

# *distinctives:* diet options

we look at two different views on diets



## *opinion 1* battling the bulge

**Zack Millar** shares how he shaped his dieting



**Zack Millar** is *Nucleus* editor and a clinical medical student in Cambridge

Last August, I was tipping the scales with a BMI of 30: obese. I was dreadfully unfit, and any exercise I attempted gave me shin splints and chest tightness. My parents were similarly afflicted and as a family we had undertaken diet after diet to try and rectify the situation, each promising so much and delivering so little.

I finally decided enough was enough and I looked to an online company<sup>1</sup> for help. Their product is simple: a wide variety of high-protein, high-fibre and low-carb foods that keep you feeling full whilst also hugely restricting your calorie intake to 600-800kcal per day. It sounded too good to be true, but I considered it worth a try.

The first few days were fairly miserable, as my body adjusted to ketosis, but after that it was plain sailing, even on so few carbs! In the space of three months, I lost 13kg and dropped two clothes sizes. I took up running and the wonderfully pretentious sport of fencing, and my fitness slowly began to improve as well. By doubling fluid intake (to protect my kidneys) and consuming extra calories for exercise, my super-low-carb diet proved a safe option.

Before starting my diet, it was important to question my motivation. Many people find themselves obsessing over looks, but God is clear about what he values: *'People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'* (1 Samuel 16:7). I felt a different temptation, which

was not so much to idolise my appearance, but rather to see my physique and fitness level as a flaw that needed to be rectified. We are under so much pressure to be perfectly rounded individuals, excelling in everything, and often we get points in portfolios when we succeed! God has no points system, and he knew what he was doing when he made us. *'I praise [God] because I am fearfully and wonderfully made'* (Psalm 139:14).<sup>2</sup>

Is there any imperative to diet, then? If we are focusing on our hearts and striving to be content with God's sovereignty, surely this applies to our physical appearance? We should be content and non-obsessional about our bodies, but we should look after them too. When writing against sexual immorality, Paul reminds the Corinthians that *'your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit'* (1 Corinthians 6:19). He even affirms obliquely to Timothy that *'physical training is of some value'*<sup>3</sup> (but note the second half of the verse) *but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come'* (1 Timothy 4:8). Improvements to our bodies will only last as long as we live on this earth. Transforming our spiritual health will have eternal benefits.

How can we hit the sweet spot of looking after ourselves without obsessing? A good place to start is to keep it objective, perhaps by using a BMI calculator or some other way to set a target weight. Would you be devastated if you gained a kilogram or if your friends failed to notice your transformation? If so, your motivation may have shifted from health to vanity! Keep it all in perspective. I put on a couple of kilograms over Christmas, and I will lose them again, God willing, but the bigger question is: how is my spiritual fitness? ■

REFERENCES

1. [www.exantediet.com](http://www.exantediet.com)
2. Philippa Hanna's song *Raggedy Doll* (or Triple O's rap version) expresses this sentiment wonderfully.
3. Ergo, there is nothing inherently sinful about being a gym bro/girl.

## opinion 2

# the Daniel Fast

Hannah Mensah reviews a different approach



**Hannah Mensah** is a medical student at St George's, University of London

**F**asting is the act of abstaining from food or drink for a period to focus on prayer and seeking God's will. Biblical characters who fasted include Elijah, Moses, David, Daniel, Peter and Jesus himself. Scripture highlights the importance of fasting, and how we develop a more intimate relationship with Christ through it. Fasting is not commanded biblically as such, but seems to be assumed and expected.

The 'Daniel Fast' is based on a modern-day interpretation of verses found in Daniel 1 and 10. *'Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink'* (Daniel 1:12). *'At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over'* (Daniel 10:2-3).

Of course, there is deeper symbolism behind these verses; Daniel's choice in chapter one is a subtle protest against his new ruler and may in part have been explained by observance of Jewish food laws. The fast in Daniel 10 appears to be a clearer example of a fast undertaken to hear from God.

The modern-day 'Daniel Fast' includes eating fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, nuts, seeds, beans and legumes, whilst giving up meat, dairy products, processed foods, and juices.

For the past few years, I have completed a 21-day 'Daniel Fast' once a year to grow spiritually. It is often the highlight of my year, as it is in these times that I feel closest to God. It is a unique experience that allows you to be intentional about seeking God.

Such spiritual gain comes at a cost. It is difficult during the first few days, and when you are doing physical exercise, or mentally taxing work, or study. Sometimes, I find it difficult to keep my focus on God on busier days.

### top tips

Here are some top tips to help you gain as much as you can from any fast.

- Make your fast intentional. Before you start, pray and ask God to reveal ways in which you can grow spiritually.
- Pick three moments each day, where you spend intentional time with God. This will help to keep the focus on seeking God, rather than it being about the food you have given up.
- If doing the 'Daniel Fast', consider increasing your portion size as your calorie intake will decrease substantially.

But the beauty of the fast is that you quickly realise that with the coupling of fasting and prayer, you can more intentionally seek the Holy Spirit's leading, and learn to live with an increased reliance on God.

## Scripture highlights the importance of fasting, and how we develop a more intimate relationship with Christ through it

A sincere desire to seek God allows you to run towards him with a repentant heart and allows him to minister to you. As you become more filled with the Spirit, you realise that you can bear more fruit of the Spirit, that is, *'...love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...'* (Galatians 5:22-23). During the fast, I find that God really reveals himself to me, and I can grow in wisdom and understanding. ■