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Orthodox Christian monastic dietary behavior and intermittent fasting

Orthodox Christian monastic dietary behavior is based on the general dietary principles and commandments of the Holy Bible and the Christian Patristic Tradition. Its main purpose is to cover the nutritional needs of monks and nuns, to allow them to gain mastery over themselves, to protect their body from the passions of the flesh and soul, and finally, to draw into themselves the life-giving grace of the Triune God. The monastic dietary behavior is renowned for facilitating longevity. It is characterized mainly by temperance, austerity and steadiness, a variety of pure, organic foods, and abstinence from certain foods for 180–200 days per year, in compliance with Orthodox Christian fasting rules.¹ This fasting was established by the Orthodox Christian Church to serve the following golden rule: “Give the body what the need wants –its requirements– and not what pleasure wants.” The yearly Orthodox Christian monastery diet includes (a) minimal dietary intake of saturated fatty acids (SFAs) and trans fatty acids (TFAs), primarily through limiting (or eliminating) meat, milk and dairy products; (b) a moderate dietary intake of animal protein, mainly from seafood (fish and shellfish); (c) a moderate intake of wine; and (d) a high intake of plant protein, carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins, trace elements, antioxidant substances, monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFAs) and polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFAs) gained from wholegrain cereals, fruit, vegetables, legumes, seafood, nuts, tahini, and olive oil.¹

Key words

Dietary behavior
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Intermittent fasting (IF) refers to regular periods of fasting with very limited or no caloric intake. It commonly consists of a daily fast for 16 hours (16:8 model), a 24-hour fast on alternate days, or a fast 2 days per week on non-consecutive days (5:2 model), schemes which show promise for the treatment of obesity.² We can conclude, by analysis of the Orthodox Christian monastic dietary behavior, that IF is a variant or imitation of it. During the ecclesiastical year, there are four principal fasting periods: (i) 40 days preceding Christmas, (ii) 48 days preceding Easter (Lent), (iii) a variable period from 8–42 days (depending on the date of Easter), known as the Apostles’ Fast, and (iv) 15 days in August (preceding the Dormition or Assumption of the Mother of God). In addition, Orthodox Christian monks also fast on three, non-consecutive days of the week (Monday, Wednesday and Friday) with dry eating, barring some exceptions if these days coincide, for example, with Despotic or Marian feast days or the feast days of certain Saints. Dry eating means to drink water and eat bread or rusks, fresh or dried plant foods and consume no oil, once daily. During the other four days of the week the monks eat normally, usually excluding meat, twice a day (at approximately 8–9 in the morning and 5–6 in the afternoon), with some exceptions, such as if the days coincide with certain fasting periods in which dry eating is provided. It is important to note that the monks of the Orthodox Christian Church eat all together at the *Trapeza* (dining table), while the consumption of food away from the *Trapeza* is characterized as *lathrofagia* (wrongful eating) and is punished. The monks in Orthodox monasteries have applied the weekly 4:3 IF model and the daily 15:9 or 16:8 IF model to a certain degree for centuries. In the same way, if we consider that Monday is an optional fasting day for Orthodox Christian laymen, then we can assume that they too apply the 5:2 IF model to some extent. Although, in contrast to IF, the monks’ dietary behavior is not intended for weight loss, it could be used for this purpose by obese individuals whose diet is characterized by a high intake of carbohydrates and animal fat.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ**Μοναστική διαιτητική/διατροφική συμπεριφορά και διαλειμματική νηστεία**

Η. ΜΑΖΟΚΟΠΑΚΗΣ

*Παθολογική Κλινική, Ναυτικό Νοσοκομείο Κρήτης, Σούδα, Χανιά, Κρήτη**Αρχεία Ελληνικής Ιατρικής 2021, 38(1):135–136***Λέξεις ευρετηρίου:** Διαιτητική συμπεριφορά, Διαλειμματική νηστεία, Μοναχοί, Ορθόδοξη Χριστιανική Εκκλησία**References**

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