

Fasting for one day a month 'cuts the risk of heart attack'

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Skipping meals once a month could help stave off a heart attack, say scientists. Fasting for at least 24 hours cuts the risk of coronary artery disease by up to 40 per cent, compared with those who eat every day, research shows. Experts believe the break from food could help 're-set' the body's metabolism, enabling it to work more efficiently as a result.

The findings come from a study of Mormons, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which requires followers to fast once a month. It has been recognised since the 1970s that Mormons have lower rates of heart disease than other Americans. Researchers say such protection should be available to anyone going without food for a day each month.

Study author Dr Benjamin Horne, professor of biomedical informatics at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, said: "People who fast seem to receive a heart-protective benefit, and this appeared to also hold true in non-LDS (Latter Day Saints) people who fast as part of a health-conscious lifestyle."

His team examined the records of patients who had had a coronary angiography - an X-ray examination of the blood vessels of the heart to look for blockages - between 1994 and 2002. Of 4,629 men and women whose arteries could be clearly examined, Mormons were less likely to have coronary artery disease, defined as 70 per cent narrowing or blocking of at least one artery.

Altogether, 61 per cent of Mormons had heart disease compared with 66 per cent of others. Dr Horne said the difference persisted even after allowing for smoking habits. A further study of 515 patients who had angiography between 2004 and 2006 found those who fasted were significantly less likely to be diagnosed with coronary artery disease than those who did not fast - 59 per cent compared with 67 per cent.

From these figures, the reduction in risk of coronary artery disease was extrapolated as 39 per cent, it was reported yesterday at the American Heart Association meeting in Orlando. Although the researchers also found healthier arteries in diabetics who fasted, they insist it might be dangerous for those with diabetes to start fasting without medical supervision.

Dr Horne said: "This study does not provide evidence that diabetics should skip meals."

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Benefits of Fasting

Fasting controls passion. It checks the emotions. It controls the senses also. It is a great penance. It purifies the mind and the heart. It destroys a multitude of sins. Fasting controls the tongue in particular which is the deadliest enemy of man. Fasting overhauls the respiratory, circulatory, digestive and urinary systems. It destroys all the impurities of the body and all sorts of poisons. It eliminates uric acid deposits. Just as impure gold is rendered pure by melting it in the crucible again and again, so also this impure mind is rendered purer by repeated fasting.

Fasting is one of the ten canons of Yoga. However, avoid excessive fasting. It will produce weakness. Use

your common sense. If you cannot fast for the full twenty-four hours, at least fast for 10-12 hours and then take some milk and fruit. Gradually increase your fast to 15 hours and then up to 24 hours. Fasting makes a man strong, both spiritually and mentally.

When breaking a fast do not take a heavy meal or a heavy food that is hard to digest. Milk or some fruit juice is beneficial.