

## INTERMITTENT FASTING? Fad or Fit?

Is Intermittent Fasting, or IF, the next big thing? Is it the new millennium's grapefruit diet? Or is it the real deal based on facts? Let's see [what the science says](#). Literally, on a daily basis, science continues to investigate, study, and understand how we can reach our peak health. With the advent of the Internet becoming an intertwined, integrated part of our daily lives, we can do our own research, collaborate with others, join groups with views that are shared or even different, trade new concepts, and interact and exchange ideas. Every day is an opportunity to learn something new.

You're probably asking yourself, but how do I know what to believe? A study comes out one day that says coffee is bad for us; then another day a different one comes out and says it is good for us. Red wine/good; red wine/bad. We've seen this over and over again. My response to this is *do what feels right and works for you; use trusted sources; do your research*. No one knows you better than you know yourself. All we can do is work with the information we have when we receive it. But I can say this: I recently started intermittent fasting and I've experienced two things: I feel great and I've even dropped a few pounds. That works for me.

First—what is intermittent fasting?

The first thing to understand about IF is that it is *not* a diet. What it is, is an eating pattern. It's not about *what* you eat, but *when* you eat it. It has two simple things to recommend it, aside from the health benefits, which can make your life easier if you implement it.

1. You will save time. You will have less meal planning as there is no forethought to preparation. You're not eating, so no need to plan and prep a meal at home or to take to work, depending what fasting schedule you follow. Since you're not preparing a meal, there is no clean up involved. This actually gives you a little extra free time, to sleep in perhaps?
2. You will save energy. Again, less time involved in planning, shopping, preparing, and cleaning up of meals. What could you do with that time? You could, I don't know, lift weights during that time, for example.

OK, you're thinking to yourself, this sounds good. I could use more time to do other things and save some energy to re-direct elsewhere. But what about the health benefits? Isn't that ultimately what we're talking about?

Of course. Postprandial—after you eat—your blood stream is full of food energy that has been converted to glucose, the body's energy source. Since your blood stream is full of energy, your body is going to use the glucose that is quickly and easily available, *first*. Anything it doesn't use to run the body, will get converted to and stored as fat.

When you fast, there is no glucose zipping around your body through your blood stream, so your body will use stored fat to burn for energy. Aha! You say, now this is making sense. What other benefits are there from fasting?

Well, eating increases insulin production. Insulin is a hormone that the body uses to help cells access energy, i.e., glucose. It is especially sensitive to carbs, sugar, and protein. Fasting actually lowers insulin levels and increases your body's sensitivity to insulin. Why is this important? It's significant because

insulin sensitivity increases your metabolism so that you increase the conversion of glucose to energy. If our bodies were cars, it would be similar to getting 45 miles to the gallon of gas versus 20 miles to the gallon. Therefore more efficient. Makes sense, right? Win Number 1.

The growth hormone—the hormone that stimulates cell reproduction and regeneration—is increased during fasting. We want to encourage those fresh, new cells to feel our best. Win Number 2.

[NerdFitness](#) puts it like this: “*The less science-y version*: Intermittent fasting can help teach your body to use the food it consumes more efficiently. For many different physiological reasons, fasting can help promote weight loss and muscle building when done properly.”

Muscle Building? Did I hear right? Yes, yes you did. Increased insulin sensitivity pushes your body into storing excess fuel—glucose—into muscle as glycogen instead, and what muscles use for energy—instead of excess glucose as fat. This is how you can lose fat and gain muscle. Strength training burns glycogen and builds muscle.

Sounds good, doesn't it? So about now you're probably wondering, well, how do I do it? Keep reading. There are several fasting methods that are suggested, you just need to decide on the one that works best for you. You can [read more in-depth here](#), but I'll break it down for you quickly.

- Daily Intermittent Fasting:
  - 16 hours of fasting with 8 hours of eating. Eight of those 16 hours you are sleeping. The other 8 could be set up so that if you start fasting at 10 PM, and don't break your fast until noon the following day, that's 16 hours right there. Your eating window would then be from noon to 8 PM. That would enable you to eat lunch with co-workers, friends, or family, and also dinner with friends or family. You can pick your eating and fasting times to accommodate your schedule. The biggest downside to daily fasting is making sure you eat the *same amount of calories* that you would by eating three meals. Remember, this is not a diet, but a pattern.
- Weekly Intermittent Fasting:
  - One day per week, so one 24 hour period, you fast, having nothing but water, tea, or black coffee (stay hydrated!) for the whole day. You choose the day and time that best works for you. The downside to this is that you are only eliminating two meals per week, so if you are trying to lose weight, with this method you really won't lose much at all.
- Alternate Day Intermittent Fasting:
  - Essentially, this is every other 24 hour period fasting. For example, you eat dinner at 6 PM, and you don't eat again until the following day at 6 PM. You still get one meal a day, but you are still fasting for 24 hours. This is a great fast for those trying to lose weight because you just can't get 2000 calories or more in at one meal. If you're trying to build muscle and not lose weight, this type of fast probably is not a good choice for you.

Probably the most important thing to learn about being in a fasting state comes from entrepreneur / author, James Clear, who says: “Because we don't enter the fasted state until 12 hours after our last meal, it's rare that our bodies are in this fat burning state. This is one of the reasons why many people who start intermittent fasting will lose fat without changing what they eat, how much they eat, or how often they

exercise. Fasting puts your body in a fat burning state that you rarely make it to during a normal eating schedule.”

[The Daily Burn](#) offers information on five different ways to make fasting a part of your life. The list for types of fasting is not exhaustive—just find the one that works for you.

[Refeeding](#). I’ve heard about it, what is it?

Well, if you’ll bear with me as I use some more metaphors, it’s like blowing out the pipes, cold re-booting your computer, shaving your head to grow thicker hair, shaking things up. You get your body’s attention by saying Hey! Here, have some extra calories / carbs...whatcha’ gonna do, now? Well, what your body is going to do is increase dopamine (pleasure) and leptin (hunger), which make you feel both good and full and tricks your body into adjusting its metabolism higher and into a “[fat burning mode](#).” Psychologically you satisfy that craving itch which reinvigorates your determination to eat well more often.

Are you ready to get started? I’ve compiled some websites for you to review for further information. This is not an exhaustive list, so use The Google if you want to explore past anything I’ve posted here.

Note: If you are a diabetic or hypoglycemic, **do not** attempt to fast without talking with your doctor first.

*This blog is for informational purposes and is not to be considered medical advice. Before making any nutritional or exercise changes, as always, please talk with your doctor first.*

If you are already engaged in IF, please leave comments on your experiences; I’m interested in hearing from you. I’ll check in in a month or so and let you know how it’s going for me.

Read more:

[Mark’s Daily Apple](#)

[The Daily Burn](#)

[Six small meals a day, or three?](#) The New York Times, March 22, 2010

[The Journal of Applied Physiology: The Effect of intermittent fasting and refeeding on insulin action in healthy men](#)

[James Clear](#)