# How a two-week fast helped me beat diabetes and cancer risk after a family history of illness



It was the year after my mother passed away at the age of 65 when I resolved to take charge of my health. For the first time in my family, she had lived beyond 50, yet she, like my grandmother and great-grandmother, fell victim to cancer far too early. Faced with my own struggles at just 48, I weighed 97kg, had developed type 2 diabetes, and experienced early menopause at 35. The pressures of running a multinational business, managing a household, and caring for my two children, alongside my pets and a crumbling marriage, left me exhausted.

Despite external stability, I was internally battling demons from my past. A fear of failure had permeated every aspect of my life, and neglecting my health only exacerbated my struggles. Growing up, I faced instability; compelled to navigate an unpredictable childhood marked by constant relocation and a lack of nurturing care. Food became my solace during periods of anxiety and sadness, rooted in a childhood fear of starvation.

By the age of 14, I began my journey towards independence, landing my first job and eventually climbing the ranks in the beauty industry—from cleaning in a chemist shop to serving as the global chief executive of reputable brands. Yet, despite my extensive experience in health and beauty, my own health remained in dire straits. I was acutely aware that I had to break the cycle of poor health that haunted the women in my family.

Determined to turn my life around after my mother's death, I began working with a nutritionist and exercising regularly. However, I sought a more radical transformation. I enrolled in a fasting clinic for an intense two-week fast, where I would consume nothing at all. Autophagy—the body's method for recycling and breaking down its components—was a key motivator. This process, vital for immune function and discovered by Nobel Prize winner Yoshinori Ohsumi, accelerates during fasting, activating fat burning and reducing inflammation.

At the fasting retreat in the German Alps, I was taken aback by the psychological shift that came after the initial struggle of the first three days. As the cravings subsided, I entered a state of calm acceptance, allowing my body to reset. Each morning began with a tea made from apple skins, complemented by daily health check-ups. Tasks such as hiking, yoga, and meditation distracted me from thoughts of food, replaced instead by a profound clarity of mind.

Over the course of this fasting journey, I lost nearly half my body weight—down to 69kg—and achieved a dress size of 12, while my diabetes entered remission. This dramatic change was about more than just weight; it was a turning point in my mental wellbeing. Having faced a womb cancer diagnosis two years ago, early detection proved critical to my recovery. I attribute my successful fight against the disease, in part, to the improvements in my health ushered in by fasting.

Ten years later, my transformation continues. My commitment to maintaining a lifestyle free from ultra-processed foods has become central to my existence, as has the routine of weightlifting a couple of times a week and maintaining an enjoyable exercise regimen. I’ve cultivated a healthier relationship with food, steering clear from past destructive habits.

Today, I strive to be a positive health role model for my children, prioritising their wellbeing over indulgent vacations or extravagant dining experiences. Instead of seeking out culinary adventures, I choose health retreats focused on meditation, fasting, and restorative movement. I have learnt to listen to my body, a skill I intend to nurture for life, fostering resilience and wellness not just for myself but for the generations who will follow.

The growing body of research supporting intermittent fasting and its myriad benefits strengthens my resolve. By embracing periods of fasting, people can harness not just weight loss but also improvements in metabolic health and longevity—potentially reducing risks linked to chronic diseases. While some remain sceptical, the increasing popularity of fasting and its celebrated effects on physical and mental health cannot be overlooked.

