INTERMITTENT FASTING
YOUR ULTIMATE GUIDE
2018 UPDATE

PHYSIQONOMICS.COM
Blah blah blah, if you die I can’t be held responsible. Oh...I’m not allowed to say that and I need this written by a Lawyer? Well that sounds fucking lame. Fine, hold on for a second.

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Yay, LAW! OK. LET’S MOVE THE FUCK ON.
Fasting diets have become extremely popular over the last few years.

And while fasting as a choice of diet is a fairly new phenomenon, the act of fasting itself has been around for centuries—the great philosophers of antiquity like Plato, Seneca, and “The Father of Modern Medicine” Hippocrates, were all extolling the virtues of short periods of abstinence from food.

The modern day incarnation of fasting is what’s come to be known as intermittent fasting or the shorthand, IF: simply, intermittent fasting is an eating pattern that has the dieter cycle periods of eating and not eating (fasting). While this concept remains at the crux of every new fasting diet, where they differ is on the length and setup of the fasting window.

And as we’ll see, there are quite a few.

Before taking a look at the different fasting diets and protocols, we should answer a few common questions about fasting.

**Is Fasting Safe?**

If you’re a healthy individual, fasting is perfectly safe.

With that said, fasting may not be suitable for everyone. You should avoid fasting if:

- You’re pregnant
- Have low blood sugar
- Have a history of disordered eating
As always, check with your doctor before starting a new diet and exercise programme.

**Will Fasting Help Me Lose Fat?**

Many fasting aficionados make it seem like fasting has magic weight loss properties. Unfortunately, there are none and calories still count.

**Meaning, even if you implement fasting but are still eating too many calories—you won’t lose weight.**

In a 2015 systematic review of intermittent fasting research—the largest study on the topic to date—Seimon et al. compared the effects of of intermittent energy restriction (aka fasting) to continuous energy restriction (aka normal dieting) on body weight and body composition.

The result? Both diet styles resulted in the same outcomes.

In 2018, Sundfor et al. published their findings from a year long study on fasting versus normal dieting. They also found no difference between the two groups when calories were matched.

So, again, it’s **your total calorie intake** that matters most and fasting can be one way of managing that intake.

For example, pushing your first meal later into the day means you have more calories to eat at lunch and dinner. When calories are low, eating 2-3 larger meals versus 5-6 small meals can help with satiety and be psychologically satisfying.
Fasting also has mild appetite suppressant effects—thought to be due to the ketone production during the fast—which is obviously beneficial during a fat loss phase.

**Will Fasting Help Me Build Muscle?**

If you’re eating in a calorie surplus and engaging in progressive strength training—yes.

... 

*Is that it?*

Yes, that’s it.

*No, but, fo’ real doe?*

Yes, fo’ real.

It’s important to note that if you’re trying to gain weight, fasting may make it harder to reach your calorie goals—especially if they’re freakishly high. So if you struggle to hit your daily calories, then, uh, y’know—probably don’t fast?

**What About Fasting and Health?**

While there are a lot of claims made about the health benefits of fasting, the truth is that most of these studies have been done in mice, and as a recent review paper notes, “further research in
humans is needed before the use of fasting as a health intervention can be recommended.”

The Two Benefits of Fasting Nobody Talks About

Fasting isn’t magic and it doesn’t render the first law moot, but there are two benefits to fasting that, in my opinion, make it an important tool.

1. **Helps you differentiate between actual hunger and mental hunger** – there’s a tendency to feel a bit of hunger and immediately rush off to satisfy it. The truth is, this hunger is more often than not just a habit and not actual hunger. Fasting for short periods helps you differentiate between the *impulse* to eat and actual, physical hunger.

2. **Builds Discipline and Mental Resilience** – I’ve spoken about this ad nauseam but I use fasting as a tool to build mental resilience and control impulse. Learning to sit and not be controlled by your impulses is going to pay dividends not only to your dieting goals but other goals, too.

Now, with all of that out of the way—let’s take a look at the popular fasting diets and protocols.
The 5:2 (Fast Diet)

The 5:2 diet (also known as the ‘Fast Diet’) was created by British Journalist Michael Mosley.

The 5:2 diet involves five days of normal eating, with “little thought to calorie control” and two days of calorie restriction: 500 calories for women and 600 calories for men.

