

# THE Center Spirit

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# Tips for Before and After a Fast

By: Esti Asher, MS, RDN, LD

With Yom Kippur approaching, there may be many things on our mind. This beautiful and powerful day is one in which we focus on teshuva. One of the ways that we stay focused on the meaning of the day is by fasting.

The term “fasting” can have many definitions in the diet and nutrition world and is generally not recommended for weight loss purposes. However, as we all know, the purpose of religious fasts is not to lose weight. Since our body uses food as fuel, it is especially important to be mindful of how we prepare our body for a fast, and subsequently how we break our fast.

While an individual can be fine fasting for Yom Kippur without following any particular pre-fast recommendations, following a few guidelines can definitely be helpful. Below are 8 tips to keep in mind when preparing for a fast and when breaking a fast.



Esti Asher, MS, RDN, LD is a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist and Self-Care Enthusiast on a mission to help women reach their ultimate health and wellbeing potential inside and out. She shares credible, clear and inspiring nutrition information with women via her virtual private practice. To contact Esti with feedback or inquiries regarding her nutritional services, please e-mail her at: [esti@estiashernutrition.com](mailto:esti@estiashernutrition.com) or visit [estiashernutrition.com](http://estiashernutrition.com).

Disclaimer: The information in this article is for informational purposes only. This article is not meant to be used as Medical Nutrition Therapy and thus is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any health conditions. Please consult with your physician if you have specific questions regarding your health.



## Before a fast:

- 1 Make an effort to drink extra water.** Our body requires a lot of water, and that requirement increases during the hot summer months when we are generally sweating extra. When preparing for a fast, it is important to be mindful to drink more water in anticipation of the fast, when we will not be drinking at all.
- 2 Wean off of caffeine** if you regularly drink coffee or other caffeinated beverages. If you drink coffee daily, then you may be familiar with the headaches that creep in when you miss your cup(s) of coffee. In anticipation of a fast day, it is recommended to slowly wean off completely (or at least decrease the amount) of caffeine that you have each day in order to help prevent or minimize the discomfort you may experience the day of a fast.
- 3 Decrease your salt intake.** This strategy will help prevent you from feeling extra thirsty the day of a fast. Our salt (sodium) intake refers to the salt that we physically add to our food and the salt that is already within the food from prior preparation and processing. It is noteworthy to mention that most of the salt that we consume comes from processed foods, including packaged foods and condiments.
- 4 Build up your body's energy reserves.** The day before a fast it is a good idea to eat more carbohydrates in order to build up glycogen stores in your body. (In the body, carbohydrates are broken down into glucose, and then glucose is stored in the form of glycogen, which is used as a source of energy.) Carbohydrate choices should ideally be complex carbohydrates such as whole grains (including whole-wheat bread, oatmeal or brown rice), fruits, and starchy vegetables. It is helpful to minimize the amount of refined carbohydrates (including white bread, cookies, cakes and candies) eaten in order to prevent the sugar crash that is associated with them.

## After a fast:

- 1 Eat slowly.** Especially after a fast, it is helpful to be extra kind to your digestive system. Make sure to eat slowly and thoroughly chew your food. This may also help increase your awareness of your satiety cues. In other words, eating slowly may help you more easily recognize when you are satisfied and no longer need to be eating, as opposed to eating quickly and too much, which will ultimately leave you feeling uncomfortable and maybe even sick.
- 2 Make a plan.** Plan in advance what you will be breaking your fast on. If there is no plan in place, you will most likely grab for anything and everything that you see in your kitchen. This may make you feel uncomfortable and dissatisfied with your food choices.
- 3 Hydrate!** Our body needs a lot of water. After going a long time (in this case, over 24 hours) without any water, we must make sure to drink a lot to help replenish our water levels and hydration status. This can be done by drinking water and eating soups, fruits and vegetables with a high-water content.
- 4 Increase your awareness and appreciation.** Be extra mindful of the delicious, beautiful and satisfying foods that Hashem has provided us with. Sometimes we do not appreciate something until it is no longer available to us. After a fast is a great time to re-instill the appreciation that we have for food and drinks and all that they have to offer.

May we all – both individually and collectively – be inscribed and sealed for a year of tova, success, health and with the privilege to bring the geulah bekarov.