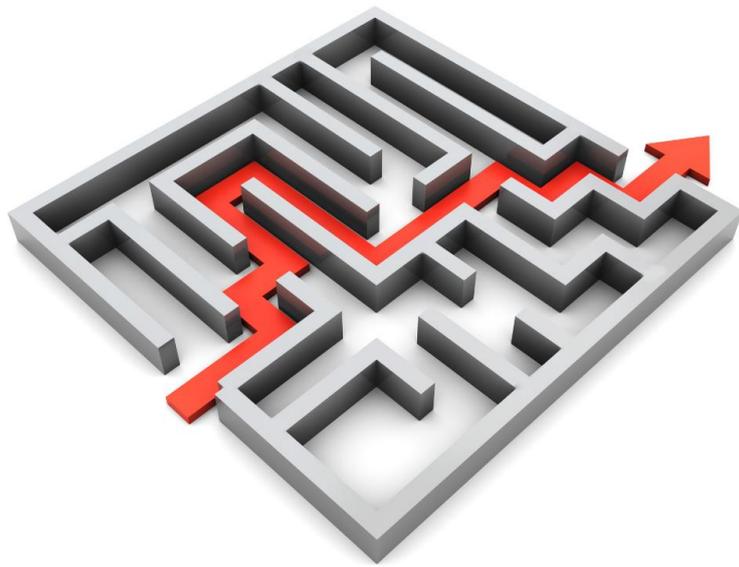


The
**Fasting
Game**



Starter Guide

Harriet Morris

Introduction - Stairway To Heaven

Turning fasting or intermittent fasting into a fun and sustainable game that will give you your health back starts with The Piano Staircase.



The Piano Staircase was a 2009 Volkswagen initiative. The aim of the project was to see if they could get people to choose the stairs over the escalator by turning a flight of stairs into a piano. When people stepped on a stair, it played a note!

Result: **a 66% increase in people taking the stairs** instead of the escalator.

This is a brilliant example of using gamification (just a techy term for making anything more game-like) to help people improve really pressing issues in their lives - in this case, increasing their physical activity.

In this player's manual, we are going to look at how we can do the same for fasting (either intermittent or 24hr+ fasts).

Five Ways To Gamify Your Fasts

Let's look at some innovative ways that The Piano Staircase used gamification to motivate people to take the stairs – and how you can use these principles to make fasting or intermittent fasting much easier and sustainable.

Fasting Game Strategy 1: The 90% Rule

What sort of musical masterpieces do you think the people climbing The Piano Staircase produced?

I'll bet they didn't exactly give Lennon and McCartney, Beethoven or Led Zeppelin a run for their money.

But it hardly mattered.

Games do not demand perfection. In fact, a perfect score often means the game is over.

Boring, right?

Perfectionism spoils games. Of course we want to keep improving, keep optimising our performance on the football field, on the chess board or doing Jiu Jitsu – THAT is the point. You don't need to be as fast as Usain Bolt to win your local sports club 100m race. You don't need to beat the world Rubik's Cube champion to feel awesome at solving this puzzle.

90% beats perfection, whatever game you are excelling at.

What I have learnt that nobody else in the health space seems to have understood is that 90% also beats perfection when it comes to managing food – and indeed fasting.

Let's understand this by meeting Alicia. I recently coached her through a 48-hour fast.

I spoke to her during the first day, and asked how things were going.

"Well, I have to admit that I forgot I was fasting this morning, and accidentally put some food in my mouth," she replied.

My response: *"No big deal."*

In the last eight years coaching binge eaters, I have come across variations on what Alicia said. Mistakes confessionals. Clients who sabotage a successful three-week sugar-free run, and think it's time to throw the towel in.

This is a bit like accidentally spilling a drop of water onto someone's shoe as you walk into a job interview and assuming you've made such a fool of yourself that you now stand zero chance of success.

Let's be clear: **the mistake you have made is not the problem here.**

The real problem is *the guilt energy of the perceived failure*. This is the vehicle that transports you from one mouthful of food to actual self-sabotage, a full-on binge.

A drop of water on a show is a mistake. You apologise and move on.

One mouthful of food is a mistake. You shrug your shoulders, say *"No biggie"* and move on.

How would it have helped Alicia for me to upbraid her for one paltry, insignificant mouthful of food?

Let's see how the *No big deal* impacted Alicia's 48 hour fast.

She later told me:

I liked the way you made light of my tiny slip-up popping food in my mouth! "No big deal" was exactly what is needed there, so that I could just go on without feeling like I'd failed and might as well quit. I ended the fast at 65 hours, no hunger at all the last day.

Alicia overshot her original goal by 17 hours AND felt great about the experience.

The secret weapon hidden in my *No big deal* is imperfectionism. It's the idea that 90% is the new 100%.

How 90% Can Be Better Than 100%

The diet and wellness industries have been thoroughly polluted by perfectionism. Drastic before and after pictures. Social-media highlight reels of your guru's life, minus the stories of the times they ended their fast early, or ate dessert at a birthday meal, or felt so depressed they had to stay in bed all morning and weep.

