



Intermittent Fasting: A Detailed Guide for Beginners

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Forward

This may come as good news to some of you: we don't need to eat three meals a day! As a resident in training, it was not uncommon for me to skip breakfast or lunch. I often developed a migraine and intense cravings later in the day - and often gave in to sweeter foods. Going from unhealthy to healthier required me to be sure that I did not skip a meal and eat the less wholesome foods that were readily available in the nurse break areas on each floor of the hospital. Eating three meals a day kept me from taking those chances and worked for me. I therefore made it an important reference point when I was providing recommendations to patients.

However, it makes perfect sense why intermittent fasting works: after a meal our body stores glucose in the liver in the form of glycogen which is slowly released by a hormone (glucagon) to provide a steady source of energy (triacylglycerol) for the body's needs during the fasting state. Let's define this as the state in between meals, whether short or long. After several hours, the shift for the source of energy comes from adipose tissues. As our body goes through a period of fasting, there is a dynamic communication with the body and the adipose stores, i.e. this tissue is meant to be actively used in periods of fasting. Some of us have been able to save a lot more of it (by higher sugar intake foods requiring insulin to metabolize it, including shifting it into adipose tissues), and they never come around to rebalancing it through fasting.

I learned about the benefits of fasting more recently. It requires some preparation but is a great way to build discipline, get to know your challenges, and shift to a fat-burning ketosis state. In this article, Tiffany Joy Yamut nicely summarizes an introduction to intermittent fasting. I hope you find it useful in your health journey.

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Your Health Forum

Intermittent Fasting: A Detailed Guide for Beginners

By Tiffany Joy Yamut, RN

Gone are the days when people relied only on books and commercials for health information. With easy access to the internet, you can "google" the latest trends to achieve [weight loss](#), improve your overall health, or avoid disease.

One of the popular health trends surprisingly beneficial to your body, which you may already have

heard of, is intermittent fasting. It isn't focused on what you eat, but rather **when** you eat!

My experience with intermittent fasting started in December 2018 when I made my first attempt to lose weight. For years, I struggled with intense carb and sugar cravings until I read how going without food for hours, strategically, could heal me.

I have to be honest: If this is your first time fasting, you're going to experience intense hunger, headaches, and other uncomfortable symptoms. But if you stick with it long enough, you're going to reap the benefits.

This article explains the concept of intermittent fasting, from what it is to how you can succeed. Read until the end.

What Is Intermittent Fasting?

Intermittent fasting (IF) is an eating method where a person switches between eating and fasting for hours. For many people who think they need to continually fill their stomachs with food to avoid starvation, IF can seem absurd.

Here's what's interesting:

Mark P. Mattson, adjunct professor of neuroscience at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, studied IF for 15 years. He found out that the human body has evolved to go without food for hours — even days. He also mentioned that it takes 10-12 hours to use up the liver's calories before the body burns through its stored fat for energy. At this point, fat loss starts to occur.

The good news is, there are many ways to do IF, depending on your schedule, personal preference, or level of comfort. We'll get to that in a while. First, let's explore the advantages of IF.

The Benefits of Intermittent Fasting

Several studies on human and animal subjects have shown the positive effects of IF on body composition, blood glucose, and more. These benefits might convince you to give it a try:

1. **Decreases body fat**

A review showed that overweight and obese subjects who restricted calories intermittently achieved

more significant weight loss (4-8%) and fat mass loss (11-16%) than their counterparts who restricted calories daily (5-8%, 10-20%, respectively).

1. Maintains muscle mass

Are you a bodybuilder or fitness enthusiast? Eight studies showed that IF increases fat loss when combined with resistance training while maintaining lean body mass.

1. Controls blood glucose levels

Those who are at risk for Diabetes will benefit from IF through regulated blood glucose levels. Fasting makes a person more sensitive to insulin, a hormone that allows glucose to enter the cells.

Patients with Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes may be able to reduce their insulin medication(s) by doing IF. However, these patients need to monitor their blood glucose to watch out for hypoglycemia and adjust their medications accordingly with their doctor's help.

1. Simplifies your day

Do you have a busy schedule? If yes, then IF is one of the best ways to simplify your day (and life) while improving your health. Whatever fasting method you'll use, you won't need to stress over what to eat for breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

1. May reduce inflammation

IF limits inflammation, according to a study. For those who don't know, chronic inflammation is associated with heart disease, cancer, and arthritis.

1. It helps you reach ketosis faster.

As someone who's been following the keto diet, I use intermittent fasting as often as I'd like to maintain or re-enter ketosis. It's one of the [most useful keto hacks](#) I recommend if you're on the same journey.



The Effects of Fasting On Your Hormones

When you fast, some hormones drop while others increase. Here's what you need to know:

- **Insulin (decreases)** - This hormone causes the cells to absorb glucose, and it also signals your body to store fat. IF reduces insulin levels.
- **Glucagon (increases)** - This hormone counteracts insulin. When glucose levels in your blood decrease due to fasting, your pancreas secretes glucagon to promote glycogen breakdown so that your body has a steady supply of energy.
- **Adiponectin (increases)** - This hormone is secreted by mature fat cells. It increases during periods of fasting. According to research, adiponectin improves insulin sensitivity. Also, it has anti-diabetic, anti-inflammatory, and anti-atherogenic effects.
- **Leptin (decreases)** - This is another hormone that's created and released by your fat cells. "Leptin" has been derived from the Greek word "leptos," which means "thin." It signals your brain that you're full. Leptin levels decline when you are in a fasting state.
- **Ghrelin (increases)** - Also called the "hunger hormone," your stomach produces ghrelin. It stimulates your appetite and promotes fat storage. Fasting increases ghrelin. However, there's also research suggesting that a carbohydrate-free, high-fat diet results in a day-long suppression of ghrelin. This may be useful if you're following a low-carb diet while fasting intermittently.

