

FAST FACTS

Intermittent fasting

Planned caloric restriction

What

Intermittent fasting (IF) refers to an eating pattern where you cycle between periods of eating and fasting; you fast, intermittently. Unlike traditional diets, IF focuses on when you eat rather than what you eat. There are several popular methods, including the 16/8 method, 5:2 diet, and alternate-day fasting.

Note that regular, expected 'fasting' of around 10 hours should happen anyway during nightfall for humans counting time between dinner and breakfast. We can refer to this as Time Restricted Eating (TRE).

How it works

While you are digesting food, or still have energy and nutrients from food, your body is largely anabolic (in building mode). However, when your body is no longer processing food, or deriving energy from it, it is catabolic (breaking things down).

While you're fasted, the body burns your energy reserves for fuel (hence the weight loss), breaks down old and faulty cells, and focuses on the repair functions in the body. In essence, because energy and nutrients are not available, the body becomes more efficient with what it does have.

Types

- **16/8 method:** Fast for 16 hours, eat during an 8-hour window.
- **5:2 diet:** Eat normally 5 days a week and severely restrict (500-600cal) calorie intake for 2 days.
- **Alternate-day fasting (ADF):** Eat normally one day, then restrict calories or fast the next.
- **Eat-Stop-Eat:** One or two 24-hour fasts each week.

TRE: While similar to intermittent fasting, TRE involves only restricting eating to certain hours, usually overnight (e.g., fasting from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.). It's a gentler approach - some call it a "normal eating" window that can be more appropriate for athletes, especially women, as it ensures daily calorie intake without prolonged fasting periods.



Pros

- Detoxification
- Metabolic reset
- Reduced inflammation
- Longevity pathways activated (eg autophagy)
- Improved metabolic
- Digestive repair
- Immune health

Considerations

- The benefits and risks of IF vary based on activity level, gender, and individual goal
- Inactive individuals: IF can be a useful tool for weight management and improving metabolic markers. However, care must be taken to avoid nutrient deficiencies.
- Men: often experience greater metabolic benefits from IF, such as fat loss and increased insulin sensitivity.
- Female athletes: Women, particularly those who are highly active, may experience negative effects from IF, such as hormonal imbalances, increased cortisol, and impaired athletic performance. Female athletes should avoid long fasting periods and instead focus on nourishing their bodies for recovery.
- Women: TRE or shorter fasting periods are generally better suited for women.