

Real Health Podcast

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Episode#70: How Intermittent Fasting Saved My Life

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Intro: This is the Real Health Podcast brought to you by Riordan Clinic. Our mission is to bring you the latest information and top experts in functional and integrative medicine to help you make informed decisions on your path to real health.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Well, welcome everyone. It's Dr. Ron Hunninghake, and we're back for another episode of the Real Health Podcast, and I'm excited today because we have one of our own employees, Jasmin Murphy on. Jasmin, welcome to this show.

Jasmin Murphy: Thank you. Thank you.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: So the title of this program is going to be, which will sound a little bit overdramatic, but it's not how Intermittent Fasting Saved my Life or your life, right? Yeah. So you were just telling me a little bit about this, and just to kind of lead into this, at one point you weighed 718 pounds.

Jasmin Murphy: That was my highest recorded weight.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Highest recorded weight. And so how did that, and you really never did have diabetes. No. And you didn't have any other serious, you had lymphedema obviously, that would go along with this, but none of the normal comorbidities, heart disease and things, diabetes. You didn't have any of that.

Jasmin Murphy: None of that.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: So let's just talk a little bit about how this happened to you, and what were some of the steps that led you to intermittent fasting?

Jasmin Murphy: Sure. Yeah. So I struggled with my weight all of my life. Some of it I'm sure is environmental. Some of it was as time has gone on, found out that I had metabolic syndrome and some other things that played into that.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Keep in mind that 70 to 80% of Americans now are dealing with metabolic syndrome, and a lot of them don't even know that they have that. But go ahead.

Jasmin Murphy: And it was a game changer when I found out and what that meant for me. But very long story short, I found myself, I was 25 years old. I was pregnant. I started to have the symptoms of lymphedema. I got put on bedrest, gained 100 pounds with my pregnancy. And most women that find themselves in that position, you have baby, you start to do the things that you need to do to try and lose the weight, and surprise you're pregnant again, and then life happens. So I had my second child. I maintained my weight pretty well through that pregnancy. Oddly enough, she only wanted salad and fruit, so I did pretty well. But after I had her, we had just life happen, downturn the economy, stress, homelessness, layoffs, all of that. And I found myself putting me and my health on the back burner.

Everybody else came before me. I made a lot of decisions that weren't the most beneficial for me and my health. And I found myself one day outside. I had fallen outside of my kid's school, and I couldn't get up, and I was over 718 pounds. There was an older woman that saw and took pity on me and told me to take her place in line. And in that moment, I said to myself, I'm not living. I had just lost two people dear to me, who I knew would've given their life to be back, to raise their kids and to be with their family. And here I had none of the reasons to not be living, but I wasn't.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: So, and really in everyone's story that is struggling with weight and there is a turning point. And would you say that was the turning point?

Jasmin Murphy: Oh, absolutely. I knew that day that something had to change. It wasn't fair to me. It wasn't fair to my children. It wasn't fair to the people that loved me, to the people that were in my life that had lost their lives.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: So you recognize the problem, but then there's always the question, what's the solution? So let's talk a little bit about what was that journey back to where you are today where you're much more functional than you used to be?

Jasmin Murphy: Absolutely. So I've always loved movement. It got really hard at a certain point, so I stopped. I was doing day-to-day things always. But I knew for me the key was to start with the thing that I loved so that I could tackle the things that maybe were a little more challenging with a little more ease. I went to the dojo that my kids took karate at, and I spoke to the owner who I was pretty good friends with. My kids have been going there for years, and I sat down at her desk and I said, I need help. I can't do this anymore. I need help. And so she developed a plan for me to start training with her son. I started training that week and it did not look like what your typical workouts looked like. We had the fold-up gym mats, and he put them out, and I sat on those, and I would do punches and kicks sitting down, and I would stand up for 30 seconds and do some leg movements and sit down for two minutes to recover. And what would've been a 30-minute workout would take an hour because I had to rest. My body just couldn't handle all of that movement gracefully with ease and without pain. But it was a starting point, and I really started to address this and tackle this not as how do I get the weight off, but how do I continue to become stronger than I was the day before?

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: I think that's a really good point because a lot of people, when they have a health problem, they're so focused on the problem that they can't give their attention to the solution. So kind of lead. How did this lead into intermittent fasting for you?