Example setup:
The Pros:

- You don’t have to track calories
- It might suit some people better, psychologically

The Cons:

- As there is no calorie control, there’s a chance of overeating on your normal days.
- It might not be suited for everyone, especially those with really active jobs.
- May be hard to stick to for the long run for most people.

Should you do it?

This can work well for people who may not want to track calorie intake too rigidly. If you do decide to use this approach, just remember to be mindful of your calorie intake. I’d also recommend coinciding the fast days with your rest days.
ADF, or Alternate Day Fasting, was created by Dr Krista Varady. Varady has been responsible for a lot of the research on fasting and its implication on humans.

It was her research that inspired the Mosley BBC documentary and the 5:2 diet.

Well, actually, it was more like this: Varady did a ton of research on fasting in humans and then Mosley and the BBC came along and stole her research to create the show and then later write Mosley’s book—or so claims Ms. Varady—and then Varady was all like fuck you BBC (probably not her exact words) and then she wrote her own fasting book.

I know, totes cray.

The setup is simple, you cycle between normal calorie intake and a reduced calorie fast day. This one day fast, one day feed pattern is repeated sequentially.

**Example setup:**
The Pros:

- Because there are more fast days, you can be a bit more relaxed with calorie intake on your normal days

- Not having to track calories

The Cons:

- Can be quite rigid for most people

- Most are unlikely to be able to stick to this pattern for the long run

Should you do it?

I’d generally not recommend this approach. While a small number of people could potentially see success with it, it’s simply not something most people can adhere to for the long term.
And the fact that you can reap all the benefits of fasting through less intensive methods (as we’ll see next), just doesn’t necessitate such an extreme method.

The 16/8 LeanGains

The LeanGains approach was the brainchild of nutritionist and personal trainer Martin Berkhan. Popularised through his blog of the same name, the LeanGains method of fasting alternates 16 hours of fasting with an 8 hour feed window.

Berkhan was one of the first people to really bring ‘calorie’ and ‘carb cycling’ to the masses. His theory being that utilising more carbs on training days, with a lower carb, higher fat intake on rest days you take advantage of nutrient partitioning for optimising body composition.

While new research is surfacing showing the benefits of calorie and carb cycling, and recently a study on this exact protocol came out showing surprisingly positive results on body composition, we’re still at the very early stages to say anything definitive and the most pragmatic approach still remains the best one: do what you can stick to. if you can cycle your calories, do so. If it causes more anxiety around your diet, just stick to a linear calorie intake.

Example setup:
There are a few ways to set this diet up, and Berkhan has gone into great detail on how to best use each one depending on your circumstance—you can view those here.

Generally, you want to fast for a 16 hour window and restrict your eating window to 8 hours.

I use this approach regularly, keeping the bulk of the fasting window during sleep. So, if my last meal was 7pm on Monday, I wouldn’t eat again until 11am on Tuesday.

![Diagram showing feeding and fasting periods]

The Pros:

- The fasting window is not as extreme as the majority of other fasting diets, so makes it much easier to stick to.

- Designed with physical activity in mind, so works well for active individuals

- Due to the consistent eating / fasting window, it provides structure to people’s day.

The Cons:
Berkhan recommends that for optimal results training take place in the fasted state. This can be impractical for people who can only train later. Though, Berkhan has provided templates for how to use his method in different scenarios.

Some people may not want to cycle their calorie and carb intake.

**Should you do it?**

Out of all the fasting methods, this is perhaps the most practical, and probably why it’s also the most popular. If you are wanting to experiment with fasting, I’d recommend starting with LeanGains.

### The Warrior Diet

The Warrior Diet was created by Ori Hofmekler and involves a 20 hour fast, followed by a 4 hour feeding window. Generally, you fast throughout the day and have one big meal at night. The diet being an imitation of the way ancient warriors, ostensibly, ate.

What makes the Warrior Diet stand out from the rest of the fasting pack is Hofmekler’s allowance of consumption of a small amount of fruits, vegetables and protein if desired. While this intake is kept to a small amount, some contend that due to consumption of food during the ‘fasting’ window, it isn’t really fasting.

**Example setup:**
If you’re last meal was at 7pm on Monday, you would not eat until 3-4pm on Tuesday. Then repeat.

Hofmekler has said the goal should be to get down to one (whole) meal per day.