6 Ways To Do Intermittent Fasting

Different individuals have their own preferences when it comes to fasting. Feel free to choose from any of the approaches below.

1. **Spontaneous intermittent fast:** This one's my personal favorite. With this method, you won't need to follow a set schedule just fast when you don't feel hungry at all. I usually skip breakfast and have lunch as the first meal of the day.
1. **The 16/8 method:** This requires you to fast for 16 hours and eat within an 8-hour window. You can finish your dinner early, perhaps at 8:00 pm, and have your next meal the next day at lunchtime.
1. **The 5:2 method:** With this method, you normally eat for 5 days and restrict your calorie intake to 500-600 calories for 2 days.
1. **Alternate-day intermittent fast:** As the term implies, you're going to fast every other day. You have two options during your fasting days: Eat nothing or eat only a few calories.
1. **Whole-day intermittent fast:** This is a 24-hour fast where you eat nothing for a day. Those on this IF plan can drink water, coffee, tea, or any calorie-free beverage.
1. **One Meal A Day (OMAD):** With OMAD, you fast for 23 hours and eat within a 1-hour window. Like the whole-day intermittent fast, this extreme form of fasting is not advisable for the elderly or individuals with certain health conditions.

Considerations Before Trying It

Before you attempt to do an intermittent fast right away, it's important to consider some factors:

- One of these is your **personal goals**. Ask yourself, "What would I like to achieve by fasting? Do I want to lose weight? Improve my metabolic health? Control my blood glucose?"
- You'll also want to consider your **personal schedule**. What does a typical day in your life look like? For example, if your mornings are likely rushed, the spontaneous fasting method or 16/8 method may work for you.
- How ready are you to try fasting? **Personal readiness** is important. Intermittent fasting comes with temporary side effects such as headaches, hunger, brain fog, and weakness. More importantly, research beginner-friendly success tips and read studies about its long-term

effects. This may help motivate and inspire you.

How To Succeed On Your First Intermittent Fast

Fast safely and successfully as a first-timer with these tips. I've used them myself to get used to IF and enjoy its benefits for nearly two years.

1. Start with the easiest fasting method.

Don't stress yourself with long and extreme fasts like a whole-day intermittent fast or OMAD. Begin with shorter fasts until your body can tolerate more hours without food. This is especially useful for preventing blood glucose from dropping too low.

1. Don't feast after the fast.

Some people fall into the trap of a fasting-bingeing cycle. Overeating will only defeat the purpose of fasting, and it may cause you to gain more weight. Here's a tip: Make sure to prepare your post intermittent fasting meal in advance. Fill up on veggies and protein-rich meats. Stay away from refined carbohydrates and sugar.

1. Get a good night's sleep.

If you're going to fast during your waking hours, you need to get proper sleep the night before to remain alert and have enough energy to carry through without food.

1. Listen to your body.

Sometimes you'll feel ill or unwell. If this is the case, don't force yourself to fast for the sake of doing it. Also, while you fast, let your body decide how long it should fast. Pushing through discomfort may not always be the best answer to reaping the benefits of fasting, especially if you have a medical condition.

1. Take vitamin and mineral supplements.

Doing IF regularly or several days a week can put you at risk for micronutrient deficiencies. For example, sodium and potassium excretion is increased during a fast, and not making up for those losses could lead to dangerous consequences.



Who Should Not Do Intermittent Fasting?

Intermittent fasting is not for everyone. Certain people should not try fasting. These include pregnant women, women having PMS or their periods, and those with eating disorders (anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa). If you are at risk for diabetes, or are already diagnosed with the condition, talk to your doctor to follow a safe plan, including adjusting your current medication/s.

Final Thoughts

Intermittent fasting is a popular eating pattern that has been linked to multiple health benefits such as weight loss, reduced inflammation, and blood glucose control. I hope this guide has provided you with enough information to get started or decide not to do it for important reasons.

At the end of the day, you decide which health strategy is the safest and most sustainable for you. It also helps to research and learn from the experiences of other people who've done it successfully to make an educated decision.

Resources:

1. <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/intermittent-fasting-what-is-it-and-how-does-it-work>
2. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/17/well/eat/the-benefits-of-intermittent-fasting.html>
3. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21410865/>
4. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7468742/>
5. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/07/190702152749.htm>
6. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4257368/>
7. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5486142/>
8. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4957917/>
9. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0002934371901525>

About the Author



Tiffany Joy Yamut is a registered nurse and health writer. She is an advocate and ambassador for a healthy lifestyle, having found greater health after modifying her diet toward Keto. Her articles include topics on anything low-carb, keto, and fitness. She is also a writer on Medium and author of her website [ketogenic buddies](#). Your Health Forum warmly welcomes Tiffany as a writer on this platform.

Other articles written by Tiffany on Your Health Forum:

[Stop and Treat Your Prediabetes Using the Ketogenic Diet](#)

[Good Carbs and Bad Carbs: How to Make the Right Choice for Your Health](#)