

The FACT and FICTION of FASTING

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Fasting to cure everything from the common to the complicated ailments has been around for centuries but lately a plethora of new research has shed light on the benefits of intermittent fasting (referred to as IMF) on everything from weight loss, to improving metabolic syndrome to enhancing vitality. IMF refers to limiting the time you eat to eight hours per day (eating between then hours of Noon and 8PM and fasting for the remaining 16 hours) whereas time restricted eating (TRE) is a little more liberal is promoting eating within a twelve-hour window (from 8AM to 8PM) and fasting the remaining twelve hours. There are other ways to approach IMF including fasting mimicking diets but the benefits they promote are very similar. Read on the learn more about this innovative approach to diet and determine if it can help you in reaching your health and wellness goals.

IMF Will Help with Weight Loss: FACT- IMF has been shown to assist with weight loss since it reduces the time one can eat to eight hours each day. This typically will eliminate one meal and possibly one snack which will create a large caloric deficit which is needed to create weight loss. Time restricted eating does not tend to have as much weight loss associated with it since the calorie deficit created is not as big. It is also important to prioritize nutrient dense foods within the eating window to ensure proper nutrient intake within a shortened eating time frame. To gain the most from either approach it is important to keep refined carbohydrates minimized and push fresh vegetables and lean proteins forward.



IMF Will Improve Metabolic Health: FACT- One of the principal benefits that TRE and IMF tout is the ability to reduce insulin resistance. During a fasting period, blood glucose levels will fall which allows the body to secrete less of the hormone insulin. Having higher levels of insulin is correlated with increased abdominal fat, increased inflammation and an increased risk of developing diabetes and coronary artery disease. As stated above, it is important to make sure that within your eating window you are eating well. Prioritizing vegetables, quality proteins, and healthy fats are also important factors in improving metabolic health and eating the majority of your intake from these foods along with IMF is the best way to approach reducing disease risk.



IMF is Appropriate for Everyone: FICTION- There are certain groups of people who should avoid doing IMF including children and pregnant women, people who need to gain weight and people taking medication that can cause low blood glucose (like any form of insulin or sulfonylureas). There are other medical diagnoses that could be negatively impacted by fasting so if you have any concerns it is always better to discuss this with your physician prior to incorporating it into your routine.



There are No Side Effects with IMF: FICTION- There are some side effects mainly with IMF (no side effects are typically seen with TRE) but these impacted are only felt in the initial few weeks. The most common side effects are headache and fatigue, and these can be caused by the body adjusting to using more fats for energy versus carbohydrates. One thing that can help reduce these side effects is drinking plenty of water especially during the fasting window. Ensuring you consume 60-70oz (roughly two liters) of water throughout the day is very helpful especially with reducing the headaches.



IMF Can Help Reduce Hunger: FACT- Initially it can be uncomfortable to feel and hear your stomach growl for the first time in a while, but when you reduce your total caloric intake this is bound to happen. IMF really shines in assisting people with being less responsive to hunger signals and instead teaches people how to be patient and wait till the appropriate time for a meal. The interesting thing is that as your body gets better at burning fat, and becomes less insulin resistant, the overall appetite and hunger will reduce dramatically. This impact can happen even faster if you reduce processed foods and added sugars for your intake within the eight or twelve hour eating window. The combination of a lower carb, very low sugar diet and IMF has proven to be very beneficial in reducing appetite and helping people go longer between meals and snacks without feeling hunger.



You Will Lose Muscle if You Exercise on IMF: FICTION- Research has shown that fasting, when done appropriately, can protect you from losing muscle mass especially as you reduce your calorie intake, which cannot be said for other low-calorie diets. During a prolonged fast (roughly fourteen hours or more) the body can release growth hormone which protects the body from losing muscle mass even if you must exercise towards the end of your fasting window. Research is mixed on how much muscle you can actually add during IMF since it is difficult to add or grow muscle in a calorie deficit, but it will help you maintain the muscle you have while you are trying to reduce body fat.



Intermittent fasting and time restricted eating are both tools that can be used to assist with meeting your health and weight loss goals. Again, when in doubt about its safety or efficacy for you personally speak with your doctor along with seeking guidance from a registered dietitian so you can get assistance with building a well-balanced and sustainable plan that works for you and your needs and preferences.

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