All this aspiration fodder is very activating for the millions steeped in food misery and body hatred. It's also massively profitable for the peddlers of perfectionism. But here's the thing: if you have any kind of Inner Food Rebel, perfectionism doesn't work.

If we were to analyse Alicia's fast with then logical mind of Mr Spock, we would say she was between 90% and 99% successful at her fast.

But Mr Spock is not what we need when we make mistakes.

You need to develop neutrality around them as an antidote to the toxic, inappropriate guilt and shame that the perfectionism of the health industries have brainwashed everyone into accepting as normal.

When you embrace 90% over perfectionism, you get to still be as effective at work as you need to be.

You get to still have a social life.

The Fasting Hit List (part 1)

Conditions That Fasting & Intermittent fasting can help

**ADHD ~ Alzheimer's ~ Anxiety ~ Auto-immune disease
Brain fog ~ Cancer ~ Cognitive impairment ~ Diabetes (type II)**

Fasting Game Strategy 2: Change The Pressure

One reason that the piano staircase is so successful is lack of pressure. Now, you may feel that pressure is a good thing. I agree - under certain circumstances. There is a lot to discuss about this, but for now all I ask is that you remain open to the possibility that **the kind of pressure you are putting on yourself is wrong**. Its very nature needs to change.

Games exist in a container outside the rest of our lives. There are several benefits to this that are clearly visible in the piano staircase - benefits we can leverage for fasting.

First of all, the piano staircase invites you to do nothing more than take a really small amount of exercise: one flight of stairs. This is not like the commitment of signing up for a 12-month gym membership.

Now, this may seem a trivial point. What difference does climbing one flight of stairs make to your health?

My answer is this: if it is fun, and you don't mind doing it again and again, you can see how the accumulative health benefits of doing something ordinary (climbing one flight of stairs) can lead to extraordinary results in your fitness.

Now let's see how this low commitment can be used with fasting.

The Power of No Commitment

I started intermittent fasting in 2021. Although I had successfully recovered from compulsive eating and had been coaching binge eaters and sugar addicts for the previous seven years, lockdown and all of its challenges had led me to fall into depression and revert to using food to manage my life. I was The Eating Coach, with over 200,000 downloads of my podcast under my belt - but I felt like a leader of an Alcoholics Anonymous group who secretly swigs back vodka during the tea break at meetings.

I knew something had to change.

I decided to try intermittent fasting. The main issue on that day in February 2021 was my great fear of being hungry. So I said to myself: *Let's just try it for one day.*

One single, solitary day. Nothing more.

Can you see how helpful that framing was for demolishing my resistance? For helping me take action in spite of my lack of self-belief?



That low commitment led to incredible things.

I've managed my previously debilitating mobility issues better than I ever could have thought, to the extent that I I've gone from limping everywhere to running upstairs now (well, sometimes anyway!).

I've lost weight and I know I've started walking away from type II diabetes. I've gone from having long-term IBS to **digestion that's better than it has ever been** in my entire life.

The impact on **my mental focus, depression and general well-being** has been off the charts, something that I could never have predicted.

I have managed to achieve all this without struggle. That's not to say it's been a 100% smooth ride. But what I can tell you is this:

The more I've done fasting and intermittent fasting, the easier it's become.

I am now in a place where I can do a fast of at least 72 hours with zero trepidation. It's normal for me

The hunger I was terrified of is a non-issue now. I wish I'd have known what a shapeshifter hunger is. I wish I'd have known about the ghrelin drop (where after a certain number of hours fasting your inner caveman conveniently makes hunger disappear)

Fasting is now as normal for me as the idea of just popping down the shops is for most people.

Now compare that to the narrative that most people internalise about intermittent and extended fasting. That it must be hard. That there are a set of protocols that you must slavishly obey. That you have to be perfectionist about it. All this is complete nonsense.

The Fasting Game Strategy 3:

Immediate Feedback

When you empower people by allowing them to easily play instruments, you make the simple activity of walking more fun and engaging

This is what Yu-Kai Chou says about The Piano Staircase in his excellent book *Actionable Gamification*. He highlights the importance of immediate feedback - not only is it motivating - **it's empowering**.

Most games give you constant feedback about how well you are playing.

Look at these two questions:

Q1: *Am I any good at this massively difficult skill called fasting?*

Q2: *Can I just do intermittent fasting for today?*

Each question invites completely different feedback. It's going to take you a really, really long time to find out if you're any good at fasting when you think of it in huge all-encompassing terms (Q2).

However, when you ask the experimental question *how can I make fasting easier for the next 24 hours?* you invite much more useful, much more motivating feedback. Bringing down the scope of the challenge (which we spoke about in the previous section on lowering pressure) invites better feedback - more *motivating* feedback.

The Fasting Hit List (part 3)

Insulin resistance ~ Joint Pain ~ Mental health issues

Metabolic syndrome ~ Mobility Issues ~ Mood swings

The Fasting Game Strategy 4:

The Hero's Journey



The Hospital For Sick Children in Toronto had a big problem. They needed to discover which cancer treatments and medications worked best and how to minimise the pain of chemotherapy in their young patients. For this, they needed daily pain reports from the kids themselves. The obstacle was that the children and teens were often too tired and lethargic from the treatments to provide these reports consistently - and without consistency, their feedback was useless.

