

Vegan health

Intermittent fasting

Everyone's talking about it, but how does it work and what are the benefits? Nutritionist and PT Cath Short explains it all



CATH SHORT

Cath is a qualified personal trainer and plant-based nutritionist. Check out her website raw4fitness.me for 1:1 online coaching or join her private Facebook group 'Reboot and Thrive' for busy mums on a health-kick at [facebook.com/groups/rebootandthrive](https://www.facebook.com/groups/rebootandthrive).

Us humans haven't always lived this way. Even as recently as 40 years ago, we had much less choice when it came to food and eating at restaurants or ordering takeaways was a rare occurrence. Going back much further, the ancient Greeks used fasting as a way to improve their cognitive ability, to improve immunity and to fight illness.

Fasting has been a fundamental part of various religious faiths and cultures throughout time, but in the modern Western world many people are afraid to go without food and barely ever feel the true

Below If you adopt intermittent fasting, then a protein smoothie might be your first food of the day at 10am.

experience of hunger. In a time of abundance, abstinence is barely on our radar.

Over-eating or being full all the time can lead to low energy levels, digestive problems, weight gain, type 2 diabetes and depression. With searches for intermittent fasting up by 50 per cent, there's clearly a desire to make a few changes to our eating habits.

An individual approach

Over the last few years, I have taken a deep dive (obsession, if you will) into the health benefits of various fasting techniques. I've tried everything from skipping breakfast to a seven-day water cleanse – all with varying degrees of success. Fasting can be a great tool to boost energy levels, for weight management and even to reset your metabolism. But it must work for you as an individual – it shouldn't be an added stress, on the contrary, it should bring mental clarity and a sense of peace instead.

Prolonged fasting (over multiple days) is generally safe to do, but it can bring on bouts of irritability and fatigue that make the day-to-day stuff a little tricky – especially if you're having to juggle family and work life at the same time!

Of all the fasting methods I have explored there is one that I feel gives the best return for the least investment while running synergistically alongside our internal body-clock. It's one that

I continue to practice almost every day without any effort or disruption and that integrates easily into my work schedule.

Intermittent fasting has become a bit of a buzz word in the health and fitness industry in recent years and for good reason. Intermittent fasting (IF) is a reasonable and convenient way to assist the body's natural toxin elimination process as well as controlling blood sugar levels and promoting weight loss.

So how does it work?

IF involves a planned alternate cycle of eating and fasting. Ideally, we would abstain from food consumption for 14-16 hours, (for example, from 7pm through to 10am) followed by a restricted eating window of 8-10 hours (say from 10am to 7pm). In short, we are drawing our meal timings closer together instead of skipping them. Many of my personal training clients have had great success with improved energy levels and general wellbeing through the practice of daily IF and it's something I highly recommend.

You can either delay breakfast or eat your evening meal a little earlier (or a bit of both). Ideally, we would go to bed fasted, which would require at least three hours between our last meal and hitting the sack. Late-night snacking is not advised.

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Your daily schedule could look something like this...

- **7am:** large glass of water (with fresh lemon juice)
- **8am:** black tea or coffee (no milk while fasting)
- **10am:** protein smoothie with fresh fruit and greens
- **2pm:** wholegrain toast with scrambled tofu and microgreens
- **6pm:** chickpea curry with brown basmati rice
- **8pm:** herbal tea

It is important to note that, while IF restricts the daily hours of calorie consumption, it does not necessarily restrict the calorie count itself. Saying that, bringing our meals closer together can have a positive effect on those mid-afternoon cravings, which is an added bonus! When we are looking at longevity and overall health, then the quality of those calories also needs to be considered... which is where a whole food plant-based diet comes in! ♥

THE BENEFITS OF FASTING

It's not just the ancient Greeks who put forward the benefits of fasting, there are current research papers to recommend it too

"Several lines of evidence support the hypothesis that eating patterns that reduce or eliminate nighttime eating and prolong nightly fasting intervals may result in sustained improvements in human health," concludes a study at pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov*. "Intermittent fasting regimens are hypothesized to influence metabolic regulation via effects on (a) circadian biology, (b) the gut microbiome, and (c) modifiable lifestyle behaviours, such as sleep."

The practice of fasting brings other benefits too; it can raise your vibrational energy by freeing your body from the unremitting burden of digesting and metabolising food. Studies have also shown that fasting

can help you live longer and even assist in preventing and curing cancer. In a nutshell, intermittent fasting can provide:

- Improved immune system
- Mental clarity
- Lower blood sugar levels
- Improved digestion
- Reduced inflammation

- Better control of hunger hormones

*<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28715993/>

Left When you're doing IF it doesn't necessarily mean you're eating less, it's compressing the time over which you eat.

