

The Many Faces of Fasting

for Regulating Blood Sugar & Balancing Hormones



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This edition was published on February 25, 2020 in the United States of America by Dr. Ritamarie Loscalzo.

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It's quite common for people with blood sugar imbalances and/or excess weight to be told to eat frequent, small meals throughout the day. The idea is that eating every couple of hours keeps your blood sugar level steady and prevents the severe hunger that accompanies dips in blood glucose. In theory, when you eat frequent small meals, you never overeat.

Studying biochemistry and recent hormone research has led me to conclude that, for most people, this is actually the worst way to eat for blood sugar balance and weight loss and can actually be damaging to your health.

Understanding Why Frequent Eating is Faulty Advice

Hunger, satiation and blood sugar balance are all under the hormonal control of what I like to call “the survival hormones.”

Eating between meals alters powerful hormonal signals, interferes with the mechanism that burns fat as fuel, clogs liver metabolism and sends calories right to fat stores.

Insulin is a hormone secreted by your

pancreas in response to eating. It doesn't matter what you eat; insulin will be secreted. The composition of your meal determines just how much insulin is secreted. The more carbohydrates in the meal, the more insulin that's required to keep your blood sugar regulated.

The most basic concept that you need to understand is that whenever insulin levels rise, fat-burning stops.

The Hormone Relationship Between Insulin and Fat-burning

In order to understand why an increase in insulin affects your fat-burning ability, let's start by understanding what should happen with hormones in a perfectly balanced body.

1. You eat, insulin levels rise, and glucose is moved into your cells to be burned for energy.
2. Insulin triggers leptin levels to rise (leptin is the hormone your fat cells secrete after a meal) which signals the brain to turn off your appetite and tells your pancreas to stop making insulin.
3. Growth hormone is released. Growth hormone, in the early post-meal stages, triggers the build up of muscle protein, which is enhanced by the presence of insulin.
4. About three hours later, glucose levels return to normal and insulin should be back down to where it was before your meal.
5. Your liver begins to kick into high gear, mobilizing glycogen into blood sugar.



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6. You begin to burn fats that are in your blood for energy, thus putting to good use fats that would otherwise go into storage as unwanted fat!
 7. More than four hours after eating, growth hormone begins to mobilize fat for fuel. However, this only happens when insulin levels are very low.
 8. If your blood sugar begins to drop too much, glucagon is secreted to mobilize stored calories and all is well until your next meal.

Typically, **insulin levels peak at around 30 minutes after you eat and return to normal at about 3 hours.** Then leptin gets to go to work to trigger fat-burning.

In the ideal situation, insulin sends 60% of the fuel in a meal to the liver for “quick access” storage as glycogen and triggers the uptake of the remaining 40% of the glucose and amino acids into muscle cells and cells of your vital organs, which use the glucose for fuel and the amino acids for growth and repair.

However, if you’re eating every 2 – 3 hours, as some experts advise, your insulin levels never go back to normal and you never go into fat-burning mode.

Eating small, frequent meals has never been proven to accelerate weight loss despite what many experts claim. In fact, there are many more studies that suggest that less frequent eating promotes more rapid weight reduction.

The period in between meals should be an opportunity for your liver to exercise and clear out glycogen. If you snack between meals or eat a meal too soon after the previous one, your liver’s exercise routine is blocked, thus setting you up for obesity, insulin resistance and diabetes. When your liver doesn’t get enough exercise, it can synthesize excessive cholesterol, leading to elevated blood lipids even if the food you eat contains no cholesterol.

If your muscles are well-toned, they’ll use up fat between meals much faster than untrained muscles. In fact, muscle tone can provide you with the energy that you need to keep going all day long.

When you eat too soon after a previous meal, insulin levels rise too soon, turning off your liver’s exercise routine, **inhibiting fat-burning, and causing calories to be stored rather than burned.** Plus, your energy will plummet and you may suffer from food cravings.

If you consistently eat meals too close together, you’ll cause your pancreas to fatigue, your insulin receptors to become resistant, and you’ll struggle with your weight.

