Dawn-to-Dusk Fasting May Protect Against Cancer

Researchers analyzed blood samples from a small group of people fasting for Ramadan.

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Fasting from sunrise to sunset is associated with shifts in proteins that are protective against cancer, metabolic syndrome and other major health conditions, according to a recent small study.

As described in the Journal of Proteomics, researchers studied 14 healthy people who fasted from dawn to sunset—more than 14 hours—for 30 days for Ramadan. The investigators took blood samples from the participants before they started fasting, at the end of their fourth week of fasting and one week after the end of the 30-day fast.

After analyzing the samples, the investigators found that such intermittent fasting was associated with proteins that protect against cancer, obesity, diabetes, metabolic syndrome, inflammation and a number of neurological disorders, including Alzheimer's disease.

The study authors believe that part of the benefit of fasting was that it essentially reset the circadian clock in the participants. Research in mice has indicated that disrupting the rhythm of the circadian clock is associated with cancer and metabolic syndrome. Intermittent fasting, the animal research indicated, could reset the clock and optimize the functioning of certain proteins that help combat disease.

The authors of the new study caution that their findings remain preliminary and that individuals should not undertake intermittent fasting without consulting with their doctor.

"Our study looked at a small number of people during a set time frame, so lasting effects of these results are not yet known," Ayse Leyla Mindikoglu, MD, MPH, an associate professor of medicine and surgery at Baylor College of Medicine, said in a press release. "There are also other questions about how often someone fasts or how diet might affect the findings."

To read a press release about the study, click here.

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