

## The Fasting Method #186 - Hot Topic: 7 Beginner Fasting Pitfalls

**Megan** [00:00:06] Before we get started with today's episode, I would like to quickly read you our podcast disclaimer. This podcast is for educational purposes only, and it is not a substitute for professional care by a doctor or other qualified medical professional. You should always speak with your physician or other healthcare professionals before doing any fasting, changing your diet in any way, taking or adjusting any medications or supplements, or adopting any treatment plan for a health problem.

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[00:01:13] All right. And now we'll get started with today's episode.

**Terri** [00:01:19] Welcome back to another episode of The Fasting Method podcast. This is Coach Terri Lance and I am joined by coach Heather Shuker today. Heather, how are you doing?

**Heather** [00:01:29] I am doing great as usual, Terri. How are you?

**Terri** [00:01:32] I'm good. Good to see you. Good. Feel your energy. Well, here we are, Heather. We're getting into that New Year place and lots of new people here with us, new listeners, new people in the community. And you've got some really great ideas of how we can help these people who are a little bit newer to this scene. So I'm going to turn it over to you and let you kind of introduce what we're doing and get us started.

**Heather** [00:02:01] Thanks, Terri. So we are going to talk today about the seven pitfalls that new fasters experience in the hopes that, if you are a new faster, you can avoid these just by knowing about them. I'm going to go ahead and get started with number one. And of course, they're in no particular order. Everybody comes at this from different directions and so see what applies to you. So number one is neglecting to manage your electrolytes.

**Terri** [00:02:31] Da da daa! [laughter]

**Heather** [00:02:36] I think you would agree, Terri, that I think people come into this and they learn all of the things, but somehow-- I think because they're learning so much all at once, somehow that gets a back burner and it doesn't seem important enough to pay attention to, but it is, a lot of times, the thing that trips people up, makes them feel unwell, and they think, "Gosh, fasting isn't for me because I don't feel well," when, really, fasting's for everyone (well, almost everyone), and it is actually this electrolyte problem that's getting in the way. I know that you've found this too. What do you think?

**Terri** [00:03:11] I think it is super important. And it's one of those things that I think a lot of us, as you said, because we're focusing on the bigger things, we forget those foundational things like electrolytes. I've done it before. I've gotten dehydrated during a fast. It was not a pretty scene. And I think the other reason why some of us kind of fail to pay enough attention to it is we feel okay until we don't. We get going in the morning and are like, "Hey, I just skipped a meal," "Woo! Look at me, I just skipped another meal," and then, "Wow, I feel like crap suddenly." And they don't recognize that paying attention to their electrolytes

first thing is what's going to help them avoid getting to that time of day where things go downhill really quickly.

**Heather** [00:04:00] Exactly. And I think another piece of that, especially when it comes to salt, is we have this fear of salt, even though we're kind of walking bags of salt water! [laughs] There's more to us, but, certainly, it's an essential element, yet, because it is so demonized, people are afraid to use it as a supplement. It's one of those things where it's necessary for life, so, if you're not eating anything and you're only drinking water, then, by definition, if it's something that you need and you're not having, you're not getting enough.

**Terri** [00:04:31] Yeah, that's a great point, Heather. I just was talking with a client about this last night. She does have some medical reasons why her doctors have cautioned her about salt, and I encouraged her to go back and ask them more detailed questions because, if you're taking in nothing, you're not getting any sodium versus if you're eating a standard American diet, you're getting way too much of the worst kinds of sodium. So I get their feedback, but I encouraged her to dig into it a little deeper. The other thing that, again, I think, people-- I don't know, some people think they just need to be warriors and tough it out - "I don't need those things everyone else needs," "I don't need a life jacket," - and I think people find that if they allow themselves to keep up with their electrolytes, fasting is so much easier.

**Heather** [00:05:25] Yes. And we want this to be doable and comfortable because it takes a while of fasting in order to reach your goals. So you don't want to just white-knuckle through it all the time and expect to be able to do that for months on end. You want to use every tool that is necessary for you to feel comfortable so that this is something that you can continue with until you cross that proverbial finish line with your goals.