Feeling weak or hungry sooner than 5-6 hours after eating a meal can be due to:

- Not eating enough at the previous meal
- Eating too many carbohydrates at the previous meal
- Impaired digestion and absorption
- Being out of shape
- Weak adrenals
- A sluggish and congested liver
- Exhaustion
- Diabetes
- Insulin resistance
- Leptin resistance



Understanding the Process of Becoming Insulin Resistant

When you eat frequent, small meals throughout the day, insulin levels stay elevated all day, triggering fat storage and leading to insulin resistance. What this means is that your cells no longer hear the cry of insulin to allow fuel in for energy. As a result, more fat storage occurs and you feel tired all the time.

If everything is functioning properly, then after a meal there is no need to eat again for 5 or 6 hours.

The hormone glucagon is in charge of keeping your blood sugar steady between meals. Glucagon signals the liver to turn the stored glycogen back into glucose as your sugar levels begin to drop between meals. It also triggers a process called “gluconeogenesis” which triggers the creation of glucose from stored protein and fat.

In a healthy person, insulin and glucagon are good siblings and take turns.

There are enough carbohydrates stored in your liver in the form of glycogen to last 24 hours, unless you

are engaging in extreme exercise like marathons or triathlons, so when things are functioning well, there are no blood sugar dips between meals.

Snacking between meals causes insulin to rise again (before it’s returned to normal), suppresses glucagon, and raises leptin levels unnaturally, leading to a condition called leptin resistance wherein the brain and pancreas no longer hear the signal from leptin to turn off appetite and reduce insulin secretion.

Constantly elevated levels of insulin from snacking between meals, deliberately planning meals close together, or eating foods high in sugar and simple carbohydrates, causes hyperinsulinemia, a condition of too much insulin in your blood. This condition leads to insulin resistance as the cells can no longer take in so much sugar and “close their ears” to the insulin signal.

Insulin resistance leads to weight gain, especially around the middle, stiffening of your arteries, elevated blood pressure, systemic inflammation, and eventually to cardiovascular disease like heart attack and stroke.

The Dangers of Insulin Resistance

Once you understand how the hormones are supposed to work together, you can understand why eating frequent, small meals is not just a bad idea for weight loss, it's outright dangerous.

In addition, eating too frequently can cause your liver to get congested. Remember, ideally, the liver takes 60% of the fuel from each meal and stores it as readily available fuel. When your liver becomes insulin resistant, those calories eaten head directly for fat storage as your liver can no longer accept them without the aid of insulin. Further, eating too often clogs your liver's fuel storage system, resulting in fatigue and impaired detoxification mechanisms.

Eating too often also triggers your liver to produce excess VLDL, the most dangerous form of cholesterol. As a result, snacking between meals causes cholesterol to rise, even more than eating cholesterol rich foods.

This whole process, a guaranteed “chain that makes you gain,” becomes a vicious, vitality-sabotaging cycle:

1. When your liver gets clogged and develops insulin resistance, it's hard to go 5-6 hours between meals or to sleep through the night because your liver can no longer produce a steady stream of glucose – it needs to come from outside.
2. When there is insulin resistance in your liver, your liver turns calories into fat at an increased rate, leading to excess weight.
3. The constant high levels of insulin due to eating too frequently result in excess leptin and eventually leptin resistance, which further confuses your liver and turns down the production of glucagon, the hormone that keeps your blood sugar steady between meals by stimulating the release of stored fuel.
4. To make matters even worse, the lining of your blood vessels and your nerve cells do not become insulin resistant and are subject to the stiffening effect of excess blood sugar and insulin.
5. The net result is stiffening of your arteries and hardening of your nerves, leading to cardiovascular disease and mental decline.



Breaking the “Gain Chain”: Solutions to Restore Your Hormones

As you can see, biochemistry supports eating meals less frequently rather than more frequently. The ideal gap appears to be 5-6 hours between meals with a minimum of 12 hours between dinner and breakfast.

Dr. Satchidananda (Satchin) Panda, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Regulatory Biology Laboratory, points out that the activity of fat-burning genes is highest when you haven't eaten for a while. Thus, extending time between meals, and not eating after dinner, actually turns on liver genes that enhance your ability to lose weight or maintain a healthy weight.

If you think you can't space your meals because you have hypoglycemia, think again.

