Is Fasting Bad for Your Hormones? The Science and Solutions Transcript

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Fasting and Hormone Health Overview

Is fasting bad for your hormones? I hear that question all the time. Is fasting bad for thyroid hormone? Is fasting bad for sex hormones like estrogen?

Progesterone? Is it bad for a female menstrual cycle? Is it bad for menopause? Is it bad for a males to stop levels? I get this question all the time.

The answer is nuanced because fasting is considered a stressor, but it's something we call a whore medic stressor. It's a stressor that can actually make us stronger and more resilient.

Kind of like exercise. But if you do too much of it, or if you do it under the wrong environment, it can be bad for your hormones. But if you do it properly, it can actually be very beneficial for your hormones and actually make you more hormone sensitive where your body responds to those hormones much more effectively because it dampens down inflammation.

It improves all cellular communication processes. So you see, chronic stress we know is antagonistic to good hormone production. We think about thyroid hormone.

That has to do with metabolism burning fat right. It has to do with energy production within the mitochondria within the cell. And so when we are under chronic stress, too much stress a high, what we call Alo static load, where we're just overwhelmed by stress, we're not able to properly adapt and recover from it.

Then our metabolism goes down or thyroid hormone activation goes down.

Stress, Thyroid, and Sex Hormones

When we are under too much stress, our fatality goes down. So what does that mean? That means for women, they're not going to have the right amount of estrogen and progesterone release at the proper times.

And for men it's going to mean lower testosterone levels. So stress is antagonistic. It's going to bring down your metabolism and your fertility if you have too much stress.

But the right amount of stress actually makes your body stronger and more resilient. Now, when it comes to fasting, we know that fasting increases something called human growth hormone.

HGH research has shown that fasting, for example, for 24 hours, has been shown to increase HGH levels by 3 to 5 times. Now, HGH, or human growth hormone, is what we call your quintessential anti-aging hormone.

It helps you burn fat, preserves lean body tissue, can even help build lean body tissue if you incorporate strength training and consuming enough nutrients.

So it's really important for that helps helps to preserve bone mass, helps to support your immune system, and creates more immune modulation. So it helps to reduce inflammation in your body and strengthen your natural immunity.

And so against viruses and different pathogens. So how is amazing. It also helps with collagen and elastin production for healthy skin hair, nails. See a look younger and you feel better.

Okay is your quintessential anti-aging hormone. Fasting as well as exercise are the two best ways and good sleep the three best ways, I should say, of naturally boosting your levels.

And you get a really nice bump with fasting and intermittent fasting. Like if you're fasting for 16 hours, 18 hours, or even doing like a one day fast, you're really nice little bump of HGH.

Again, research has shown 24 hours 3 to 5 time increase in HGH.

How Fasting Boosts Growth Hormone

Now you also when you're fasting you increase cortisol which is a stress hormone. And I mentioned fasting is a stressor on the body. So you get an increase in stress hormone.

Now as long as human growth hormone is elevated that's fine. Cortisol actually gives us wakefulness. It helps us with better memory. Better recall actually can improve your mood if it's in the right ratio.

If we're just getting, you know, basically certain amounts of cortisol, right, that are under control in our system, we don't want to low, we don't want to high for too long.

That's the key now. As long as growth hormones elevated, our tolerance point for cortisol can be elevated. That's fine. The key is when we overwhelm our system now, all of a sudden stress hormone will go up.

Growth hormone will go down too much. Kind of like think about it like a seesaw. We want that seesaw to be very balanced. But if cortisol goes up too much because we're under a lot of stress, maybe we have a bad diet, right?

There's a number of things I'm going to go through that would increase that. Now growth hormone plummets. Really. We want growth hormone elevated cortisol down or balanced in that ratio on the seesaw.

So we want to keep growth hormone up right. Like when we're sleeping cortisol down. Then when we get up and we're moving out moving throughout the day we want cortisol gives us wakefulness.

But it should be balanced on that seesaw right. With. So the cortisol is elevating but it's balanced with growth hormone. That's the key here. So what are things that reduce our human growth hormone cortisol ratio.

That's what I call it the growth hormone to cortisol ratio. You're not going to get blood work necessarily to to be able to test that out and quantify that.

It's really going to be about how you feel. So when you're fasting you actually feel amazing, right? You should have great mental clarity, feel really, really good.

Shouldn't feel like you're wasting muscle, right? You should actually feel strong when you break your fast when you exercise right. Should have plenty of energy throughout the day.

Should have good digestion when you eat your meals. All of those types of things are signs that you have the right amount of growth hormone to cortisol, right?

Your growth hormone, or cortisol ratio is in good condition.

Cortisol Balance and Signs of Overstress

If you're noticing a lot of anxiety, a lot of cravings, lots of fatigue, brain fog, depression while you're trying to do intermittent fasting, that's a sign that your growth hormone or cortisol ratio is too low, right?

You're not getting the the growth hormone you need. Cortisol is elevated and you're getting more catabolic activity and more stress overwhelming your system.

Your static load has increased. Your your body is overwhelmed by the stress it's under. So what would lower that growth hormone to cortisol ratio. Well it's going to be a lot of bad lifestyle activities right.

Bad diet bad hydration if you are not drinking enough water and not getting enough salt and minerals, then your body releases cortisol, releases aldosterone, which is called a mineral corticosteroid released from the cortex of the adrenal glands, right where cortisol is released as well.