Jasmin Murphy: Yeah, so my trainer at the time, he loved to investigate and learn about new things, and he would always tell me. We found a kinship in that. And so he would always bring me things and say, have you thought about this? Have you heard about this? And one of the things he brought to me was

intermittent fasting. And he said, he called me Jazz, and he said, “Jazz. I've been reading on this intermittent fasting, and here are some of the things that it does.” And as he started to talk to me about some of the foundational principles of intermittent fasting. It made sense to me. It also felt good to me because one of my struggles with food was becoming hyper-fixated on the diet. I never was a breakfast eater, and every dietician, every professional I went to would say, “Oh my gosh, you've got to eat breakfast, and you need to eat six small meals a day.” And that created a hyper-fixation with food for me, and I found myself overeating when I would do that because I'm so focused on now. My natural inclination was to not eat in the morning was to drink

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Water. And it's important for people to know that intermittent fasting is not a diet. There's not a special diet associated with it. It's the timing of your meals and giving your body a period of time where you go into natural ketosis. But before we get too far ahead in the science of it, so what you're saying is you were able to take the fixation away from, “I'm on a diet.” So you were able to just focus on what the good parts of this were. So what were the good parts for you that helped you make this shift into intermittent fasting? You said number one that you never did like breakfast anyway.

Jasmin Murphy: Yeah, no, I love breakfast food, but I didn't like to eat at 7 in the morning. I'm barely awake. Then, let's be honest, my workouts were early in the morning. I would drop my kids off at school. The dojo was two minute drive from the kid's school, but my training was an hour and a half after I dropped them off. So I would go sleep in my car until my trainer showed up. I wasn't trying to eat breakfast. I'm hypoglycemic. And I always felt like for me, when I would eat and then I would at a certain point start to feel sluggish, start to feel lower energy, not higher energy, I didn't want to work out. After that, I started to learn that if I would go in a fasted state, drinking my water, drinking my black coffee, working out, that workout became so much more efficient and effective for me.

Again, like I said, it removed the fixation away from food. It allowed me to, we talk about healthy lifestyle, being about lifestyle. This isn't a short-term diet. It's got to be something that you can do for the rest of your life to maintain it. That felt feasible to me. I wasn't forcing a puzzle piece to fit. I was working with my body's natural rhythms, and it just felt so good. I noticed that my energy was better after my workouts. I could go stronger, faster, longer, harder, and I started to see an immediate change in my body and even when I got sick, which we'll talk about later.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah. Now you mentioned hypoglycemia. So some people who hear and have heard about intermittent fasting, they say, “Well, I'm prone to hypoglycemia.” Did you have to, in the process of beginning the intermittent fasting program, did you have to start gradually or were you able to jump right into it?

Jasmin Murphy: We started somewhat gradually. We started gradually and implemented a lot of things that some people like staunch, IF people are like, oh, that's kind of breaking your fast. But it worked for me. So I started with making sure that I had the water with electrolytes in it. And right before my workout, I was drinking a black coffee. Some people say that breaks your fast, some people say it doesn't. For me, it helped; it worked. I learned how to break my fast in the best way possible for me and my body. So one of the things or the tips that we used was about an hour after my workout, I would break my fast with an apple and then wait another hour before I ate, and then I would have a protein meal. And that helped me to gradually come out of that. I eventually got to the point where I was able to do a drive fast. I was able to do different fasting windows and do longer fasts and shorter fasts and mix it up. But yeah.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: So kind of giving the audience an idea, so what time would you normally have your supper the day before, and then what time, so how many hours would it be that you went through the fasting before you would eat in the early stages of it?

Jasmin Murphy: So the early stages, my last meal was usually around 8:30 or 9, and a lot of that was based on my kids' schedule, and I was breaking my fast at about 10 to 11 the following day.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Okay, so you were getting about a 12- to 13-hour fast is not a bad way for people to get started because obviously intermittent fasting can go longer than that. And did that happen to you? Did you start to lengthen out your fast period?

Jasmin Murphy: I did. I naturally started to lengthen it. There became a point where I could go longer and longer without feeling like I needed to eat. And initially there is that internal fear that, "Oh, I'm hypoglycemic. I'm going to have to eat. My blood sugar is going to get really low. This is not going to be good for me." I noticed the exact opposite happened, and so then I was able to move into at my, without doing the 24-hour fast or the drive fast, I was able to naturally move into a 24 fast. So 20 hours fasted, four hour eating window, and that felt really good for me.