Most people who claim they are hypoglycemic (and attribute feeling uncomfortable if they skip meals) really don't experience true hypoglycemia. Many of the people I've worked with have discovered that their blood sugar is actually elevated when they experience the out-of-balance feelings they were misled into believing were symptoms of low blood sugar.

I recommend that you get a blood glucose meter and check your blood sugar between meals. We teach the best way to do this in our Sweet Spot Solution Program.

Many people do experience what's known as “reactive hypoglycemia,” where their blood sugar plummets after being high (triggering too much insulin secretion), then going too low because of the over-clearance of sugar from the blood due to high levels of insulin.

When hunger comes on too soon, you can stave it off with water flavored with essential oils or lemonade made with water, lemons, and a pinch of stevia if desired.

Make friends with hunger. It can be your friend. Hunger indicates that your body is in fat-burning mode. The hormone ghrelin, secreted by your stomach, triggers hunger but also triggers the release of growth hormone, your fat-burning friend.

If you learn to tolerate a little hunger and gradually increase the space between meals, you'll be rewarded by weight reduction, hormone balance and improved blood lipids.

So, now that you understand the dangers of eating frequent, small meals and how they affect your hormone balance, what's the solution?





Timing Your Meals to Optimize Hormones is Essential

It's important to remember that fat-burning is impossible when insulin levels are elevated. It takes about 3 hours after a meal for insulin levels to return to baseline, even if you just eat a small snack.

Until then, fat-burning is impossible.

If you have weight to drop, are fatigued, concerned about family history of heart disease, cancer or diabetes, make use of that critical fat-burning time.

At 3 hours after a meal, do some exercise, drink some water with lemon juice. and do whatever it takes to hold off the next meal

for as long as you comfortably can.

It may only be 3 hours and 15 minutes to start, then 3 hours and 30 minutes, and then eventually, in 15 – 30 minute increments, you'll be able to gradually move your meal spacing to at least 5 – 6 hours.

Appropriate meal spacing becomes more important for people after the age of 30 or following a period of intense training. In such cases, continued frequent eating will cause a gradual increase in percent body fat. It may show up either as added weight or as loss of muscle in proportion to fat.

Fasting and Intermittent Fasting for Fat Loss and Reduction of Insulin Resistance

Healing can only happen when insulin levels are low.

Fat-burning also happens only when insulin is low.

As you stretch the time between meals and change the foods you eat to foods that require less insulin, you'll see the pounds melt away, your energy rise, and your mental clarity improve. And maybe, even more importantly, you'll protect yourself from the top 3 killer diseases in our modern world - heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

So what if we took this to the extreme and eliminated all food for a period of time?

How would that affect your weight and insulin resistance? What about energy, strength and endurance?

It turns out that short fasts actually accelerate fat-burning and reverse insulin resistance. Many of our Sweet Spot members have this experience because the Sweet Spot diet is designed to **regulate insulin levels, and aid in the repair and re-sensitization of insulin receptors .**

After 2 short fasts, one of our members, diabetic for many years and on medication, got off her medication and dropped her fasting glucose from the low 200's on medication to low to mid 100's off medication. As a result of continuing the healing on The Sweet Spot Solution, her blood sugar continued to drop. Now, her fasting glucose readings are now in the 80's.



The Benefits of Fasting for Health and Longevity

When I did my first fast over 35 years ago, very few people were talking about it as a tool for restoring health. Now **the benefits of taking a break from eating are widely accepted**, and have been suggested in medical research in humans and other animals. They include:

- Lowered insulin and glucose, and increased insulin sensitivity
- Decreased inflammation
- Stimulation of autophagy - where your body eats up damaged cells
- Improved blood pressure, triglycerides and cholesterol
- Improved brain function
- Reversal of the effects of aging
- Increased butyrate, carnitine and branched-chain amino acids
- Enhanced gene expression and protein synthesis
- Improved antioxidant defense
- And MUCH more!

Conditions that respond well to fasting are high blood pressure, diabetes, autoimmune conditions, inflammatory conditions, inflammatory bowel disease, ulcers, and even many types of cancer.

One of the myths about fasting, even for as little as 12-24 hours, is that it decreases metabolic rate and can lead to wasting of lean muscle mass. In reality, the studies say otherwise and support the overall benefits of fasting to your long term health.

