

Health Benefits of Intermittent Fasting - Is it worth the “weight”?

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Religious and spiritual practices have been using traditional fasting as far back as the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates.

This is no surprise when you think of Hippocrates, who is

considered to be the father of modern medicine, his most famous quote being “Let thy food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food”. Nutritional therapy follows this discipline of not defining a person by disease, but by their environment, including diet, digestion, gut health, lifestyle, sleep, and beliefs.

This article is slightly different to my previous nutrition articles, as it will be focusing on the benefits of timing of foods, rather than specific nutrients (see the benefits on page 9). This is known as Intermittent Fasting. There are many different types of fasting, though for ease of understanding, this is written on the basis of fasting for 16 hours and eating within an 8-hour window. This is also known as the “eating window plan.” For example, stop eating dinner at 7pm and the next meal will be brunch the next day at 11am.

Having a thyroid imbalance may have many guises including weight gain, fatigue, depression, foggy head, elevated cholesterol, and joint pain. This is due to thyroid receptors being in nearly every cell of our body; there are roughly 15 trillion cells in a human body.

The magnitude of this figure alone is enormous. It is no wonder that any slight imbalance in our thyroid hormone can make a difference between “living our best life” to “making it through the day.” I know which one I would choose every day!

So how does Intermittent Fasting work? Well, upon fasting, the body ramps up the metabolism to meet the demand on energy. Even if we are just “at rest” the body still demands energy to maintain temperature, keep our heart beating, oxygen flow/breathing, brain function etc. The body demands energy, even whilst sleeping. In addition, the more active we are, the more energy we require and the more capacity we must

burn. It makes sense to combine intermittent fasting with regular exercise.

Energy is created in the body's powerhouse called the mitochondria. Mitochondria is in most cells, though abundant in the brain and heart, which are the most energy demanding organs.

Energy is not created without oxygen, and oxygen is not created without the consequence of producing oxidative stress. We need oxidative stress to fight infection and support the immune system as well as to regulate signalling in the body, including nitric oxide, which is essential for blood pressure/modulation.

To combat excess oxidative stress, we produce antioxidants that protect us and reduce the free radical damage. The older we get and the more energy we produce, the more vulnerable we are to oxidative stress, which consequents in premature ageing and disease.

The good news is, intermittent fasting speeds up the renewal of cells, and this has been known as “flipping the metabolic switch” or up-regulating DNA. Our DNA codes for enzymes that are responsible for the production of antioxidants. Therefore, intermittent fasting can be anti-ageing, just through this mechanism alone.

Most of the studies on intermittent fasting found reduction in blood sugar levels, cholesterol, blood pressure and weight loss within a 12-week period. Therefore, this way of eating is all about sustainability, think of intermittent fasting as a journey, rather than a quick fix.



Intermittent Fasting requires strong willpower and discipline. It is all about knowing the difference to what you want right now, to knowing what you really want the most. In other words, in the

moment, you might have sugar cravings, though long term you would like more energy, better sleep, increased cognition etc.

Whilst fasting, it is important to keep hydrated through drinking water and herbal teas but reduce stimulants including alcohol, caffeine, and sugar.

On rising start the day with a large glass of water and continue to drink gradually throughout the day. Being hydrated keeps the cravings away and drives you through the morning ready for your first meal. Eating a “wholefood” diet, feeds your body the nutrients it demands to fuel up the mitochondria and to increase the production of energy.



If you think you are ready to start intermittent fasting, then choose 2 days of the week to begin with, and then, gradually increase this to 3-4 days per week. Aim to drink between 2-3 litres of water per day.

Intermittent fasting is not suitable for children, pregnant women, teenagers, people who are underweight, people with eating disorders or anyone who is hypoglycemic. Patients with Diabetes Type 1, using insulin, should be under strict supervision from their health care practitioner. I would also note that this is not suitable for people who have just started or are still adjusting to thyroid medication.

I think the take home message from this year is we have to be accountable for our own health, especially as we are now beginning to get back into the workplace, travel on public transport and hopefully start to enjoy going out again.

Understanding how we can improve our health, without reliance on medication, must be the best form of accountability.



If you would like a nutritional consultation and/or a personalised intermittent fasting menu plan, please email us on melissa@melissa-cohen.com to arrange an appointment.

www.melissa-cohen.com

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Blood Markers	Benefits
Lowers Insulin levels	Increase energy, preventative for Type 2 Diabetes, decrease visceral/belly fat and weight loss
Increases Human growth hormone	Increase metabolism, anti-ageing (cellular repair), increase muscle mass/decrease fat, stimulates immune system
Decreases Hba1C	Regulates blood sugar, sustainable energy
Decreases tumour necrosis factor (TNF) and Interleukin 6 (IL6)	Elevated TNF and IL6 are inflammatory and linked to auto immune disorders, therefore reduces inflammation – Hashimoto’s/Graves’ Disease
Increases Autophagy	Regulates immune system and clears out unwanted/old cells and eliminates bacterium/virus