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Dr. Ron Hunninghake: So what period of time was that a couple months or was it ...

Jasmin Murphy: Took about two and a half months. Two and a half to three months. Right.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: And so just for the sake of the audience, there's going to be so much individual molding of this program in order to make it work. But I think one of the big things is not to expect instantaneous results, and maybe there'll be some trial and error in the process of it. But as time goes on, what you're saying is that it got easier, and it started to feel more natural, which is keep in mind that our ancestors did not eat three meals a day very often. It depended upon what food they could hunt. It depended upon work schedules, the availability of food. And nowadays we've got food everywhere and people, as soon as you say, "I can't have this," then you want it. But interesting. And I'm an intermittent faster myself. I've lost five belt sizes in probably the last year or so since I've been doing it without a struggle at all. But what was your experience as time went on? Did you feel like you had to work at this or did it just start to feel better and better?

Jasmin Murphy: No, it started to feel better and better. And I started much like you, so congratulations on the five belt sizes. I started to notice really drastic rapid changes with ease. One of them actually was with my lymphedema and with the inflammation and the swelling. And then I was able to start to pay more attention to some of my body's natural rhythms, like when I would hit a plateau, how long that plateau would last. So now I can tell you, I know my body and I can say, "Oh, okay, I haven't seen a change in two weeks. I know that in two and a half weeks, all of a sudden there's going to be a quick change because that's how my body adapted to."

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: This is definitely not dieting. I always tell people diet is a four letter word, don't go there. But this book that, I don't know if it can be seen by the audience, but it's "The Intermittent

Fasting Revolution, the Science of Optimizing Health and Enhancing Performance.” Dr. Mark Matson is one of the key researchers, and what he's basically saying now is that this is producing all kinds of really good health benefits, whereas we think of dieting as maybe creating problems in people, and it's not sustainable. There's this, so many diets out there that are not sustainable. But part of the sustainability of this is that there are, now I can list 10 health benefits of intermittent fasting. And so I'm going to go ahead and list them one at a time, and you kind of give me your feedback. So the first one was enhanced energy production. Did you notice that?

Jasmin Murphy: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And to not be a morning person and to work out in the morning to be able to have a really good workout. And I think I had my best results when I was working out in a fasted state.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah, that's great. Number two, cellular repair and regeneration. Did you notice that you had a better sense of wellbeing and that your body was starting to get healthy again?

Jasmin Murphy: Yes, and real quick, interesting story, and one of my turning points, especially in having conversations with friends and family that maybe weren't necessarily on board with the fasting. At a certain point I had a bout with being septic. Septic. And so I was in the hospital and I fasted what most people don't realize, and I had to point this out with me fasting, I was able to recover more quickly. And I had to explain, when you think about it, if you're in the hospital and you have a serious infection or illness, the first thing they do is they put you on NPO or no foods, no food. They put you on a saline IV to keep you hydrated, but you're in a fasted state.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: And that's actually number nine of these 10 health benefits enhanced immune functioning. Fasting has been found to support immune system functioning by promoting the regeneration of immune cells and reducing inflammation in your body. So that's amazing that that worked out as good as it did. Of course, the big one is number three here, improved insulin sensitivity because the essence of metabolic syndrome is loss of insulin sensitivity or what's called you go into a state of insulin resistance, and then the tendency is for the blood sugar to go up and for more and more insulin to be on board. Now, you never did have a problem, though, with diabetes or elevated blood sugar. No. So yours was just a pure type of the, probably relating to the lymphedema and probably stress. It just sounds like you were in a huge, huge state of stress, and that may be one of the major reasons why people get disruption of their metabolism. But a big part of stress is this feeling of loss of control. And I'm sensing that when you got into intermittent fasting, you started to regain control over a number of things in your life. Tell me a little bit about that.

