



Health Fact Sheet

Intermittent Fasting

Fasting has been practiced for both health and spiritual reason for millennia and has a long pedigree behind it.

Hard core fasting – going without any form of solid food for long periods – is only for the dedicated few, but intermittent fasting has been shown to have many benefits for health, weight loss and cleansing and involves either a liquid diet or a very reduced intake of calories for a couple of days or so.

Some people choose to fast for one day a week or one day a month as they believe it gives the body a chance to ‘clean house’, giving it a break from continual ingestion of food.

The most popular form of intermittent fasting is the so-called 5/2 version, where normal diet is eaten for 5 days a week and a restricted calorie intake on the remaining two. This is also sometimes seen in the form of 4/3 diet – 4 days of normal eating and 3 of restricted.

For simplicity’s sake we will refer to the 5/2 version.

The principle of intermittent fasting has some science behind it. Research is showing that restricting food intake two days a week leads to healthy weight loss – regardless of what you eat on the other 5 days. (Although obviously if you eat healthily for the 5 days results are enhanced). There are also other benefits as well.

The University of Southern California’s Longevity Institute has shown that going without food for a short amount of time switches on a number of repair genes, which can be beneficial against ageing. This possibly replicates the eating patterns of our ancestors – it is much more likely they operated on the feast or famine principle, than 3 square meals a day.

A study carried out in 2005 on 8 healthy men subjected to intermittent fasting showed striking beneficial changes to insulin sensitivity, and important factor for both health and weight loss. Fasting has also been shown to reduce the levels of a hormone called IGF-1 or Insulin-Like Growth Factor, which affects almost every cell in the body. It promotes growth when we are young, but goes on to promote ageing as we get older.

Studies on mice that were genetically pre-disposed to develop dementia showed that those subjected to fasts developed dementia at the human equivalent age of 80, whilst those who didn’t fast, developed dementia at the age of 50. The key here was the production of a protein called brain-derived neurotrophic factor or BDNF, which stimulates stem cells to turn into new nerve cells in the

hippocampus, the area of the brain related to learning. The increase in BDNF is also linked with suppressing anxiety and elevating mood.

How Does It Work?

For five days a week you eat a normal diet, eating the recommended calorie intake of 2,000 calories a day for women, 2,500 calories a day for men. How you make up those calories does not seem to be an issue. Then for two days a week calorie intake is restricted to no more than 500 calories for women, 600 for men. Ideally the two days should be non-consecutive as most people find this easiest, but find a pattern that suits you.

What Do I Eat on a Fast Day?

Ideally nutrient-rich foods that will leave you satisfied whilst staying within the calorie limit. This covers primarily the high-protein, and low GI (glycaemic index) foods. Steamed white fish, skinless chicken, prawns, tuna, tofu, nuts, seeds, pulses and legumes are all good protein sources.

You can either split your calories into 2 meals and a snack ie. breakfast, snack lunch and dinner, or just breakfast and dinner. Miso soup can be a good snack as it contains protein and is filling, delivering only 84 calories per cup. Avoid alcohol as it is loaded with calories.

It may feel tough at first, but stick with it and you will soon get used to it. Hunger pangs come and go, and are not damaging to your health. Find ways to take your attention off them when they occur – talk to a friend, go for a walk etc. You will find that the longer to do this the less you will be bothered by hunger pangs.

There are a couple of sample menus below – one for women, one for men.

Who Shouldn't Do This?

If you have an underlying health condition, check with your GP first. Also pregnant women, or women trying to get pregnant shouldn't fast, the same for children, diabetics and those with eating disorders.

Don't Like Calorie Counting?

One of the big drawbacks of this approach can be the need to keep counting calories, which keeps you fixated on food – and keeps you feeling hungry as your body has not satisfied its nutrient requirement. Limiting calories can also exacerbate the nutrient deficiency that is seen in most people to some degree.

I have developed an approach which negates the need for calorie counting, and ensures that there is a high nutrient intake, and reduces the likelihood of hunger pangs being a big issue on the fasting days. For basic information go to Superfoods 5/2 Diet fact sheet.

If you are looking for sustained weight loss using these principles but also addressing the different underlying imbalances that keep weight returning look at the programme **Sustainable Weight Loss**.

Standard Calorie Counting Fast Day Menus – Women

Breakfast

Scrambled eggs (using skimmed milk) and two eggs. Scramble in a frying pan without fat. Stir in 50 g of smoked salmon. Calories: 256

Boiled egg and ½ grapefruit. Calories: 125

Porridge (40 g oats) made with water and topped with blueberries. Calories: 197

Half a tub of cottage cheese, 1 sliced pear, 1 fresh fig. Calories: 142

Sliced apple, sliced mango and 1 hardboiled large egg. Calories: 213

1 small pot natural yoghurt, handful blueberries, 2 slices ham. Calories: 130

Smoked salmon, 1 water biscuit, spread with 1 tsp cream cheese. Calories: 200

1 boiled egg, slice ham, 1 tangerine. Calories: 140

No Lunch

Dinner

Roasted vegetable salad – 10 cherry tomatoes mixed with 1 courgette sliced, ½ sliced aubergine, 1 sliced red pepper and drizzled with balsamic vinegar. Sprinkle with basil leaves and roast for 20 – 25 mins in hot oven. Sprinkle with 2 tsp parmesan.

