Decrease Salt

No real news here. When you eat salted foods, the sodium in your blood level. The sodium in your

blood level rises. This not only stimulates the brain's thirst receptor (which triggers the thirst sensation), it also affects the body's water requirement, because water is needed to remove salt from the body. So even if you can't live without pickles and other salted delicacies on a daily basis, try to resist anything very salty before a fast.

Avoid Caffeine

If you regularly drink more than two or three cups of coffee a day—or if you are a caffeinated cola fanatic—consider tapering off several days before, so that by one or two days prior to the fast you will not be consuming any caffeine at all. Although caffeine isn't tech-

nically addictive, the body becomes accustomed to its stimulant effects. Suddenly abstaining from caffeine after an extended period of even moderate intake will probably produce the characteristic "withdrawal headache." The diuretic properties of caffeine, as mentioned earlier, will aggravate you further by increasing your need for water. Finally, you can minimize water loss by being careful not to exert yourself too much the day before a fast. Exercise only moderately, and stay out of the sun as much as possible.

By following the suggested recommendations set forth, some of the discomfort experienced on a *taanit* can be alleviated. **JA**

The Basics



Include:

Eight to ten glasses of water (or other, non-caffeinated beverages)
Small portions of animal protein.
Large portions of starch and carbohydrates (whole-grain breads and cereals, pasta, potatoes, legumes and unsalted popcorn).
Vegetables and fruits with edible skins or seeds.



Avoid:

Coffee, tea, caffeinated sodas
fried, salted, or spicy foods.



Menu Suggestions:

Liberal amounts of plain water, 100 percent fruit juice, seltzer, and herbal tea (teabags rather than bulk tea are preferable)
Whole-grain *challah*.

Chicken (broiled, baked, grilled, broiled).

Rice (preferably brown) and lentils or limas.

Lightly sautéed or steamed mixed vegetables (zucchini, summer squash, snow peas, carrots) or tossed salad with romaine or other dark green varieties of lettuce.

Cakes and lots of fresh fruit.

