

You are *when* you eat: A guide to intermittent fasting



Intermittent fasting (IF) is an eating pattern that cycles between periods of eating and fasting, to take advantage of the body's natural processes. Whereas a diet focuses on what foods you eat, **intermittent fasting focuses on when you eat.**

The most popular methods include the 16/8 method, where you fast for 16 hours and eat during an 8-hour window, and the 5:2 diet, where you eat normally for five days and drastically reduce your calorie intake (500–600 calories) on two non-consecutive days each week. Whatever method you choose, **understanding how intermittent fasting works is key to making it effective.**

How does intermittent fasting work?

Usually, your body uses glucose from carbohydrates as its primary energy source. When you fast, your body runs out of glucose and starts to burn stored fat for energy instead. This switch, which typically occurs several hours after your last meal, is the main reason **intermittent fasting can be effective for fat loss**.

Ensuring that your body gets the nutrients it needs to function is far more important than adhering to a strict eating window, but intermittent fasting can have potential benefits.

Benefits of intermittent fasting:



Fat loss – When you fast, your body runs out of glucose and starts to burn stored fat for energy instead. Many people also find that not eating after 7pm helps them to reduce snacking



Improved metabolic health – By lowering insulin resistance, fasting can reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes. It can also decrease inflammation and may lower LDL cholesterol, which benefits your heart health



Improved gut health – Intermittent fasting can help activate the migrating motor complex (MMC), which can benefit people suffering from gastroesophageal reflux disease (GORD) or small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO)



Enhanced brain health – Fasting increases the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that helps brain cells survive and grow. BDNF can improve cognitive function, learning, and memory, as well as protect cells from stress and help cells to live longer and work more effectively

Potential risks and considerations for intermittent fasting

While intermittent fasting can be a great fat loss tool, it's not without risks. Some people **may experience side effects**, especially when first starting out. These include:

- Increased hunger
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Digestive problems
- Sleep disturbances

These side effects are usually mild and tend to decrease as your body gets used to fasting. However, **intermittent fasting might not be suitable for everyone**, and it can lead to nutritional deficiencies and health issues if your eating window doesn't include a well-balanced diet.

Older adults and those with certain health conditions should approach intermittent fasting with caution and **consult with a healthcare professional before starting**.



How to start intermittent fasting

To start, **choose a method that fits your lifestyle**. Many recommend the 16/8 method. This way, you give your body enough time to burn stored fat while still allowing for a manageable eating period. It's also sustainable for long-term use, making it easier to stick with over time.

Research on circadian rhythms suggests it's more optimal to sync your metabolism with natural cycles of light and dark i.e. have breakfast and avoid eating late/too close to bedtime.

To ease into it, **begin with a shorter fasting period**, like 12 hours, and gradually extend it as your body adjusts. Remember to stay hydrated during fasting by drinking plenty of water, herbal teas, or black coffee.

Avoid any drinks with calories, such as juices, soda, or milk, as these can interrupt the fat-burning process.



Managing expectations

The time it takes to see results can vary. Generally, you can expect to start seeing fat loss within 4 to 8 weeks, **depending on your consistency and overall diet**. Just remember that initial weight loss might include water weight, so it's important to be patient and give your body time to adapt.

Intermittent fasting can be a great method to lose weight, but please be mindful that it's simply one of many lifestyle strategies that can improve your health. Nutritious food, regular exercise, and getting enough sleep are still the most important factors.

Contact **HealthHero** today for more support and advice. We're with you every step of the way.