**The Pros:**

- There is a very heavy emphasis on eating whole, nutrient-rich, foods such as fruits and vegetables

- Reducing meal frequency to 1-2 meals per day can help during a diet when calories are bound to be low

- Works well for people who aren’t hungry during the day, and/or due to work schedule find it easier to skip breakfast and eat later in the day.

**The Cons:**

- Unsustainable for most people.

- Due to the setup, you’re most likely to have to train in the fasted state, which might not be practical for some.
Should you do it?

This diet would be best suited for those who prefer eating a lower meal frequency and train later in the day. If you are wanting to experiment with this approach, it would be best to have 1-2 pieces of fruit with a protein shake before training and then having the one large meal post workout.

Eat Stop Eat

The Eat Stop Eat approach to fasting was pioneered by Brad Pilon and involves a 24 hour fast once or twice per week.

Example setup:

If you’re last meal was at 7pm on Monday night, you wouldn’t eat again until 7pm Tuesday night.
Apart from the 1-2 weekly 24 hour fasts, the rest of the week you eat normally.

The Pros:

- No need to count calories on normal days
- Can suit some people better psychologically
- Seeing that it’s only two days per week, it won’t impede on your training and recovery.

The Cons:

- Unlike the 5:2 and ADF diets, you’re consuming zero calories (outside of calorie-free beverages, coffee, and water) and this can be pretty difficult for some people to stick to.

Should you do it?
This style of fasting can work very well.

I would recommend easing into it slowly. Start with the LeanGains method, and slowly increase the hours you spend in the fasted state until you work your way up to a 24 hour fast. Make sure the day you do decide to do a 24 hour fast, it’s either a rest day or you’re only engaging in some light form of activity like yoga, stretching, walking etc.

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**eTRF**

*(Early Time-Restricted Feeding)*

This is a fairly new model of fasting that has you consuming all your calories in a 6-12 hour window, and is the inverse of the 16/8 LeanGains model: you eat breakfast, lunch, and skip dinner.

The premise of eTRF is that we should be eating in sync with the body’s circadian rhythms; eating when it’s light out and ceasing eating once its dark.

eTRF is still fairly new, though one recent study published in the journal of Cell Metabolism found subjects on an eTRF protocol versus a ‘traditional’ meal timing approach saw huge improvements in their metabolic and health markers, like:

- Reduced insulin resistance
- Reduced blood pressure
- Decreased levels of oxidative stress

Interestingly, participants improved their health despite being in a calorie deficit and despite losing weight.

Even more interesting is the fact that both diets were matched meal for meal so these effects weren’t due to a difference in food quality or quantity.

With all that said, it’s still important to remember a few things:

- It’s only one study, and so we’ll need to wait and see what happens as more research comes out on eTRF.

- The study had a very small sample size—only 8 subjects, and only men were studied.

- The subjects were all obese and prediabetic, so we don’t know what effect this would have on healthy individuals.

**The Pros:**

- I thought long and hard on this and I can’t think of any pros to this approach other than you a) REALLY love breakfast and, b) you’re a social recluse so it doesn’t matter that you stop eating mid-afternoon.

**The Cons:**

- You have a social life and/or a family so skipping dinner is not an option.
How To Start fasting
(+ Misc tips)

If you are wanting to dip your toes into the ascetic world of fasting, here are some tips:

- **Start small** – I know how exciting it is to want to start something new, but I’m gonna need you to chill. Don’t just jump straight into a 24 hour fast. Start small: Instead of a 16 hour fast, maybe you do a 12 hour fast, this isn’t as bad as it seems, you’ll be asleep for 7-8 hours of it; then you’ll just need to fast for another four hours after you wake up. Then once you’re comfortable with the 12 hour fast, you can push it up to 14 hours, then 16.

- **Don’t be so rigid** – if you only fast for 15 hours instead of the planned 16, don’t stress it. It’s not going to make a difference. To add to this, if for whatever reason you need to eat (say for work) then eat. Once again: shit isn’t that serious.

- **Pick your fasting window** – Decide the hours you’re going to be in the fasted state. This will make things simple and you’ll be more likely to stick to it; there’s also the entrainment of Ghrelin.

- **Adjustment period** – there will be a week or two where your body will be adjusting to the fasting, you’ll feel hungrier
during this time but this is simply because your body is used to eating at your regular intervals. This will pass shortly and there’s nothing to panic about.

- **Stay Busy** – During the fasted state you’ll notice a heightened sense of concentration and cognition—make use of this by staying busy. Don’t just sit around brooding about food because that’ll just make you even hungrier. This is why most people fast during the morning hours when they’re the busiest.