**Terri** [00:05:54] And I would say the biggest tip I have about electrolytes that I've learned over the years with clients and Community members is that there is such a thing of waiting too long. And the analogy I always use is pain medication. Now, I know a lot of people don't like to take pain medication. They have a procedure done and they come home with a prescription for pain medication, but they want to get past the pain medication and so they say, "I'm not going to take that first dose. I just don't think I need it." And so they skip, you know, four hours and they skip that first dose. And by eight hours in, they're in so much pain. And it's like you can't catch up. Taking the dose then doesn't do what it needed to do for hours ago go in the same way. And I feel like that's true of electrolytes. If we wait until like 4:00 or 5:00, when we start to feel kind of off a little bit, we are already progressing into a degree of dehydration that's really hard to just catch up.

**Heather** [00:07:01] Right. Just like the pain-medicine analogy, you want to treat your electrolytes and your dehydration like a pack of wolves. You stay ahead of it. You don't wait until it gets you to try and do something about it because then it's too late. And that got a little gruesome, so let's go ahead [laughs] into the next thing. All right. The second pitfall is trying to string one-meal days over and over and over again. And we see this all the time, don't we, Terri?

**Terri** [00:07:32] Absolutely. Something I see a lot of people do when they're newer to fasting is they get in the mindset that my goal is to just stretch how many hours I can go without eating. And I think that's a brilliant plan to get from 15 to 18 [hours] and 18 to 20, but what they do is they just do this every day. So one day it's 16 hours, and the next day it's 17, and then 19, and 23, and 23, and 26, and they're not getting in enough refueling time to give their body what it needs. So, of course, you know, Heather, we are really

committed to the alternate-day way of fasting, even for 24 hours. So if you eat two or three meals on day one, then the next day it would be one meal. Then you go back to your two or three. You alternate that stretch rather than stretch, stretch, stretch, stretch every single day.

**Heather** [00:08:37] Exactly. And I think the reason people fall into that trap is because it works for a while until it doesn't anymore, right? Our body acclimates to that one meal a day, and then our metabolism slows down. It's like, "Okay, if this is all we're getting, this is what we're running with." And so people will see themselves doing great and thinking they're fasting really well, but then they find themselves in this spot where they're only eating one meal a day, and they're not quite there where they're ready to do an overnight, but they're starting to regain the weight that they've lost because of that dip in the metabolism.

**Terri** [00:09:16] That's right. And I think that's a big misperception that some people have about fasting in general - that it is just deprivation, it's just not eating enough, and that they're going to go into starvation mode. That's really not what happens, but constantly underfueling our body does lead us to a place where our body starts to struggle. Like you said, it stops releasing excess weight, it starts holding on, you know, out of fear. And so really learning to fuel appropriately and fast appropriately, you need both to make it work.

**Heather** [00:09:53] Exactly. And I think that's critical and it is a very common mistake so I wanted to make sure that we touched on that today. In that same vein, another thing that we see is people trying to crank it up too fast, right? They come to us and they're ready to, you know, reach their goals as quickly as possible. And they're like, "All right, let's roll. Let's let's do a five-day fast." [laughs] And, no, let's take it back a little bit. What are your thoughts on that?

**Terri** [00:10:21] Well, Heather, you know, I have a huge, huge bias about this and talk about it a lot in our community. And I refer to what I call 'the fasting dial of intensity' and sometimes it's dialed really low and sometimes it's dialed high. The beauty of it is that we get to adjust where that dial is, based on how we're doing, what's going on, what are the stressors in our lives, or whatever. And what I see so many people do is they're introduced to this dial and they're like, "Well, if a little bit is good, a lot must be great," and they turn it up to full volume, full intensity. It burns them out every time. And I think one of the other negative takeaways for so many people when they do this is they doubt themselves and they doubt fasting. They say, "You know, I thought this was going to be the thing for me, but, clearly, I can't fast. Clearly, fasting just doesn't work for me," and they stop. So learning that entering the pool at the shallow end until you have built up your swimming abilities, enter in at the lower end of the fasting dial. Build up your fasting muscle until you're ready to do those longer ones, and then dial back when your body needs to lighten up a little bit.