Jasmin Murphy: Yeah. Well, I mean, like I said, it allowed me to control what felt good and natural to me. First of all, with my eating patterns, you spend so much time as a person on a larger body, having everybody tell you what you should and shouldn't do. So being able to do something that felt good for you, that made sense for you, it felt amazing. The level of clarity that I had, it's hard to explain to somebody that hasn't fasted, but you have a moment where all of a sudden you see everything more clearly, things feel more clear. And when you have that moment, you're making better decisions overall. You feel like you're functioning in a higher state. That in and of itself gave me that feeling of having more control because I felt like I was able to make better decisions, and not just with eating and with exercising, but just in life in general. Right.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: I've read about fasting. There's a number of different ways to fast besides intermittent fasting, but one of the sentiments that's expressed in just about all the books I've ever read is that in increased mental clarity. And part of that may be that the brain can actually work better in ketosis. And so when you are intermittent fasting, your body does go into ketosis. It starts burning fat.

And ketones are interesting in that our ancestors, if there was no food, they had to get mentally sharper and more acutely aware of their environment and making better decisions in order to survive. So in a sense, intermittent fasting puts you into a higher level of survival mode.

Jasmin Murphy: Without the stress.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Without the stress, without the stress, fantastic. Reduced inflammation. So I'm assuming that pain levels went down as a result of this too.

Jasmin Murphy: Absolutely. I've had Osgood Slaughter. I was diagnosed with Osgood Slaughter at eight at the time that I was diagnosed. We were told you grow out of it, but I still always had ligament and joint issues. And as I continued this journey, I noticed even at that higher weight, a lot of those joint pains, ligament pains, they disappeared.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah. Yeah. We're back. This number six here is brain health. And this has to do with mitochondrial functioning. And so one of the astounding sets of information I got just a couple months ago is I used to think that a neuron in our brain has 100,000 mitochondria, which that's amazing to even think of that. Well, that's wrong. They now know that the neurons in the brain have 1 million to 2 million mitochondria. And one of the things that intermittent fasting helps the most is mitochondrial functioning. So your brain functions better, your heart functions better, your muscles function better, your liver functions better because all of those are high mitochondrial engine need and for those organs to work properly. So enhanced cognitive functioning and protection against neurodegenerative diseases, who knows, had this gone on, the depression would've gotten worse, and you may have started to slip into a kind of Alzheimer's-type state, which can happen to people. So you certainly aren't in that state now.

Jasmin Murphy: Not at all.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: That's wonderful. The other thing is increased longevity. There's a lot of research now using intermittent fasting. People are living longer and feeling better. I remember hearing about that probably 30 or 40 years ago, that if they took lab animals and fasted them a certain amount of time, they lived about twice as long as the ones that weren't fasting. So that's pretty impressive. And then number 10 here is cancer prevention. Well, obviously you didn't get to that stage, and you don't want to, but we're seeing more and more people who are dealing with cancer, and part of it, I think is this metabolic syndrome is setting people up for increased risk of cancer.

Jasmin Murphy: I can speak to that just a little bit though, because every woman, my, we have a history of ovarian and cervical cancer. In my family, there are, up to my generation, no woman has made it past the age of 40 without having a total hysterectomy. Myself and one other have.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah. Great.

Jasmin Murphy: And I attribute it to some of those lifestyle changes that I made.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Well, Jasmin, I'm just thrilled that you could be on the program today, and you're an inspiration to those people that are going to listen in, especially the ones that have been told, you're stuck. There's nothing we can do to help you. This is something that you did completely within yourself.

Well, you had some initial help there at the beginning, some encouragement. But once you got started, it's like momentum took over and it's, you're still on the journey now.

Jasmin Murphy: Yeah.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Well, thank you again for being on the program, and I hope everyone, even someone who's not dealing with a weight issue, keep in mind that, as I mentioned earlier, 70 to 80% of Americans, and actually Western Society is dealing with this metabolic syndrome, and it just sneaks up on people. There are people that are normal weight, but they still have the metabolic syndrome. So I really think intermittent fasting is not a bad idea for anyone. Though you may want to get some help, get some coaching, and take your time getting into it. But don't be discouraged if it doesn't work right away, just because you've been doing this how long now?

Jasmin Murphy: Since 2017? 2016?

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Yeah. Yeah. So you've lost over 300 pounds, is that what I heard?

Jasmin Murphy: 342 pounds.

Dr. Ron Hunninghake: Wow. Yeah. Folks, it can be done. For all of you that said you tried and it didn't work, you weren't using the right method. So thanks again for being on our program, and I wish everyone the best of luck in giving this a little bit of a try, or at least doing some research on it, and just even what one to two days a week can make a big difference.

Jasmin Murphy: Thank you.

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