



B.C. Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association

MEMBER UPDATE

ReFresh

September 29, 2021



This week...

Intermittent Fasting – Is it for me?

There will be many of you that have tried or perhaps even practice intermittent fasting (IF); others may have heard of this popular health and fitness trend and wondered what all the commotion is about. Then, there may be some of you who think that intermittent fasting is simply short spurts of running during your daily walk!

Intermittent Fasting is an eating pattern that cycles between periods of fasting and eating during specific times. It is not a diet, as it does not specify which foods you should eat, but rather when you should eat them.

Watch this [4-minute informative video](#) on how IF works.

Fasting has been practiced throughout human evolution. Ancient hunter-gatherers didn't have supermarkets, refrigerators, or food available year-round – sometimes they couldn't

find anything to eat. As a result, humans evolved to function without food for extended periods of time.

In fact, periodic fasting is more natural than always eating 3–4 (or more) meals per day.

Johns Hopkins neuroscientist [Mark Mattson, Ph.D.](#) has studied intermittent fasting for 25 years. He says that our bodies have evolved to be able to go without food for many hours – even several days or longer. There are multiple ways to do intermittent fasting, but they are all based on choosing regular time periods to eat and fast. Mattson says that after hours without food, the body exhausts its sugar stores and starts burning fat. He refers to this as *metabolic switching*.

Intermittent fasting works by prolonging the period when your body has burned through the calories consumed during your last meal and begins burning fat.

How do I start?

It's critical to check with your doctor before starting intermittent fasting. Not eating for long, extended periods of time is never healthy.

Those who ***should not*** practice this method include:

- Those with diabetes because it can lead to dangerous dips and spikes in blood sugar
- Women who are **pregnant or breastfeeding**,
- Anyone with a chronic disease, the elderly, and children.
- Those with a history of, are at risk of, or currently struggling with an eating disorder.

[Here](#) is a short, but important article on intermittent fasting and eating disorders.

Here are two approaches to IF:

A **daily approach**: restricts your daily eating to one, 6 – 8 hour period per day. For example, allow yourself to eat meals between the hours of 9 am and 5 pm or 10 am – 6 pm and do not eat during the other 16 hours. Avoid snacking or eating at nighttime, and NOT before bed!

Weekly - 5:2 approach: involves eating regular meals five days a week. For the other two days, limit yourself to one 500–600 calorie meal. For example, you could eat normally every day of the week except Mondays and Thursdays, which would be your one-meal days.

Going for longer periods without food, such as 24, 36, 48 and 72-hour fasting periods, is not necessarily better for you and may be dangerous. Going too long without eating may **encourage** your body to start storing more fat in response to starvation.

Mattson's research shows that it can take 2 – 4 weeks before the body becomes accustomed to IF. You may feel hungry or cranky while getting used to the new routine. Fortunately, people who make it through the adjustment period tend to stick with the plan, because they notice they feel better.

During the times when you are not eating, water and zero-calorie beverages such as black coffee and tea are permitted. During your eating periods, 'eating normally' does not mean binge eating, like packing your feeding times with high-calorie junk food, super-sized fries, and treats.

What will I gain?

Good news: it is not what you gain from trying IF, but what you can lose! People use intermittent fasting to lose weight. However, research also shows that the IF can do more than just burn fat. There are a range of health benefits associated with the practice: a longer life, a leaner body, and a sharper mind.

"Many things happen during intermittent fasting that can protect organs against chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, age-related neurodegenerative disorders, even inflammatory bowel disease and many cancers," says Mattson.

When you fast, your body is affected at the cellular and molecular level. For example, your body adjusts hormone levels to make stored body fat more accessible. Your cells also initiate important repair processes and change the expression of genes.

Changes that occur in your body when you fast include:

- **Human Growth Hormone (HGH):** The levels of growth hormone skyrocket, increasing as much as five-fold. This has benefits for fat loss and muscle gain.
- **Insulin:** Insulin sensitivity improves, and levels of insulin drop dramatically. Lower insulin levels make stored body fat more accessible.
- **Cellular repair:** Your cells initiate cellular repair processes. This includes autophagy, where cells digest and remove old and dysfunctional proteins that build up inside cells.
- **Gene expression:** There are changes in the function of genes related to longevity and protection against disease.

Other intermittent fasting benefits researched so far have revealed:

- **Thinking and memory:** Intermittent fasting boosts working memory in animals, and verbal memory in adult humans.
- **Heart health:** Improved blood pressure and resting heart rates as well as other heart-related measurements.
- **Physical performance:** Young men who fasted for 16 hours showed fat loss while maintaining muscle mass. Mice who were fed on alternate days showed better endurance in running.
- **Diabetes and obesity:** In animal studies, intermittent fasting prevented obesity. And in six brief studies, obese adult humans lost weight through intermittent fasting.
- **Tissue health:** In animals, intermittent fasting reduced tissue damage in surgery and improved results.

Is intermittent fasting safe?

Some people try intermittent fasting for weight management, and others use the method to address chronic conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, high cholesterol, or arthritis. For a large percentage of people, intermittent fasting is safe, but it is not for everyone. As noted earlier in this article, some groups of people should steer clear of intermittent fasting.

Keep in mind that intermittent fasting may have different effects on different people. Talk to your doctor if you start experiencing unusual anxiety, headaches, nausea, or other symptoms after you start intermittent fasting.

Do you think you will try IF? You never know. Perhaps IF is a ‘health habit secret’ that might give you the boost you need!

Sources:

Harvard Health Publishing | [Intermittent fasting: Surprising update](#)

Health Line | [Intermittent Fasting 101 — The Ultimate Beginner’s Guide](#)

Health Line | [6 Popular Ways to Do Intermittent Fasting](#)

Johns Hopkins | [Intermittent Fasting: What is it, and how does it work?](#)