**Heather** [00:11:51] Perfect, and so true. I think that is why we have this amazing new feature in The Fasting Method Community, which is this 12-week program. And so, basically, Dr. Fung and Megan Ramos took The Fasting Method and broke it into doable steps so that people can understand where to start and where to go next, when it comes to The Fasting Method, so that they don't feel like, "Okay, I want to fast, I want to reach my goals, what should I do?" Here's what you do. [laughs] We've got it broken down for you. And if you just take it as it comes in that order, you're going to, like you said, build up that muscle and do the reps necessary at level one so that you can gradually get yourself into, say, level four or level seven, wherever you need to go to meet your goals. Now, that said,

just because it's broken into a 12-week course, that doesn't mean that a regular person can necessarily advance from level one to level seven in 12 weeks. It's a matter of giving you the opportunity to understand what order Megan and Dr. Fung recommend based on their experience and fasting so many people. And once you have that information, then you can apply it to yourself in the pace that is appropriate for you. We all have different kind of speeds at which we will adjust up our fasting dial and back down, as need be, so there is no perfect level of intensity at any given time for everyone. That's something that you self adjust.

**Terri** [00:13:31] Absolutely, Heather. And I know that-- I'm so wedded to this topic. I feel like you and I could do five or six episodes just on this, but we would just keep saying the same thing over and over, hoping that people really take it. So, you know that I have recently been learning to ski. Some of our listeners know that. Our community members often know that. And one of my instructors last year shared something. I didn't know where it came from. I guess it actually comes from like the Navy SEALs. But he said, "Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast." That when you're first learning to come down the hill, you've got to go slow. You've got to learn how to balance, and what to look at, and where are your poles, and how are your feet working. And that makes it smooth until going smoothly makes it faster. So when people want to jump ahead, you know, that would be like me just straight-lining it right down the mountain. It's dangerous, and it's going to scare the bejesus out of me, and it's going to make me never want to ski again. So slow is smooth. Smooth is fast.

**Heather** [00:14:43] I love that analogy. It's perfect. Mic dropped! [laughter] Let's move on. All right, number four, pitfall number four (and this is a big one, we see this a lot) is to consider fasting a magic eraser and feel like you don't need to make any dietary changes. You can just fast it all off and eat whatever you want and expect to reach your goals. What do you think about that, Terri?

**Terri** [00:15:09] How many hours do you have, Heather? [laughter] I believe that value of what you just said so much that I actually encourage people to focus on the food first. And sometimes people are frustrated with me. They're like, "No, no, come on, coach. I wanna do a 48-hour fast." But I just find that if we don't figure out our relationship with food and how we're going to navigate that, get that moving, building the fasting muscle is so much harder. And even if we muscle our way through it, somehow, we have some backlash that happens. And even though we're doing the fasting, we're not seeing the results. And I can't think of-- you know, that definition of insanity thing? To me, in the fasting world, the definition of insanity is fasting really hard and not seeing the results. Something's not working and, often, it's because people are only relying on fasting and they're not paying attention to the fuel that they're putting into their bodies.

**Heather** [00:16:14] I agree. And you know that my focus is weight loss. That is what I'm mildly obsessed with, with the understanding that I believe with weight loss comes a whole lot of other health benefits. So it's not just about the visual for me, it is just a passion project and it's what I really like to talk about and work with people on. And I think it's important to remember that, for most of us who have spent our life struggling with our weight, it wasn't because we were under fasting. It was because of our relationship with food, as mentioned. And so I like to think of fasting as, you know, a tool for weight loss. And so if we think about any of the tools for weight loss, they don't work if we don't permanently change how we've been eating. So if we are eating in such a way that our body is not healthy, we're carrying too much weight, and we use one of these tools like our favorite -fasting - and lose the weight. If we don't then permanently change what we were

eating to begin with, of course it all comes back. And so, if we neglect that key piece, we don't ever really get to reach what we're all looking for, which is some level of maintaining a new, healthier body and not have to spend all of our time with this unfortunate relationship with food that many of us struggled with for decades. So that needs to be part of the process. As you learn to fast and make those lifestyle changes, the food choices and your way of eating that works for you needs to be worked on right along with it.

**Terri** [00:17:57] You know, the other important thing that you highlighted in there, Heather, is when people think, "Oh, I don't want to have to change my food," we think of old diet mentality - "I have to watch my calories," and, "I have to go super low-fat," or something, "I have to do what is so uncomfortable," - versus, "What works for my body?" "What decreases my inflammation?" That's going to help us big time with weight loss and health. So there's more to making dietary changes than the old diet kind of learning that we did in the past.

**Heather** [00:18:32] I couldn't agree more. All right, let's move on to pitfall number five. And this is this is a nuanced one, okay, everyone. So it is to tell everyone you know [laughs] that you've decided to start fasting for weight loss. How does that tend to work out in your experience, Terri?

