

Fasting could be a quick route to health benefits

EXTREMIST magician David Blaine is courting controversy going without food for 44 days. He's not alone, as fasting is common, but is it beneficial? Health reporter, JULIE CUSH reports



EXTREME – magician David Blaine is on a 44-day fast, suspended over the Thames in a glass box with only water to drink

THE longest Rumana Ramzan has gone without food is three days. But after a few hours of fasting on nothing but water, her lethargy disappears and she feels a boundless energy.

The 36-year-old complementary health practitioner has been fasting for years, not for religious reasons but for health benefits.

Currently stuntman David Blaine is starving himself suspended in a glass box over the River Thames. And while Rumana believes he is taking fasting to extremes, she is all for regular well-monitored abstinence from food.

But she stresses the practice is absolutely not suitable for pregnant women, diabetics, those with eating disorders and the very sick or convalescing.

She said: "Fasting is one of the most natural things in the world and in fact the body does it naturally.

"When we are ill the body rejects food and the energy that we use to digest food is saved and diverted elsewhere to help with healing.

"I certainly wouldn't advocate going without food for 44 days. Regular fasting is something that needs to be built up to and the body has to be prepared. But there are so many health benefits."

Fasters believe that having a break from food gives the body a chance to get rid of toxins which have built up in the organs.

They also believe it stimulates growth hormones which slow down ageing, help repair tissue and even dissolve cysts.

Rumana, who is a member of the Institute of Complementary Medicines and Association of Master Herbalists, regularly recommends clients try short fasts to tackle health problems such as allergies and digestive disorders. She said: "I would never recommend someone to do a fast



HEALTH BENEFITS – Rumana Ramzan says that sensible fasting can rid the body of toxins and slow the ageing process

without preparing the body. On the days leading up to a fast, which can last for a few days to a week, processed food has to go - replaced by raw food, fruit, vegetables and lots of water.

"When I go on a week-long fast I make sure I start it at the weekend when I can relax because there are side effects such as headaches, tiredness and aching joints for the first few days. Toxins will also come out of the skin's pores.

"To stop hunger pangs I drink juice like carrot juice, beetroot or a non-citrus fruit. Orange is too acidic.

"I drink every half hour and don't feel hungry. By the end of the week my skin feels clear and I am free of bloating. I am a very healthy eater - lots of fruit and vegetables - but just like everyone else I am exposed to pollution and like to purify my body."

Dietician Moira Hill, who is based at Newcastle's Royal Victoria, believes people who detoxify and

fast need to ask themselves why they do it.

She explained: "If it is to get rid of toxins they should examine their diet and incorporate more fruit, vegetables and water.

"Many people say they feel the benefits and who are we to say they shouldn't do it? But I would say to be sensible about it."

Bil Sedgwick, 42, of Neasham, Darlington, is an animation designer. He decided to try a three-day fast out of curiosity. He only drank apple juice and ate psyllium husks to bulk out his stomach. Bil said: "For the first day I felt terrible and unsettled.

"But by the second day I felt light and energetic. After the fast I also felt a bit virtuous and as if I'd had a spring clean. I also had a rash on my leg that disappeared."

Rumana is based in Darlington, but also runs clinics at the Elmfield Road practice in Gosforth once a month. Call (01325) 722 803.

Discipline brings rewards

HEALTHY Muslims are expected to fast from sunrise to sunset during the month of Ramadan as part of their religion.

They cannot eat or drink anything during the daylight hours, but once the sun sets families pray and eat a large meal together.

Muslims celebrate Ramadan because they believe that the Qur'an, Islam's final holy book was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed during this month. And as a reward for sacrificing food they believe minor sins are forgiven.

Strain of our diet

THE digestive organs: The liver can become strained with the effort of breaking down massive amounts of animal protein and fat as well as drugs and poisons. Of all the vital organs in the body, the one that suffers the most abuse from modern dietary habits is the colon which flushes out digestive waste from the body.

To accompany an all-juice five to seven day fast, many people take a herbal cleansing supplement which helps rid the colon of waste products.