Endurance athletes actually burn more body fat while fasting than when fed, according to a study the European Journal of Applied Physiology and Occupational Physiology published in 1987.

While the downside of long-term fasts can potentially be slower metabolism and the breakdown of lean muscle tissue, the benefits often out weigh the risks. And short fasts of 24 – 72 hours actually may increase fat-burning and metabolic rate.

Short fasts can also slow down aging, build muscle mass, tone your skin, and even reverse some chronic health problems. A one day per week fast has been shown to boost your fat metabolism by optimizing the critical hormones involved in storing and using fat.

Fasting is the simplest method your body has for maintaining caloric balance. Healing and repair, as well as fat-burning, happens during the fasting state. Unfortunately, many people spend 16 or more hours a day in the fed state.

Short Fasts and the Myth of Going Into “Starvation Mode”

There is a large and growing body of research that shows increased fat-burning during fasting, with no impact on metabolic rate, endurance, or strength.

- In a study conducted at the University of Nottingham (Nottingham, England), researchers found that when they made 29 men and women fast for 3 days, their metabolic rate did not change.
- A study at the Pennington Biomedical Research Center found that men and women who fasted every other day for a period of 22 days experienced no decrease in their resting metabolic rate.
- Another study published in the Journal of the American College of Nutrition found that the resting metabolic rate of people who were on a diet of 800 calories a day for 12 weeks AND completed resistance exercise did not change. Apparently fasting and low calorie diets don't cause the loss of muscle mass if you are doing resistance training.
- The British Nutrition Journal published studies that found no change in the metabolic rate of men and women between the ages of 25 and 65 who skipped breakfast, or people who ate two meals a day compared to seven meals per day.

Based on these and hundreds of other studies that have been performed on metabolic rate, calorie restriction, and fasting, it appears that your metabolism is much more closely tied to your lean body mass than anything else.

Fasting and Exercise

Short fasts or periods of caloric restriction do not seem to have a negative effect on muscle mass or strength as long as you are exercising.

- Research published in the European Journal of Applied Physiology and Occupational Physiology found that a three-day fast has no negative effects on how strongly your muscles can contract, your ability to do short-term high intensity exercises, or your ability to exercise at moderate intensity for a long duration.
- In a study comparing runners who'd fasted for 23 hours to runners who were fed, it took almost 30 minutes of exercise for the insulin levels of runners in the fed state to be the same as those who were fasting BEFORE they even started their run.
- Fasting and exercising have a dramatic effect on maintaining blood glucose levels. Contrary to popular belief, fasting does not negatively impair mental alertness or high level thinking. In fact, those patients of mine who've fasted for 24 hours or longer report increased mental clarity.
- In 2008, the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition published a study that found that university students performed equally well on a series of intellectual tests after having compared eating a normal meal, skipping one meal, skipping two meals, or going 24 hours without food.
- A study published in the European Journal of Applied Physiology found that fasting can actually make you more sensitive to the anabolic effects of protein intake and exercise on muscle growth. Intermittent fasting may actually allow for better muscle growth.



Taking short breaks from eating allows you to retrain your relationship with food, get comfortable with having an empty stomach, notice when you are full, and subsequently eat less when you do eat.

Short-term fasting decreases leptin levels and can help restore the sensitivity of your hypothalamus and pancreas to the full signal of leptin. Fasting also increases growth hormone (GH) so that fat loss remains high during periods of fasting.

- Halberg N, et al. published findings in the Journal of Applied Physiology showing that fasting for as little as 24-hours drastically reduces your insulin levels, thus allowing fat-burning to be optimized, and helping to restore insulin sensitivity.
- This was confirmed by research published in the American Journal of Physiology done on people who fasted for 72 hours. Plasma insulin levels dropped to less than half of its initial levels. 70% of this reduction happened during the first 24 hours.

Amazingly, **a 24-hour fast can have a more dramatic impact on reducing insulin than low carbohydrate diets alone.** If you want to bring your insulin levels down quickly, short-term fasting appears to be the most effective way. Intermittent fasting (fasting 1 or two days a week, for 24 hours) appears to be a very valuable strategy for reversing insulin resistance, burning fat, and improving the results of The Sweet Spot Solution program.