The solution? Why, a game of course.

Pain Squad is an app that any patient at the hospital can use to deliver their daily reports. The game element is that when they open the app for the first time, they find out they have joined Pain Squad, a police force to keep pain in its place. As Rookies they get reminders to record their levels of pain. Reporting is easy - they use a slider.

To keep them coming back to the app, there are motivating video clips recorded by characters in two of Canada's top police TV series. There are even opportunities to progress up the career ladder to sergeant and so on.

How awesome is that? Pain Squad with its gamified app, has transformed how often the young patients report their pain. Not only can the medical staff give them the best help possible, but the patients have ownership and a sense of agency in their own healthcare.

I'm sure you can see how inspirational this is - but there is also a hidden gold for you in the story of Pain Squad.

I would bet that the reason that kids love pain squad so much is the career progression i.e. role-playing. I bet they are tired of people seeing them as victims, and equally fed up not being able to go out and live life as their friends do. How awesome for them to be able escape into a world where they have so much more power than in their real lives.

The lesson in Pain Squad for you is leveraging The Hero's Journey.

If you've never heard of The Hero's Journey, you've certainly experienced it every time you go to the cinema, or watch Netflix.

This is an ancient story structure that is thousands of years old. It just so happens to be the plot structure for most Hollywood movies.

Fasting gets you to the heart of what it is to live your life in a powerful way. It strikes me that it's not just seriously ill kids, but you and I, who can make use of this story when it comes to health challenges.

In The Hero's Journey, the main character has a problem. They have to go on some kind of journey (either internal or external) and in doing so, **they meet numerous obstacles.** In the vast majority of cases, they solve the original problem, but here's the thing: in doing so, **they gain some new strength of character** that enables them to live more powerfully.

Problem – obstacles – character strength. That is the hero's journey in four words.

To illustrate, let's take a famous story which became a hugely popular movie trilogy as example of the hero's journey: **Lord of The Rings**

Problem: The young Hobbit Frodo has to take an evil ring to Mount Doom and destroy it in order to save Middle Earth

Obstacles: Gollum, the Ring Wraiths, Orcs, Saroman, Frodo's own lack of experience and naivety, the eye of Sauron, the harsh terrain of Mordor etc

Character Strengths Gained: courage, intuition, navigating uncertainty, accepting the need to leave The Shire, embracing loneliness, asking for help and working with allies and becoming a leader.

Many people have heard of the hero's journey, but what is not very well known is the fact that **the hero who is often badly equipped for the task at hand**. Who would have thought a naive and inexperienced Hobbit could save the whole of Middle Earth?

Donald Miller, in his book *Hero On A Mission* talks about how heroes are actually *characterised* by self-doubt.

You may have guessed by now that I want you to turn fasting and intermittent fasting into your own hero's journey. Isn't it wonderful that **self-doubt is not only ok, but a core personality trait of any hero**.



Your Turn To Play

Instructions For The Fasting Game

I hope that you are excited to start playing The Fasting Game.

Just as in the world of games and sports, pick whichever option appeals most to you below:

Game No.1

Use my first intermittent fasting experiment as the inspiration for your own experiment. Not necessarily the same one. The most important question to ask is this:

When it comes to fasting, what is the best next step for me?

A great rule of thumb here is *What makes you feel intrepid?*

To me, **intrepid** is a mix of fear and excitement. You're uncertain, but your curiosity is getting the better of your fear. This is excellent news!

Your best next step may be a 16 hour intermittent fast. It may be to extend what you are already doing by 20%. It may be to extend a 24 hour fast to 36 hours. It may be to experiment with shifting your fasting window. It may be to change up what you eat during the fed state (non-fasting windows).

To leverage the benefit of immediate feedback you also need to ask:

What am I measuring in this experiment? (eg Am I suited to IF in the first or second half of the day? Will I really explode with hunger if I don't eat for the next 14 hours? How challenging is extending my fast by 20%?)

Notice that **the one thing I do NOT want you to measure is how good you are at fasting**. That is a bit like asking a five-year-old who has just had their first reading lesson to memorise a passage from *War and Peace*.

We are all born with the potential to fast *and find it easy* in the same way most of us have the innate potential to read and write. This does not mean that we need to try to achieve the fasting equivalent of reading Tolstoy this month!

Game No. 2

The second fasting game you can play is to reframe fasting as a Hero's Journey. This is not something I can give detailed instructions for here, but some great questions to get going are:

#1 Which characters from film or literature do I resonate with?

#2 How can I use their challenges as inspiration for using fasting to get my health back?

#3 Can I start seeing the obstacle to fasting as having hidden benefits? What might they be?

The Fasting Game Strategy 5:

Get Some Help

The Fasting Game is inspirational, I hope you'll agree.

If you are feeling stuck or have any questions, then I have some excellent news for you. To thank you for sticking with me to the end of this starter guide, I would like to invite you to a free 20-minute session with me to give you some clarity on how to gamify fasting or intermittent fasting for you.

Book your session here:

<https://hmorris.as.me/20>

Cheers now!



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