



Intermittent Fasting: Is it right for you?

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Intermittent Fasting (IF) or cyclic fasting may be a “trendy” style of eating, but it is definitely not new. Many religious rituals require fasting and our nomadic ancestors often went through periods of famine because of lack of food.

IF is a type of eating pattern that includes set periods of eating and fasting. So, when to eat is more important than what we eat (within reason). Here’s how it works... When your body doesn’t get enough carbohydrates or calories to use for energy, it will turn to your fat cells to make glucose for energy. As stored fat is broken down, your body produces ketones or ketone bodies as an alternate fuel source when there is not enough glucose present. This is the basis of the ketogenic diet. The most common type of IF plan is called the 16/8 method. Simply, you have an 8-hour eating window and a 16-hour fasting window. This is a method I suggest frequently in my practice as it seems the easiest to live with and the method which we seem to get the best results.

So, let’s talk about the advantages and disadvantages of IF.

1. It can help you lose weight. IF promotes the formation of ketone bodies that serve as a source of fuel instead of glucose. So, it allows your body to burn stored fat. It also increases your Human Growth Hormone (HGH) which is linked to fat loss and muscle gain.

2. It can lower insulin levels and improve insulin sensitivity. This is extremely important for people who are prediabetic or have Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (DM2). Of course, those who are taking medications for DM2 should always have their glucose levels and medications monitored by their doctors.

3. It can reduce inflammation. Chronic inflammation is at the core of diseases such as DM2, obesity, heart disease, autoimmune disease, cancer and Alzheimer’s. IF lowers systemic inflammation and pro-inflammatory cytokines.

4. It can lower your risk of heart disease and improve overall heart health. IF reduces body weight, body fat, LDL-C, triglycerides and blood pressure.

5. It supports brain health. IF has been shown to increase levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) to reduce cognitive impairment and decline.

6. It promotes Anti-Aging. IF induces autophagy, your body’s internal housekeeping system which cleans out aging or damaged cells. By increasing autophagy, we can actually promote longevity.

7. It can cause a “fasting headache.” This occurs as a person adjusts to caloric restriction.

8. It should not be followed if pregnant, nursing or trying to conceive children. Limiting nutrients at any of these times could harm you or your baby.

9. It should not be done if you have a history of disordered eating. IF could trigger bingeing in some people.

10. IF can exacerbate symptoms of hormonal imbalance, thyroid conditions and adrenal fatigue. It’s important to talk to your functional medicine doctor if you have any of these conditions.

So, we can see there are many benefits to IF and definitely some disadvantages. It’s important to give your body the right vitamins and nutrients when you are fasting. It is also important to include lots of nutrient-dense (organic) fruits and vegetables, grass-fed meats, wild-caught fish and healthy fats during your eating window. Any questions? Please feel free to reach out to me anytime.

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