

PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS



DOES INTERMITTENT FASTING REALLY WORK? LET'S WEIGH IN.

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Obesity is becoming an increasingly common chronic disease.¹ 1 in 5 children and 2 in 5 adults in the United States are obese.¹ Obesity is defined as having a body mass index(BMI) of 30 or higher.² Severe obesity is defined as having a BMI of 40 or higher.² We've probably all heard of the term BMI before, but what does it really mean? BMI is a quick and inexpensive way to assess a person's weight in relation to their height.³ You can calculate your BMI by dividing your weight in kilograms by your height in meters squared or search for a BMI calculator on the internet.³ Doctors use BMI as a predictor of other health issues. However, BMI should not be the only thing you look at when evaluating a person's health status. BMI is helpful, but does not tell the entire story. Having a high BMI puts you at an increased risk for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, breathing problems, joint problems, stroke, cancer, and other health issues.⁴

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“Lose 8% of initial body mass over 8 weeks”

There are two main factors that need to be addressed to combat obesity, physical activity and diet. We all know that physical activity is beneficial for your health overall and can help you lose weight. Throughout history, people have created and tried an uncountable amount of fad diets. You've probably heard of some of them, keto, whole30, paleo, atkins, weight watchers, master cleanse, and so many others. The thing that all of these diets have in common is what you eat and how much you eat. Have you ever heard of a diet that instead focuses on when you eat? Intermittent fasting is a type of diet that focuses on not eating for a period of time each day or week.⁵ There are a few different approaches to intermittent fasting. Alternate day fasting is where you eat regularly for one day then fast or eat a small meal of less than 500 calories the next day.⁵ 5:2 fasting is where you eat normally for 5 days a week and fast 2 days a week.⁵ Daily time-restricted fasting is where you eat normally within an 8-hour window and fast for the other 16 hours a day.⁵ How does intermittent fasting compare to other fad diets? Does it actually help you lose and keep off weight? Is it sustainable or will you fall off after a few weeks?

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Findings & Analysis

A study published in the Journal of Exercise Physiology aimed to explore how time-restricted intermittent fasting for 6 weeks influences overweight young adults. Male and female young adults who were considered to have low physical activity with a BMI above 19 kg/m² were recruited from Midwestern State University. The participants were divided into two groups, with Group A fasting from 8pm to 12pm, and Group B fasting from 4pm to 8am. Participants measurements were taken before the study started, at 2 weeks into the study, 4 weeks, and at the end of the study at 6 weeks. The measurements taken include body mass, BMI, waist to hip ratio,⁶ body fat percentage, and resting metabolic rate.

The study found that these young adults showed significant⁶ changes over the 6-week fasting intervention. Although there were no significant differences in weight loss between Group A and Group B, overall, the participants lost an average of 4.5 kg of body mass.⁶ The study also reported a drop in BMI after the 6-week intervention (from 31.6 to 30 kg/m²), as well as a reduction in waist and hip circumference (from 88.84 to 84.39 cm).⁶

Intermittent fasting (IF) has gathered popularity for its potential health benefits, particularly in weight management and metabolic health. However, several myths and misconceptions persist regarding its effects.

For example, many believe that IF leads to excess muscle loss. Studies show that weight loss from both calorie-restricted and time-restricted diets consists of approximately 75% fat loss and 25% muscle loss, making IF a comparable and effective weight loss strategy.⁷

Another common misconception is that IF slows down metabolism. Studies show that IF can boost metabolism by improving insulin sensitivity, increasing leptin/adiponectin levels for better appetite control, lowering LDL cholesterol and triglycerides, and enhancing ketone production as an alternative energy source, all while supporting glucose metabolism and reducing blood sugar levels.^{8,9}

Furthermore, IF is commonly assumed to be unsustainable. Many believe intermittent fasting hunger makes the diet unsustainable long-term, but studies show hunger decreases as the body adapts to new eating times. Participants often fear hunger more during eating windows than fasting periods and report a reduced appetite, making IF a manageable long-term dietary approach.¹⁰

What Does the Future Hold for Dieting?



With the rapid increase social media is playing in everyday lives, it has become a critical component of health advertisement. Online platforms such as Tik-Tok, Instagram, Facebook, etc. are participating in the rapid increase of diet culture. Trends such as the mediterranean diet, gut health supplements, GLP1's for non-diabetics are just of the few. However, many of these diets correlate to misconceptions.

Dieting has become an expansive industry. With the success rates of long term dieting being relatively poor, it is important to consult in medical professionals to come up with a method that will work best for you and your body. Notably, every individual is different and prioritizing good health habits such as getting enough sleep, daily exercise is a great way to start your next dieting journey.¹¹

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