

# Intermittent Fasting 101: What Is It? And Why Is Everyone Doing It?

What do you think of when you hear the word “fasting”?

Typically, most people associate fasting with religion. For centuries, those practicing Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, and others have abstained from food and drink in order to connect with their spirituality.

However, medical professionals are beginning to see the benefits of fasting for our overall physical health.

Known as “Intermittent Fasting”, this lifestyle choice of restricting eating to certain times of the day or week is growing in popularity among health and fitness professionals. [Recent research from the John Hopkins University School of Medicine](#) even found regular fasting to have serious long-term health benefits.

Here’s a look at what intermittent fasting is and how it can help you not only lose weight but live longer, healthier lives.

## What is Intermittent Fasting?

Intermittent fasting is not necessarily a diet. There is no counting calories or restricting certain food groups.

Instead, intermittent fasting is all about restricting the time frame in which you *do* eat.

Instead of eating three square meals per day spread evenly across 14-16 hours, those living an intermittent fasting lifestyle only eat during a certain time window. Typically, this window is 8 hours; however, the exact timings and rules can vary depending on which intermittent fasting method is used.

One of the most popular methods, known as the 16/8 method, simply means that over a period of 24 hours, you fast for 16 hours and eat for 8. Also known as the ‘Leangains’ protocol, those practicing this method typically skip breakfast and then eat lunch and dinner.

For example, their eating window might be from 12 pm to 8 pm, and then they fast from 8 pm until 12 pm the next day.

During periods of fasting, people are not advised to eat or drink anything other than water or tea/coffee without milk or sweetener. While this can be difficult to get used to, a regular fasting schedule gets easier over time and has its many long-term health benefits.

## What are the Benefits?

Researchers have found that when a person fasts on a regular basis, they can “trigger a metabolic switch from glucose-based to ketone-based energy”. Additionally, researchers stress that these “ketone bodies” are more than “just fuel”. They are “potent signalling molecules with major effects on cell and organ functions”.

This metabolic switch is key in enabling intermittent fasting to have such dramatic and widespread health benefits.

### **Increased Longevity**

[According to the article in the New England Journal of Medicine](#), those who regularly fast develop “lasting adaptive responses” that help cells not only repair themselves but also build defenses against “oxidative and metabolic stress”.

The article states:

“Repeated exposure to fasting periods results in lasting adaptive responses that confer resistance to subsequent challenges. Cells respond to intermittent fasting by engaging in a coordinated adaptive stress response that leads to increased expression of antioxidant defenses, DNA repair, protein quality control, mitochondrial biogenesis and autophagy, and down-regulation of inflammation.”

This improved stress response helps the body fight off disease and stay healthy; resulting in an increased lifespan.

### **Decreased incidence of obesity**

One of the main reasons why intermittent fasting has been so popular in health and fitness circles is because of its obvious implications for short term weight loss. However, regular fasting can also help decrease the risk of obesity in the long term.

One of the ways an intermittent fasting schedule does this is by keeping blood sugar and insulin at healthy levels. When insulin is low, stored fat in the body is more accessible to burn. In turn, this can also help to reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes.

### **Decreased incidence of cancer and disease**

An enhanced adaptive stress response combined with a decreased risk of obesity means that those practicing intermittent fasting are at a significantly reduced risk of heart-related diseases and cancers.

Additionally, intermittent fasting has also been shown to decrease a person’s risk for inflammation, which is often a “key driver of many chronic diseases”.

### **Sources:**

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/intermittent-fasting-guide>

<https://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJMra1905136>