**Terri** [00:18:53] Heather, you and I have talked about this before as we've been preparing for episodes and we say there's this little thing that kind of happens in our community where the message is, "Don't talk about fasting," and I think people misunderstand that. So, today, the nuance here is let's maybe not tell everyone before we know how we're going to do with it, but once we really experience it and we're thriving with it, that's when we should wear the sandwich board and tell every person we see that there's this tool that is so helpful. But I think people get so excited that they want to tell everyone first.

**Heather** [00:19:37] I think so, too. And when that happens, those of us who were very excited about fasting in the beginning, we would go out and say, "Oh, I'm not eating," "Oh, what do you mean?" And then people that don't understand fasting would be concerned. Naturally, right? And so here you're trying to do something that's a little difficult, and, especially if you're not part of the Community and you don't have the support of others that are doing it, it might feel like you're doing something that you shouldn't be doing. And so when you tell everyone, "This is what I'm going to do," and you hear back from them, "Oh, that's a terrible idea," then, maybe when it gets a little hard, you're more likely to quit. Whereas if, like you indicated, you don't tell everyone that you're embarking on this new way of lifestyle change (except maybe people within the Community who understand what fasting is and why it's so beneficial) and wait until you actually have the results that so many of our members have, right (so you have the weight loss, you've improved a lot of health markers), at that point, you're probably going to be asked what you're doing. This is a 'show don't tell' situation. So when people come to you and are like, "Oh my gosh, you look great, what are you doing?" please tell them. [laughs] Please let them know that we are here and we can help them in the same way that you were helped.

[00:21:05] On that note, fasting pitfall number six for new fasters is to try to go it alone.

**Terri** [00:21:13] Heather, I think this is one-- you know, we could do this as all seven of the pitfalls right here on this one because so much evidence that we have in our personal experience, in our Community experience, our experience with clients, but also in research, is that we do better with things when we have a supportive network, when our environmental influences are kind of lined up to help us make these difficult changes and

make them stick. And so doing it on our own, like, doing it in complete privacy, gets us in our head, it doesn't get us support, and it is so, so much harder.

**Heather** [00:21:57] Exactly. And I think most people listening have experienced the honeymoon period when you start something new. You're gung-ho, you're really into it, you're reading and learning all the things, and then you actually start. [laughs] You and I have talked before about motivation kind of abandoning us. And so when it gets hard and you no longer feel motivated, if you're alone, you just quit, you just bale. And there's a difference when you get to that point alone versus when you get to that point in a supportive community because you start to realize everybody got to that point. And yet when you're surrounded by experienced people that have reached amazing goals, you see, yeah, they felt that too, they kept going, and they got to places they couldn't even believe. And so when you're surrounded by people like that, instead of just being like, "This is too hard, I quit," you're like, "Gosh, this \*is\* hard, but look at what they got when they kept going. I sure want to get to where they got. I'm inspired and I want to keep going." Another piece of that is, you know, we're talking about these pitfalls and things that people run into. Of course, it's not an all inclusive list. There are a lot of things that come up with fasting that are very personalized and unique that you might not know how to troubleshoot. When you're in a community with experienced people, with coaches, then, as one of those things comes up for you, you get that answer. So instead of floundering around not knowing what to do to fix it, you get an answer, you dodge that obstacle, and you're able to keep going.

**Terri** [00:23:44] Many of us have struggled with our weight for a long time. It didn't start a couple weeks ago. It's been 20 years, 30 years, 60 years. And we start to feel like there must be something wrong with us - "I've been successful in my career," "I've been successful raising kids," "I've been successful doing whatever but why can't I do this thing?" And I see so much power in getting to be reminded - "I'm struggling with this thing because it's something that people struggle with and, when I'm in a community, I get reminded of that. I see other people who also experience some of the things I do that some other people in my life don't have to deal with." I have people in my life that eat however they want and they don't really seem to have a negative consequence from it. It's not like me. I need to see people who are like me and, although our struggles aren't always exactly the same, it really changes it to know I am not alone in these challenges.

**Heather** [00:24:51] Terri, I love that so much that I don't know what to say after that. I could not agree more. I can't tell you how many times clients have come to me on the struggle bus in a small group session, and the other three people in the session are also on the struggle bus. And so you can look around and see, oh my gosh, it is not just me that didn't come here trying to make these really big lifestyle changes, like you said, after decades of old habit patterns, and stumble and find it difficult, and question why you can't just do it. Why can't I just do it already? It's hard for everyone because it's incredibly difficult to change the lifestyle habits that we've had for decades. And when you see that everybody else is having the same problem, and that we all need to do it messy, and just keep showing up and give ourselves credit for the progress that we did make, and just keep trying, it becomes less of a, "I'm a failure," and more, "I'm trying to do something hard with all these other people," and for doing it.

