

How to cope with someone on the 5:2 Diet



Caitlin Moran: On the 5:2 Diet? Call me on a food day David Bebbler

[Caitlin Moran](#)

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‘The peak of hunger is between 2-5pm, when Fasters become actively evil. Like demons’

At this point in the summer of 2013, there is nothing most urban Westerners need more than advice on how to cope with a friend, colleague, loved one or fellow lift-user who is on the 5:2 Diet.

For those who don't know what the 5:2 is, it is a diet wherein the dieter eats perfectly normally for five days of the week – then spends the remaining two days on a very restricted diet, of no more than 500 calories for women and 600 for men. The 5:2 is also referred to as “intermittent fasting”, which gives it a pleasingly religious/medieval air – the subconscious suggestion being that the dieter will end up not only more slender, but also wiser, calmer and closer to God.

Current proponents of the diet are bogglingly varied and are said to include Benedict Cumberbatch (“It's the only way to slim down into Sherlock”), Sir Mervyn King, Beyoncé and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, and the book, *The Fast Diet*, has now sold more than 250,000 copies in the UK.

So, yes – the 5:2 is all around you. There is no escape. Indeed, you are almost certainly going to spend some time today with someone who is following it. Here is my advice for you, when that interaction should happen.

1) Establish, as soon as possible – as if it were an emergency – if they are on a “Fast Day” or not. This is key information you will need to know right up front, before you say or do anything. I cannot stress how vital it is that you discover this.

Thankfully, it's very easy to find out if someone is on a Fast Day – because anyone on a Fast Day will tend to say, “I'm on a Fast Day,” in a small, tense voice within 30 seconds of meeting you. They will then look at you as if expecting you to respond with something that expresses great sympathy – “Oh, no! A Fast Day! You must

be very, very hungry!” – but also admiration: “Eating only 500 calories for a whole day is an amazing thing for you to be doing, Sue! Go you!”

Bear in mind that even if you do give this perfect greeting – rather than the far more likely nonplussed “Oh” – it’s important for you to realise that, ultimately, nothing can go well between you and this fasting person today. This is someone functioning on 40 per cent of their brain capacity, at best – disabled, as they are, by extreme hunger and constant thoughts of how much they would like some delicious frangible buttery toast.

They hate you, because you are a person who can have some toast. And if you go so far as to eat some toast in front of them, they will turn away in a poorly suppressed murderous rage – probably to go and stab a picture of you eating some toast, which they are about to draw, in the aching hours of free time unfilled, today, with lovely breakfasts, dinners, lunches and snacks.

2) Although any point in the day with someone Fasting is basically going to be a tense and unpleasant pain in the arse for you, there is a particular danger time: between 2-5pm on a Fast Day. This is usually the peak of the hunger – and, therefore, the peak of the danger for you. During this spike in hunger, brain capacity appears to drop as low as 9 per cent, and Fasters become actively evil. Like demons.

Personally, were I Prime Minister, I would make it so people you were talking to on the phone had to say at the start of the conversation, “It’s 4.30pm and I’m on a Fast Day”, then you could simply put the phone down before they inexplicably refuse to process your claim, send an engineer to mend your boiler or authorise an emergency crew to come and cut you, bleeding, out of the wreckage of your car.

NB: in all likelihood, the person who crashed into your car was someone else on a Fast Day, who’d just driven past a Burger King and was blind with tears of hunger.

3) Weakness. Yes – often the rage suddenly turns to sorrow, accompanied by massive physical weakness. You see fully grown women struggling to open a can of Diet Coke, or big men trying to turn stiff door handles before collapsing, shouting, “My wrists suddenly feel as limp and powerless as Cheestrings. Oh GOD! HELP ME! I THINK MY BODY HAS STARTED TO CONSUME ITSELF FROM WITHIN!” Operating a photocopier is beyond these people, at this point – you will have to do it for them.

You will essentially become one of those Helping Hands monkeys that disabled people have – but for a 38-year-old accountant from Hackney.

4) Smugness. And then, on “normal days”, this: “I’ve lost three-quarters of a stone!” they will say, folding fistfuls of chips into their mouths. And you’ll be all like, “Hang on – you only did that because we didn’t kill you on the days you were behaving like a Roid Rage Colin from *The Secret Garden*! This is society’s achievement, not yours!”

But they just sit there, being a size 10, not listening.