The Fasting Way Quick Guide

Orthodox fasting, made simple. The whole book on two pages.

BY JEREMY ROBINSON · A COACH, NOT A PRIEST

Spiritual first
The fast is not a diet. It is prayer and repentance with the body joining in.

Your priest guides
How strictly you fast is set with your priest or spiritual father. Not by you alone.

Three go together
Fast, pray, and give. Whatever you save by eating simply, give away.

1 What's in, what's out — the general rule

FOOD	STRICT DAY	OIL & WINE DAY	FISH DAY	FAST-FREE
Meat & poultry	NO	NO	NO	YES
Dairy & eggs	NO	NO	NO	YES
Fish (with a backbone)	NO	NO	YES	YES
Oil (olive oil)	VARIES	YES	YES	YES
Wine	NO	YES	YES	YES
Shellfish (shrimp, clams…)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Beans, veg, fruit, grains	YES	YES	YES	YES

Texts name wine; other drinks, ask your priest. Oil varies by jurisdiction; some pastors treat olive-oil abstinence as monastic, not for laypeople, so follow your priest. Shellfish was traditionally simple, cheap food (shrimp, clams). Feasts can relax a Wed or Fri. Follow your parish calendar.

WHEN WE FAST

- **Wed & Fri**, most weeks
- **Great Lent**, ~7 weeks before Pascha
- **Apostles' Fast**, to June 28
- **Dormition Fast**, Aug 1–14
- **Nativity Fast**, Nov 15–Dec 24
- **Fast-free weeks** after Christmas, Pascha & Pentecost

New Calendar dates. Old Calendar: Dormition and Nativity fasts 13 days later; Lent starts the same day (shared Paschalion). The Apostles' Fast varies in length and can vanish on the New Calendar.

2 Build the plate — use it at every meal



- **½ vegetables**: greens, peppers, soup
- **¼ protein**: beans, lentils, tofu, shellfish
- **¼ smart starch**: potatoes, oats, brown rice, fruit
- **+ a little fat** on oil days: olive oil, avocado, nuts

PROTEIN SWAPS

Chicken, beef	→	Lentils, chickpeas, beans
Eggs	→	Tofu scramble
Fish	→	Shrimp, mussels, clams
Cheese, yogurt	→	Hummus, soy yogurt
Milk	→	Unsweetened soy milk
Whey shake	→	Pea or soy protein powder

3 Watch out for the bread-and-pasta trap

Meat and cheese go out, bread and pasta rush in. Refined starch digests quickly and doesn't keep you full for long, so you're hungry again sooner and reaching for more.

✓ Do this
- Pair every starch with protein and fiber
- Make beans and lentils the center of the meal
- Cook a pot of beans and a big soup each week

✕ Skip this
- Bread, pasta, and crackers as the whole meal
- Grazing on chips and pretzels all afternoon
- Assuming “vegan” on a label means wholesome

4 The 5 gap-fillers *can help, never required*

Food first. Supplements are never the starting point and never part of the fast itself. Ask your doctor first, and get bloodwork so you aren't guessing. If you're unsure whether supplements are fine on fast days, ask your priest.

B12
The big one. Found almost only in animal foods. Clams and mussels help. Ask your doctor, especially if over 50 or on metformin.

Vitamin D
Lent and Nativity fall in darker months. A blood test shows where you stand. Most D3 is from lanolin; D2 or lichen D3 is plant-based.

Algae omega-3
EPA and DHA without fish. Many softgels are gelatin; choose plant capsules.

Electrolytes
Headaches or cramps? A little iodized salt at home; greens, beans, potatoes. Magnesium can help.

Iron
Only if bloodwork shows a need. Too much can harm. Pair plant iron with vitamin C, like lemon on lentils.

No product is part of the fast. If you use a supplement, choose with your doctor and keep it simple.

5 Mindset quick rules

1. **Fast the tongue**
   No gossip, no complaining (even about the fast). Fewer words when you're hungry.
2. **Slipped? Turn back. Next meal. Keep going.**
   No guilt spiral, no skipping meals to "make up for it." Repentance is a change of heart, not a penalty.
3. **Fast in secret**
   No announcing, no sighing, no watching other people's plates (Matthew 6:16–18).
4. **Your priest guides strictness**
   A gentler rule given in obedience is a real fast, not a lesser one.
5. **Let hunger call you to pray**
   Each hunger pang is a cue to pray: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."
6. **Stack it and stage it**
   Pray right after your morning coffee. Keep fruit, beans, and soup where you'll see them first.

6 A mini strict day *no meat, dairy, eggs, fish, oil, or wine*

BREAKFAST	Tofu scramble cooked in a splash of broth with onion, spinach, and turmeric. Salsa on top, fruit on the side.
LUNCH	Big bowl of lentil soup with lemon. Green salad with vinegar and herbs.
SNACK	A cup of edamame with a pinch of iodized salt and a glass of water.
DINNER	Shrimp (if your rule permits) and vegetable stir-fry, steam-fried in broth with ginger, garlic, and soy sauce, over a modest scoop of brown rice.

TALK WITH YOUR DOCTOR AND YOUR PRIEST

See your doctor before changing how you eat or adding supplements, especially if you take **diabetes or blood pressure medication**, take blood thinners, are **pregnant or nursing**, or have a **history of disordered eating**. On insulin or a sulfonylurea? Ask your doctor before eating fewer meals or keeping the morning Communion fast. Feel faint or unwell? Stop and eat. Talk with your priest about how strictly to fast. I write as a coach, not a priest, and I don't speak for the Church; if you belong to another tradition, follow your own pastor and calendar. This sheet is general education and encouragement, not medical advice, and it makes no promises about weight loss or any health result.