2 tangerines Calories: 239

Vegetarian Chilli – Finely chop clove garlic and 1 red chilli in 1 tsp olive oil. Add pinch cumin and 4 small chopped mushrooms, adding water if it sticks. Add ½ tin chopped tomatoes and ½ tin kidney beans and simmer for 10 mins. Serve with 2 tbsp cooked wild brown rice. Calories: 378

Chicken Stir Fry – cut a medium chicken fillet into strips and fry in 1 tsp olive oil with 1 tsp chopped ginger, 1 tbsp chopped coriander, 1 clove crushed garlic and 2 tsp soy sauce. Squeeze in juice of ½ lemon. When browned add handful of sugarsnap peas, 100 g sliced cabbage and 2 carrots cut into strips. Cook for 7 – 10 minutes.

1 tangerine Calories: 306

Sashimi – 4 pieces salmon and 4 pieces tuna served with soy sauce, wasabi and ginger.

1 tangerine Calories: 341

Tuna, Bean and Garlic Salad – put 140 g canned cannelli beans, 120 g canned tuna in spring water, 6 chopped cherry tomatoes and a large handful baby leaf spinach into a bowl, Drizzle with dressing of 1 clove crushed garlic, juice and zest of lemon and a splash of white wine vinegar. Calories: 255

Feta Nicoise – Chop 1 hardboiled egg and mix with handful lettuce leaves, handful cooked green beans, 100g chopped cucumber and top with 90 g feta cheese, 6 black olives and 1 tbsp chopped parsley.

Drizzle with white wine vinegar to serve. Calories: 360

Thai Salad – put 2 tbsp thai fish sauce, juice of 1 lime, 1 tsp sugar, 2 sliced spring onions, 1 chopped red chilli into a bowl. Mix in 10 small cooked prawns, 2 grated carrots, and 50g soaked vermicelli noodles. Toss and serve.

Calories: 323

Mexican Pizza – 1 torilla topped with 2 tbsp passata, 2 small diced balls of light mozzarella and scatter with chopped mushrooms, red pepper, courgette, red onion, aubergine and/or spinach. Cook in hot oven 5 – 10 mins.

Calories: 358

Fast Day Menus – Men

Breakfast

Scrambled eggs (using skimmed milk) and two eggs. Scramble in a frying pan without fat. Stir in 34 g of parma ham. Calories: 261

2 boiled eggs, 5 asparagus spears, 1 slice wholemeal toast, 2 plums. Calories: 331

Fry ½ sliced onion in 1 tsp oil, add 4 small chopped mushrooms. Cook until tender and add handful spinach. Then pour over 2 beaten eggs and cook for 5 mins. Grill until eggs are set. Calories: 245

2 poached eggs on a slice of wholemeal toast. Calories: 258

2 grilled rashers bacon (lean), 1 small sausage, 1 small grilled mushroom, handful spinach. Calories: 177

1 small pot fat-free natural yoghurt, 1 chopped banana, 1 tbsp sugar-free muesli. Calories: 206

150 g Smoked salmon, with lemon wedges. Calories: 214

Small pot natural fat-free yoghurt, 1 chopped banana, 6 strawberries, 100 g blueberries, 4 almonds. Calories: 271

No Lunch

Dinner

Spiced Dhal – Fry 1 chopped onion, glove crushed garlic, 1 tsp chopped ginger in 1 tsp olive oil. Cook for 5 mins. Add ½ pint water, 50 g dried washed red lentils, pinch cumin, coriander, turmeric, cayenne pepper, salt and pepper. Boil for 20 mins. Garnish 2 tbsp fat-free yoghurt. Serve with 2 poppadums. Calories: 326

Thai Steak Salad – Grill 140 g sirloin steak and slice thinly. Serve on 100g shredded lettuce and 100 g shredded savoy cabbage. Serve with dressing of juice 1 lime, 1 tsp sugar, 1 clove crushed garlic, 1 chopped, de-seeded chilli and 1 tbsp thai fish sauce. Calories: 257

Seared Tuna – Sear 170 g tuna steak, squeezing with lemon if necessary. Slice into strips 1 small red pepper, 1 sliced, courgette. Mix with 1 tsp olive oil and seasoning and grill on medium-heat for 5 mins. Dress with squeeze of lemon and serve.

12 strawberries Calories: 352

Roast Salmon – place 140g salmon fillet, and 10 cherry tomatoes on a baking tray. Bake 200° C for 15 – 20 mins. Serve with 112 g cooked green beans.

20 raspberries Calories: 258

Roast mackerel and vegetables – place 2 sliced tomatoes in foil. Put mackerel fillet on top and wrap. Roast in hot oven for 10 – 15 minutes. Serve on big pile cooked broccoli dressed with lemon juice. Calories: 415

Bacon and Butterbean Soup – Fry 2 rashers lean bacon in 1 tsp olive oil or 2 ins. Add 1.2 small chopped onion, ½ sliced carrot, and 1 diced celery stalk. Cook for 5 mins. Add ½ can butterbeans and ½ pint water. Simmer for 20 mins. Season and blend or mash for consistency. Calories: 386

Roast Pork – serve 150 g lean roast pork with 50g cauliflower and 50 g broccoli. Drizzle with meat juices. Calories: 383

Prawn, Watercress and Avocado Salad – 28g watercress, 140 g cooked prawns, ½ avocado, ½ chopped red onion, 1 tbsp capers and splash of white wine vinegar.
1 tangerine Calories: 320