And that helps your body retain sodium and retain fluid. So it doesn't you don't lose too much fluid. So dehydration electrolyte imbalance is a really big factor, especially when people are fasting.

They may not be consuming enough water or consuming enough electrolytes. And that can cause increased or I should say decreased HGH to cortisol ratio.

Constipation is a big factor. If you're not moving wastes out, then that waste is going to release endotoxins, which is going to drive up cortisol, lower growth hormone levels, poor breathing habits.

If you're doing a lot of short, shallow breathing, or if you're doing a lot of mouth breathing and not nasal breathing, that's going to increase cortisol, lower growth hormone, poor sleep if you're not sleeping well, if you have circadian rhythm disruption, staying up late at night, you're exposed to blue light that is going to distort your growth hormone to cortisol ratio over or under training.

If you're doing too much exercise or too little, right, if you're very sedentary, not moving much, or if you're doing too much exercise, that's going to overwhelm your system and your growth hormone is going to go down, your cortisol is going to go up.

Bad self-talk, bad relationships, a job you hate, right? These are all things that create stress, right? You create stress and anxiety every time you go home.

You're fighting with your spouse, right?

What Lowers the HGH-to-Cortisol Ratio

You're getting more stress if you're if if you're constantly hearing negative voices in your head, right. That's going to create more stress in your life.

If you hate the job you go to every day, it's going to cause more stress. Your growth hormone is going to be depleted. Your cortisol is going to be elevated.

High toxin exposure. Let's say you're in a moldy home and you're breathing in mold all day long. And that's going to cause a lot of stress and inflammation on your system.

So those are the things that deplete your HGH to cortisol ratio. So what what replenishes it? What builds up your growth hormone levels, protein and nutrients?

Really optimizing protein levels in your meal is super key. So when you're eating you know, I recommend feast famine cycling. So you're not always fasting, you're not always feasting, you're spending time fasting, and you're also spending time feasting and eating plenty of nutrients.

So making sure you're getting enough nutrients, making sure you're eating high quality protein, 30 to 50g or more in a meal. That's going to be key for helping boost growth hormone throughout the day and at night while you're sleeping.

That's going to be super important for that, and to get the best growth hormone release during your fasting window. When you're fasting for 16, 18, maybe 24 hours, good hydration, right?

Hydrating? Well, particularly during that fasting window. Super key, a good hydration, maybe some salts or electrolytes. Very important for optimizing growth hormone and keeping cortisol under control.

Good quality sleep obviously super important. We got to make sure we're sleeping. Fact between the hours between 10 p.m. to 2 a.m., that's when we're going to get the maximum amount of growth hormone release as long as we are sleeping, right.

So we want to get good quality, deep sleep, good quality REM sleep, deep sleep is really when your body does the most recovery. REM sleep REM sleep is where your brain really does the most clean up, right?

And lymphatic drainage and consolidating memories and resetting neurotransmitters, right. So that's the power of good sleep. So we've got to make sure we're sleeping well.

We got to have positive self-talk right. Good relationships a job that we might not love, but it offers opportunities for us to, you know, to experience joy at times, whether it's our coworkers or just, you know, being able to perform in such a way that you feel confident in yourself, being able to do something, maybe, maybe as some sort of art form that you enjoy.

Lifestyle Habits That Support Hormones

Right? Right. Whether it's design or, you know, whatever it is, some sort of something that you enjoy throughout the day, it's going to help boost your growth hormone, keep cortisol under control, good relationships.

You're going to release endorphins. You're going to release things like oxytocin when you're, you know, hugging your spouse, hugging a friend, petting a dog.

Right. All that releases oxytocin, which helps to boost growth hormone, keep cortisol balance, keep the stress hormones balanced. So very, very important from that perspective.

Proper movement getting the right amount of exercise, getting movement throughout the day. Very important for that human growth hormone to cortisol ratio.

So the answer to the question is does fasting is fasting back to your hormones? No. As long as you have the proper human growth hormone to cortisol ratio, because you're doing many good things that are supporting your your lifestyle and you're keeping your stress and your overall Alo static load down.

Now, if you're overwhelmed with stress, you're overtraining, you're stressed out. You got young kids, you're not sleeping well at night, you've got stress in your relationship, and you don't enjoy your job, and you're feeling pressured at your job.

And then you try to implement fasting that might overwhelm your system. Your thyroid might go down, your sex hormones might go down, you might feel even worse.

So the key is make sure that you're following healthy lifestyle practices, getting all of these things under control. I always say before you start really intermittent fasting, you should make sure that you are prioritizing really good sleep, getting really good quality sleep first, and then the next thing would be then you can start implementing, you know, a tighter fasting window.

Maybe you're doing a maybe you're eating your meals in a 12 hour eating window right now, and you want to compress it down to eight hours so you get more growth hormone release, more fat burning, better insulin suppression, better insulin sensitivity, more autophagy, more cell regeneration, more of these anti-aging benefits.

Well, first thing you're going to do is make sure you're prioritizing good sleep, making sure that you're keeping stress under control. Make sure you got positive self-talk, making sure you're getting some movement the right amount of exercise.

Make sure you're hydrating your body well, making sure you're balancing your blood sugar with your nutrition. And then you can start compressing that eating window.

And that's when that's when it really becomes fun, enjoyable. And it really improves your cellular health, your mitochondrial health, and you get the great anti-aging benefits.

So that is how you have to address this. Fasting can be one of the best things you do for your hormones, as long as it's coupled with the lifestyle strategies that allow for optimal hormone expression.