



## Intermittent Fasting, Good Idea?

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Fall is Time for Change is Intermittent Fasting for you?

For years I have studied Ayurvedic Medicine, the 5000-year-old healing science that originated in India, and have found that much of its wisdom continues to be rediscovered. One of the dietary teachings of Ayurvedic practice suggests that we eat from sunrise to sunset. This of course changes seasonally, as do the recommendations for season-specific foods. I recently read the Ayurvedically oriented book *Change your Schedule, Change your Life* by Dr. Suhas Kshirsagar that talks about Chronobiology and Ayurveda. The essential idea is that there are optimum times during the course of your day to do certain things: eating, exercising, and sleeping. So I took another look at Intermittent Fasting.

Intermittent fasting is the practice of restricting food for set periods of time, either daily or over the course of a week. This practice is intended to be a lifestyle change, not a weight loss diet. It does provide weight loss, but slowly (about a pound a

week), so it is not a quick fix. And for those who have trouble maintaining sufficient weight, or just wish to remain at their own optimum weight, this is worth looking into. The weight loss is primarily due to the fact that caloric intake is automatically restricted by having fasting periods.

Currently there are two schools of thought on intermittent fasting: the 16/8 and the 5/2. With 16/8, you eat over an 8-hour period and fast 16 hours. The 5/2 is a weekly practice, calling for two days of fasting— or of very restricted caloric intake (about 500 calories)— for two non-consecutive days per week.

The 5/2 is not one that I would recommend. It's hard to maintain a regimen that you do a couple of days a week. It requires a great deal of discipline and planning, and I think it's much easier to fall off the wagon. I also think it's not a great idea to regularly and severely restrict calories or fast for a 24 hour period; it can wreak havoc with blood sugar and may lead to overeating on the days not fasting. Because this method continually breaks up natural body rhythms, it is not very kind to your gallbladder: fasting can cause a buildup of bile and ensuing discomfort when it is once again released to metabolize fats. And I think that not eating any food at all can become distracting. Having said that, some people find this practice useful, or use it to jumpstart another kind of program. I do, however, think this is only for the young. Anyone over 40 probably should be looking at the 16/8 if they intend to do intermittent fasting.

The 16/8 requires that you fast for 16 hours, eight hours of which is your sleep time. (I wish I could sleep eight hours, but that is a topic for another time). Most people on the 16/8 cycle start around 11:00 or 12:00, having a brunch or lunchtime first meal. They then stop eating all foods at 7 or 8 pm. You are allowed coffee or non-caloric beverages during your fasting times. If you want a cup of coffee in the morning, as I do, a little splash of almond milk is not going to ruin the program. You may (and are encouraged to) drink a lot of water or other non-caloric beverages such as tea. I think water is probably the better choice as it provides a flush for your system. No snacking between meals. If you want a treat, have it mid-day rather than in the evening. So if I want to eat my chocolate almonds (dark chocolate only), I will have them after lunch rather than after my evening meal. Carbohydrates are encouraged only for the first meal, with the next or third meal (you can modify the program to three small meals) containing more protein and vegetables. Fruits also should be eaten earlier in the day. The idea is to load sugars and carbohydrates into the time when your body can best process them, and go to bed having greens and proteins as your last meal.

The 16/8 also asks that you exercise before eating, but I think that would either encourage you to eat more after you exercise, or suppress your appetite— depending on the amount of exercise you do. The idea of exercising first is that your body will burn calories more effectively if it does not have fuel to digest. It's a personal choice, and I suppose it makes sense, but I can't manage it myself so I'm not going to ask you to try.

I've been doing the 16/8 about two months now, having two meals a day. I really like it. I never was a fan of eating first thing in the morning, so just having coffee is not difficult for me. I eat my first meal around 11:15 and try to stop eating by

7:00. This of course doesn't work every day— if I have a social meal it often goes later, and I just reset for the next day.

Here's what I have noticed personally. My digestion is better. I think this is because my digestive system gets a long period of rest where it is not being called on to do anything. On a side note, my food bills are significantly less. I do feel that my focus is a bit clearer. I seem to be able to sleep uninterrupted for longer periods. And I am losing a bit of weight. I'm going to give it a few more months and see how I feel.

I like the feeling of having an empty stomach. It's not something I was used to, as I would tend to snack around 4 o'clock in the afternoon. We are a snacking culture, encouraged to nibble all day, and although I miss that break and feel a little hungry, I don't find that it affects my functioning.

Those who support intermittent fasting say that it improves all kinds of things: blood sugar level, blood pressure, cholesterol, and depression. There are some research studies; in a small study of the 16/8, the University of Illinois found weight loss and blood pressure reduction. Like most "new" trends, the promotion tends to say that it heals the sick and raises the dead. I think it will take time to see what happens to people who follow the plan for many months at a time, not just for a short time to take off a few pounds before going to your cousin's wedding.

Having said that, I do think intermittent fasting is a good way to eat for some people. Folks who are diabetic or are battling health challenges should obviously consult with their doctor. I have been telling people to nibble for years. If you do "graze," assess whether you feel good. Grazing is a good thing for many people. It provides a constant caloric intake and does tend to keep blood sugars regulated. So, as with anything else, intermittent fasting will work only for certain people.

Let me know what you think. I'll let you know how I do. It does seem to be the way that one would naturally eat. And most of us have fairly sedentary jobs, which require less fuel. If you want to know more about intermittent fasting, there are several books available (many of them free on Kindle— some of them a little fanatical). Let's see whether it's a working system or another fad.

Namaste,  
Wendy