Fasting once or twice a week allows your insulin levels to become very low and alternate with periods of normal levels. This gives your insulin receptors a needed rest, allows your blood vessels to heal from the over exposure to insulin, and allows your blood sugar regulating system to return to balance much more rapidly.

On top of the positive effects of short-term fasting on bringing insulin and blood glucose levels down, research has shown that short-term fasting can result in a six-fold increase in growth hormone.

Growth hormone also plays a big role in keeping your metabolism elevated. Eating and insulin secretion prevent the release of growth hormone. Therefore, metabolism is positively affected by short-term fasting.

- According to a study in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism, growth hormone causes more fat loss in the fasted state than in the fed state; therefore, providing more evidence that intermittent fasting is a boon to insulin sensitivity and fat-burning.
- The journal Aging Cell in 2010 published a study that showed that fasting, not just caloric restriction, was needed to significantly increase growth hormone. The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology Metabolism confirms that exercise results in a greater increase of growth hormone than fasting alone.

People who use intermittent fasting as a weight loss method lose more weight in a 10-week period than people on a very low calorie diet and they maintain their weight loss longer.

Intermittent fasting can be used as a very effective way to maintain optimal insulin and blood glucose levels, in addition to an excellent weight maintenance strategy.

If fasting twice a week helps you to reduce your weight, then perhaps fasting once a week will help you maintain it. It will also keep your insulin levels lower and growth hormone higher.

Intermittent Fasting Strategies

- **Time Restricted Eating:** Eat all of your meals within an 8-hour window, i.e. breakfast at 10, lunch at 2, and dinner at 6.
- **Early Time Restricted Eating:** Eat breakfast and lunch within an 8-hour period, then skip dinner.
- **Late Time Restricted Eating:** Skip breakfast, then eat lunch and dinner within an 8-hour period.
- **Breakfast to breakfast 24-hour fast:** Eat breakfast on day 1, skip lunch and dinner, and have breakfast an hour later on the second day (24 hours).
- **Lunch to lunch 24-hour fast:** Eat lunch on day 1, then skip dinner and breakfast the next day. Eat lunch on day 2 an hour later than on day 1 (24 hours).
- **Dinner to dinner 24-hour fast:** Eat an early dinner on day 1, then skip breakfast and lunch the next day. Eat dinner on day 2 an hour later than on day 1 (24 hours).
- **Breakfast to lunch 31 hour fast:** Eat breakfast on day 1, skip lunch and dinner, then skip breakfast the next day and eat at lunch on day 2.
- **Breakfast to dinner 36 hour fast:** Eat breakfast on day 1, skip lunch and dinner, skip breakfast and lunch on day 2 and eat at dinner on day 2.
- **Dinner to Breakfast 36 hour fast:** Eat dinner on day 1, skip all meals on day 2, then eat breakfast on day 3.

As you can see, there are many ways to get started on incorporating intermittent fasting into your daily life.





Fasting Mimicking Strategies

While the benefits of extended fasts - 3 days to even as long as 30 days - are numerous, It's **not recommended to do longer fasts on your own**. You need to be supervised by a qualified healthcare professional experienced in fasting, especially if you are on medication or experiencing serious health challenges.

As a result, not many people get to experience the advantages. Plus, most people are scared to fast for even 24 hours, let alone longer, although the popularity of intermittent fasting over the past few years has changed that for many.

So, when I heard about the work of an Italian biologist and researcher, Dr Valter Longo, I got excited.

Longo set out to create a diet that could mimic the effects of water fasting, while providing nutrition so that people could continue their daily routine and not feel deprived.

From his research was born what he called the *“Fasting Mimicking Diet.”*

He produced a meal kit of packaged plant-based foods that provide the precise nutrient balance he found to be effective in his research.

The low-calorie, relatively high-fat, low-carb content of the meals causes your body to generate energy from non-carbohydrate sources after your glycogen stores are depleted. This process is called gluconeogenesis, and it allows you to **burn extra fat around your hips, thighs, or belly instead of craving sugars and starches**.

The downsides of using the kit are:

1. It's expensive - \$249 for 5 days of meals
2. There is no fresh food
3. Some of the packaged soups and bars contain foods that don't suit my body, and many of the people I work with, like honey and rice flour.