As I reflect on my transformative journey, it is clear that the path to health can be laden with complexity, but ultimately, it offers the possibility of profound change. I have reclaimed my narrative, embracing wellness fully, and in doing so, I have changed not just my own life, but the legacy I will leave for my children.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-14695089/body-weight-autophagy-diabetes-health.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://time.com/4275710/fasting-diet-5-2-weight-loss/> - This article discusses the growing popularity of intermittent fasting, particularly the 5-2 diet, which involves eating normally for five days and severely restricting calories for two days each week. Scientific studies support its effectiveness in weight loss, with research indicating that fasting can help deplete liver glycogen stores, prompting the body to draw energy from fat reserves. Additionally, intermittent fasting may offer benefits for brain health, potentially reducing risks associated with diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. However, experts advise consulting a doctor before starting fasting, especially for individuals with metabolic diseases, as fasting can have adverse effects like hypoglycemia.
3. <https://time.com/3924922/longevity-cutting-calories/> - This article highlights a study suggesting that periodic fasting or adopting a fasting-mimicking diet (FMD) can slow aging and improve health. Research conducted on yeast, mice, and humans found that occasionally reducing calorie intake can boost metabolism, reduce bone loss, improve cognitive function, lower cancer incidence, and extend longevity. Mice on a four-day low-calorie diet showed significant health improvement, while humans who underwent five-day monthly fasting cycles experienced reduced risk factors linked to aging, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and cancer. The diet involves cutting calorie consumption to 34-54% of normal levels and includes precise amounts of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, and micronutrients, which can activate stem cells and trigger beneficial regenerative effects. However, the diet should be approved and monitored by a physician or dietitian.
4. <https://time.com/6216011/does-fasting-improve-gut-health/> - This article explores the potential benefits and limitations of fasting on gut health. Intermittent fasting includes methods like time-restricted eating, where individuals abstain from caloric intake for 12 or more hours. This approach reflects human evolution's sporadic food availability and could address negative health impacts from constant eating. Research supports claims that intermittent fasting may improve gut microbe diversity, gut barrier function, and immune function. However, there are mixed outcomes, such as apparent benefits from Ramadan-style fasting but worsened symptoms for some individuals with inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). Healthy fasting can increase beneficial gut bacteria like Lachnospiraceae, producing butyrate to reduce inflammation and improve gut barrier function. Other benefits include the migrating motor complex, which cleans the gut between meals, and autophagy, a process for clearing damaged cells. Despite its promise, many questions remain about fasting's utility for treating gut conditions, and further research is needed before definitive health claims can be made.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autophagy> - Autophagy is the natural, conserved degradation of the cell that removes unnecessary or dysfunctional components through a lysosome-dependent regulated mechanism. It allows the orderly degradation and recycling of cellular components. Although initially characterized as a primordial degradation pathway induced to protect against starvation, it has become increasingly clear that autophagy also plays a major role in the homeostasis of non-starved cells. Defects in autophagy have been linked to various human diseases, including neurodegeneration and cancer, and interest in modulating autophagy as a potential treatment for these diseases has grown rapidly. The word 'autophagy' was coined by Belgian biochemist Christian de Duve in 1963 based on his discovery of the functions of lysosome. The identification of autophagy-related genes in yeast in the 1990s allowed researchers to deduce the mechanisms of autophagy, which eventually led to the award of the 2016 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine to Japanese researcher Yoshinori Ohsumi.
6. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intermittent_fasting> - Intermittent fasting is an eating pattern that alternates between periods of fasting and eating. It has been practiced in various forms across different cultures and religions for centuries. Research indicates that intermittent fasting can lead to weight loss, improved metabolic health, and may even extend lifespan. However, it is not recommended to treat cancer in France, the United Kingdom, or the United States, although a few small-scale clinical studies suggest that it may reduce chemotherapy side effects. Periodic fasting may have a minor effect on chronic pain and mood disorders. The article also discusses various methods of intermittent fasting, including the 5:2 diet, alternate-day fasting, and time-restricted eating, and their potential health benefits and risks.
7. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2307.01491> - This study investigates the effects of the Ramadan fasting model (RFM) on nonalcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD) in rats. The researchers found that RFM led to significant weight loss, improved lipid profiles, and reduced liver enzyme levels in rats fed a high-fat diet. Additionally, liver histology showed improvements in rats subjected to RFM compared to those fed a high-fat diet without fasting. The study suggests that RFM can induce positive metabolic changes and improve alterations associated with NAFLD, including weight gain, lipid profile, liver enzymes, and hepatic steatosis.