[00:26:01] All right, lastly, but of course, in no particular order, a very common pitfall of new fasters is failing to have a plan. And that can look like a whole lot of different things. One of the ones that comes up the-- well, there are two that come up the most. One is not looking ahead at your calendar and your schedule and seeing what day's work best for you for

fasting. And another one is thinking about when you break your fast, are you ready for it? Right? Do you have, you know, appropriate foods ready to go when you come home from work ravenous or are you walking in like a wild animal trying to find something to kind of relieve the discomfort of hunger and finish the fast properly or not?

**Terri** [00:26:52] I think this also happens when people don't have a food plan, even for eating days, not just a food plan of breaking a fast (which I think is super important) and a plan for how they're going to fast, but a plan of how will I eat when it's mealtime for me? How will I make sure I have the appropriate food? I don't know about you, Heather, but I think most of us, when we are short on time, ready to eat, this is when we can make some really problematic decisions because we make them out of convenience. So I've been talking a lot lately about having convenient things ready. Like, you wouldn't believe how many times I've just opened a can of tuna fish and, you know, spruced it up a little bit and it's a meal. That is a four-minute meal prepped for me, not a, "I need to go to the grocery store," "I need to plan," "I need to cook," "I need to prep." Four minutes! So having safety foods (that's how I refer to them) - safe things in your home - that you can have prepared very quickly so that your brain doesn't take you down that, "Oh, let's go with this nice, convenient thing," that, of course, causes us all kinds of problems.

**Heather** [00:28:07] And on that note, unfortunately, our brain plays tricks with us, as you talk about all the time, and, sometimes when we're fasted, we're like, "Well, I haven't eaten for 24 or 42 hours, so it's okay for me to make this problematic choice." Whereas, as we discussed earlier, if we don't work on our relationship with food, we're going to end up stuck, right? If we keep thinking of fasting as something that gives us, you know, free rein to eat whatever, then we're not going to make the progress that we're looking for, even though we're working really hard and doing things that, you know, are uncomfortable. So we don't want to expend that effort and then have it not really get us anywhere because we erase our effort with problematic foods.

**Terri** [00:28:59] Absolutely. Lather, rinse, and repeat. When we let one area of this slip, it all starts to slip. So if we don't have a plan, we don't have a good fasting plan, a good way to break our fast, a good way to eat when it's time to eat, everything gets more complicated. We're making ourselves work harder. And, you know, one piece of advice that so many entrepreneurs and self-help people talk about is work smarter, not harder.

**Heather** [00:29:27] Exactly. So if you are, in fact, a new faster and you've heard these seven pitfalls and you're actually feeling a little more overwhelmed [laughs] as opposed to better because you've gotten some guidance on how to avoid pitfalls, that's normal. Learning everything there is to know along this journey takes a lot. We say that it's like drinking from a water hose. And so please don't expect to know and understand everything there is to know from out of the gate. It takes time to gradually build all the knowledge and everything that you need to know, but the best way to learn is to actually start, right? We learn best from experience, from doing things. So I'm not saying, "Here are all the pitfalls. Go avoid them," more, "Here they are. Experience them and, as you do recognize them, and, with that experience, you will learn what you need to know to be successful in this journey."

[00:30:32] First and foremost, though (and I think both Terri and I have tried to reinforce this), one of the best ways you can keep yourself from staying in these pitfalls for too long is to get support. So I want to invite you to come on in to our community. If you feel like you might need more intensive support and you want a coach, of course I invite you to do that as well. But it is normal and natural to need more support because this is new and this

is not something you're familiar with, and so it will take time. But you'll find that, over time, you'll learn everything you need to know.

**Terri** [00:31:11] Absolutely. Get that support, whatever that looks like for you. Remember that we're here not only here at the podcast, but we do have a large, thriving community, and we'd love to see you there. All right, Heather, thank you so much for the seven pitfalls. I think these are all going to stick with me as I reach in with some of our Community members and my clients. And I look forward to coming back with you in another episode.

**Heather** [00:31:38] Thanks, Terri.

**Terri** [00:31:39] Take good care, everyone.