

## **FASTING AND PHYSIOLOGY**

But enough theory and theology! This talk is supposed to be about practical things. Let us assume that everyone here believes in and tries to follow the spiritual path which is offered to us by Byzantine Christianity, and that we all know that this path necessarily includes the discipline of the body, a small part of which is the discipline of that sack of flesh called the stomach. So, what do we know about this organ? All too often people come to me and say that they cannot fast because they need protein. When I ask them questions and try to figure out why they think that they need more protein than most other Christians who observe the fast, it turns out that these people rarely have a good idea of how much protein their body really needs, or which foods contain protein and how much, or what else they may need besides protein. In most cases, these people simply want that hotdog, they want that hamburger, and they want that cheese sandwich, and that is the only reason they say that they need protein. So let us take a closer look at our bodies' real needs. This is not a college course on human physiology, so we will keep things very simple. When it comes to food, our bodies basically need three things: carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. Also vitamins and minerals, of course, but people usually do not complain that they do not get enough vitamins during a fast—even if they really do not get enough—but that is for a different reason, which has nothing to do with fasting. A varied diet which is plentiful in such foods as whole grains, raw green vegetables, legumes, nuts, seeds, and fresh fruit should provide enough vitamins, calcium, iron, and other necessary elements. The amount of carbohydrates, protein, and fat that a person needs depends on the person's age, gender and lifestyle. But before we get into the exact amounts, let us first very briefly discuss what these nutrients do for us.