So, I created a whole foods version of the fasting mimicking diet that I'm calling [***Fasting while Feasting***](#), that includes everything you need to do your own 5-day whole-foods, plant-based diet that will give you lots of the advantages of fasting.

The advantages of this food plan are:

- It costs less than eating your regular menu since you're eating less food.
- The food is fresh and therefore the nutrient density is higher.
- There is a lot of flexibility for you to adapt for food sensitivities, cultural preferences and blood sugar balancing needs.



The 5-day plan consists of high-quality foods that provide specific ratios of macronutrients, micronutrients and calories that have been shown to provide the benefits of fasting without the limitations of a water fast.

Benefits of food plans that mimic fasting include:

- Weight and belly fat loss
- Lower blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol
- Decreased markers of inflammation
- Decrease in insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1), a marker for cancer
- Increase in stem cell production, a marker for regeneration of cells

This 5-day plan is something you can repeat once every month or two for best results, especially if you have excess body fat to eliminate and/or health challenges you'd like to resolve.

Some people see dramatic results in just a few days, and for others, doing this once a month for a few months or even up to a year is required.

Conclusion - How to Benefit from The Many Faces of Fasting

Fasting is an excellent strategy for improving overall health and hormone balance. The benefits have been clearly and repeatedly demonstrated.

Meal spacing is a controversial topic. The popular belief that eating small, frequent meals is best for maintaining blood sugar balance and optimal weight is not supported by the research or the biochemistry.

When you eat small frequent meals, your body is in a constant mode of elevated insulin. Under high insulin conditions, growth hormone is inhibited and fat-burning is turned off. Frequent eating leads to leptin resistance, insulin resistance, and excess weight. Based on the biochemistry, the spacing between meals that works best is 5-6 hours.

Longer periods of time in the fasting state provide even more benefits including lower insulin and glucose levels, higher growth hormone levels, reduction of insulin resistance and leptin resistance, and increased metabolic rate.

Intermittent fasting is an extreme form of meal spacing. Fasting for 24 hours once or twice a week can accelerate your progress towards a lean, strong body, balanced blood sugar and vibrant health.

Here are your options for getting the many benefits of fasting. Some will work for you even if you can't go for a day or more without food.

- **Meal Spacing** - ideally, your meals should be no closer than 4-6 hours apart on a daily basis. This may be where to start for you, and you may need to progress slowly to extending your meals before trying longer fasts.
- **"Fasting While Feasting"** - a 5-day meal plan that mimics the benefits of fasting while eating nutritious, delicious and filling meals.
- **Intermittent Fasting** - going from 12 - 36 hours without food one or more times a week. See list of options in previous section
- **Short to medium length fasts** - water only for 2 - 7 days. This can be repeated once every month, every quarter, or once a year. If you are on medication or diagnosed with any serious health conditions, be sure to do this under the supervision of a qualified health professional who can monitor your vitals and medication.
- **Extended Fasting** - fasting for 7 days or more - up to a month. My longest was 28 days. This can be done once only, or repeated every year or two. While some people can do this at home, with supervision, many do better by checking into a residential fasting clinic.

Pick an option to start with, give it a try, and see how it works for you.



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About Dr. Ritamarie Loscalzo

MS, DC, CCN, DACBN

Dr. Ritamarie Loscalzo is passionately committed to transforming our current broken disease-focused system into a true health care system where all practitioners are skilled at finding the root causes of health challenges and using ancient healing wisdom married with modern scientific research to restore balance.

As the founder of the Institute of Nutritional Endocrinology, Dr. Ritamarie specializes in empowering health and nutrition practitioners to identify and reverse the root causes of health issues by using the science of functional assessments and the wisdom of nature to restore balance to hormones, which control every system in the human body.

Students and graduates, as well as colleagues, refer to the Institute of Nutritional Endocrinology as the “Harvard of online functional medicine training.”

Dr. Ritamarie is a licensed Doctor of Chiropractic with Certifications in Acupuncture, Nutrition, Herbal Medicine, and HeartMath®. She’s also certified as a living foods chef, instructor, and coach.

A best-selling author, speaker, and internationally recognized nutrition and functional health authority with over 30 years of clinical experience, Dr. Ritamarie offers online courses, long-distance coaching and counseling, and deeply empowering and informative live events.

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