- **Coffee is your friend** – coffee and fasting are the Bonnie and Clyde of the nutrition world. Coffee will help with the focus and alertness and suppress appetite. And besides it’s delicious.

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### The Fasting FAQ

1. **Can I drink water during the fast?**

   Yup. Any calorie-free beverages are fine; coffee, water, diet drinks, etc. If you wish to add a splash of milk into your coffee, go for it. Just remember, though: a splash.

2. **I’ve heard fasting will cause metabolic damage?**

   It won’t. This myth came about after a misrepresentation of the Minnesota Starvation Study – you know, the same study I spoke about in my six-motherfucking-thousand-word article. And seeing
that we’re speaking of studies, in a more recent study, researchers took 11 healthy individuals and had them only drink water for 84 hours – yes, 3.5 days.

By the end of the 84 hours, the researchers found the participants metabolic rate had increased by ~14% while they fasted.

Now, before you take this the wrong way and think fasting does the exact opposite and ‘speeds’ up your metabolism, it doesn’t: the reason for this increase is due to the release of catecholamines – a group of chemicals released by the body that allow fat to be mobilised and released from the fat cells, so you can use it for energy when you’re hunting sabre-tooth tigers...or, shopping for your grass-fed Bison at your local supermarket.

Your metabolic rate will eventually return back to normal.

3. Won’t Fasting Make Me Lose Muscle?

No.

As long as you’re not being an idiot–like fasting for an entire week–and strength training, muscle loss is a non issue.

Thankfully, we have research to support this.

In a 2016 study, researchers examined the effects of strength training three times per week in combination with fasting.

The researchers split 34 men who already had experience lifting weights into two groups.
**Group 1:** the fasting group consumed all their calories in an 8 hour window.

**Group 2:** the normal diet group who just ate in a calorie deficit.

Both groups consumed the same number of calories (and protein).

At the end of the study, neither group had lost lean mass or strength.

In this study, obese subjects were randomised to 1 of 4 groups for 12 weeks.

- **Group 1:** Combination (alternate-day fasting + endurance exercise)
- **Group 2:** Alternate-day fasting only
- **Group 3:** Exercise
- **Group 4:** Control

They found the combination group maintained their lean mass during weight loss.

**4. Will *insert food item here* Break My Fast?**

If it contains calories—it’ll break your fast.
Though, if you’re adding a splash of milk to your tea or coffee in the morning, uh, what the fuck are you doing? Milk does not belong in coffee—drink it black or don’t drink it at all.

5. Can I train Fasted?

If you find that you enjoy training fasted, sure.

But for a lot of people fasted training tends to affect performance negatively. And some people can become hypoglycemic if they train fasted.

So my recommendation is to always consume some food 1-2 hours before you lift.

6. I’ve heard BCAA’s will break my fast, what the shit cookie is that about?

Yes, they do.

Besides, BCAAs are pointless. Read this to learn why.

7. But, isn’t breakfast the most important meal of the day?

‘Most important’? No. Most marketed? Yes.

Allow me to defer to Marion Nestle for this:
“Many—if not most—studies demonstrating that breakfast eaters are healthier and manage weight better than non-breakfast eaters were sponsored by Kellogg or other breakfast cereal companies whose businesses depend on people believing that breakfast means ready-to-eat cereal.

Independently funded studies tend to show that any eating pattern can promote health if it provides vegetables and fruits, balances calories, and does not include much junk food.

For most people, when you eat matters far less than how much you eat (emphasis mine). If you wake up starving, by all means eat an early breakfast. If not, eat when you are hungry and don't worry about it.”

Talking of studies, this 2014 study that looked at “The effectiveness of breakfast recommendations on weight loss” concluded:

“A recommendation to eat or skip breakfast had no discernible effect on weight loss in free-living adults who were attempting to lose weight.”

This 2016 study and this 2017 study came to the same conclusion.

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**Final Thoughts**

The biggest benefit of fasting, as I mentioned earlier, is that it helps people realise nothing bad will happen if they don’t eat for a while. This realisation often leads to a better understanding of their habits (“Oh, I was only eating because it was a trained response”).
As with most things, fasting is just a tool. It may work well for you, it may not. Experiment and see how you feel, if it’s not your thing, that’s fine—you don’t have to fast.

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