

LEARNING MADE EASY



Intermittent Fasting

for
dummies[®]
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Safely shed weight
and keep it off

Flip on your
metabolic switch

Make healthy
and delicious recipes

Janet Bond Brill
PhD, RDN, FAND, LDN

Nationally recognized nutrition and
fitness expert and best-selling author



Intermittent Fasting

by Janet Bond Brill, PhD, RDN, FAND

Nationally recognized nutrition and fitness expert

**for
dummies®**
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Intermittent Fasting For Dummies®

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Introduction

Congratulations, you've come to the right place if you want to lose weight and body fat, get more fit, and improve your health! Fasting has been used throughout history to promote weight loss and increase longevity. Intermittent fasting, currently one of the world's most popular health and fitness trends, is a newer style of fasting that has gained considerable recognition in recent years, because many people find these regimens easier to follow than traditional, highly restrictive, calorie-counting diets. It's an uncomplicated concept, which makes it simple to follow without the deprivation associated with other diets. Translation: Intermittent fasting equals freedom! Intermittent fasting is not a diet in the conventional sense, but rather an eating pattern — a timed approach to eating.

That's why intermittent fasting has generated such a positive buzz — anecdotes of its effectiveness have proliferated around the globe. With intermittent fasting having become the go-to lifestyle, as a lifestyle research doctor, I needed to understand the science. So, I read the data and discovered a mountain of rock-solid scientific evidence showing that intermittent fasting, when combined with a healthy diet and lifestyle, is a remarkably effective approach for losing body fat, especially stubborn belly fat; maintaining or even gaining muscle; and treating or preventing many diseases and conditions that plague Americans.

What makes this health trend so popular? It's not really a diet, per se, but a new style of eating and living that after you get the hang of, it can allow you to attain your health and wellness goals and still embrace life and eat the delicious, healthy foods you love. You'll find out that it's not so much about what foods you should eat but more so, when you eat. As they say, "timing is everything."

About This Book

Intermittent Fasting For Dummies gives you all the tools you need to follow an intermittent fasting plan. Discover why simply changing the timing of your meals to allow for periodic breaks in eating can make such a positive difference in your body. With all the conflicting information about intermittent fasting out there, you may be wondering what's real and what's fake advice.

This handy guide puts all the important information together in plain English, laying out easy-to-follow guidelines for the different methods as well as describing what intermittent fasting can do for you — help you lose the fat for good, get healthier, fight disease, and hopefully increase your longevity. Remember, *you* are in charge, and you decide what will work for you.

By helping you eat fewer meals, intermittent fasting can lead to an automatic reduction in calorie intake. Additionally, it will positively change your hormone levels and flip the switch on your metabolism to facilitate all kinds of healthy bodily processes.

Specifically this book discusses the five most popular methods of intermittent fasting. Each type is effective, but may not be the right fit for everyone. You'll find out how to practice the different varieties of intermittent fasting as well as determine which method works best for your specific lifestyle.

This book is different from other books available about intermittent fasting because it's researched and written by a trusted expert in nutrition, health, and fitness — a registered dietitian and nutritionist — me! You can have confidence that the plans in this book are safe and based on sound science.

Foolish Assumptions

When writing this book, I made the following assumptions about you:

- » You may want to lose weight and keep it off.
- » You may want to get rid of excess body fat (especially stubborn belly fat).
- » You may already be lean and fit but want to tap into the myriad health benefits associated with intermittent fasting.
- » You want to increase your energy level and boost your metabolism.
- » You may have tried multiple diets in the past and been frustrated with the process and possibly gained back the weight.
- » You want to reduce the risk of diabetes, cancer, and heart disease.
- » You may want to simplify your life by freeing up time previously used to plan, cook, and clean up after all those meals.
- » You may have sensed all the excitement about intermittent fasting and want to give it a whirl.
- » You want to live a long, happy and healthy life.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, and in true *For Dummies* fashion, you'll notice several icons — all of them are designed to help you better understand and get the most out of your intermittent fasting plan. The following is a list of the icons you can expect to see throughout this book and what they mean:



TIP

This icon points to a tip that you can help your intermittent fasting process easier to follow.



REMEMBER

This piece of information is especially noteworthy and important.



WARNING

Warnings, if posted, are enormously significant. Be wary!



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This book is based on scientific data and hypotheses, which may get a bit technical in the explanation. I hope to explain the scientific jargon in easy-to-grasp concepts, but if it's too confusing, skip it.



WEB EXTRAS

I'll occasionally direct you to a helpful website with this icon.

Beyond the Book

In addition to all the information in this book, you can find additional information online to help you with your intermittent fast. If you want to discover more about nutrition, healthy eating, and the Mediterranean Diet, you can visit my websites:

- » www.DrJanet.com: For nutrition tips, recipes, blogs, book and app links, and all things nutritious and healthy, visit my website. You can also find out about my extensive credentials so you can have full confidence in my written nutrition advice.
- » www.MediterraneanNutritionist.com: This website is your one-stop Mediterranean eating guide. *U.S. News & World Report* has consistently rated the Mediterranean Diet as No. 1 in numerous categories.

Where to Go from Here

You can read the entire book from cover to cover or if that's not how you want to go about it, feel free to go to the Table of Contents and read the chapters that most interest you right now. You may want to start in the kitchen or supermarket, stocking up on delicious, nutritious foods for recipes in Chapters 21 and 22. Perhaps you may want to start with Chapter 1 to get an overview of intermittent fasting. Or you may decide to peruse the Parts of Tens first to get a quick overview of key recommendations in bite-sized bits of information. Regardless, this journey is all about putting you in charge. It's about *you* taking control of your life and changing *when* you eat while still enabling you to choose what you eat.

If you want additional information to reference whenever you want, refer to the Cheat Sheet at www.dummies.com. Just search for "Intermittent Fasting For Dummies Cheat Sheet."

1

Getting Started with Intermittent Fasting

IN THIS PART . . .

Find out what intermittent fasting is and why this eating pattern is a complete game-changer.

Evaluate whether intermittent fasting is a lifestyle that's feasible for you and what you need to do if it is.

Assess where you're beginning so you can figure out where you want to go with your intermittent fasting plan.

Determine your ideal weight range for your personal health to get you a clearer picture of what is a safe and sustainable weight and percent body fat goal.

Get up to speed on this exciting method of losing body fat (especially the dangerous belly fat) and getting healthier.

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Entering the world of intermittent fasting
- » Visualizing what intermittent fasting can do for you
- » Answering your frequently asked questions
- » Starting the walk toward the path of change

Chapter **1**

The Lowdown on Intermittent Fasting, Just the Basics

You want to begin an intermittent fasting plan and embark on a leaner, healthier, and longer life. (You wouldn't be reading this book otherwise, right?) You may have heard that intermittent fasting is the key that unlocks everything from sustainable weight loss to increased mental clarity to a serious boost in energy. You may have asked your healthcare provider about how to follow this wildly popular diet but given her limited nutrition knowledge, you may not have received valid information.

So in vogue is this health and fitness trend, that it has moved into fad diet territory — meaning intensely popular for a short period of time — spawning massive amounts of misinformation at your fingertips. Because of its fad status, you may have fallen prey to illegitimate intermittent fasting claims and techniques proliferating on the Internet. This chapter serves as your jumping-off point to the world of intermittent fasting and explains in plain English what intermittent fasting is, based on sound science.

Defining Exactly What Intermittent Fasting Is (and Isn't)

Before you can understand what intermittent fasting is, I first need to discuss fasting, which is different from intermittent fasting. *Fasting* is refraining from consuming food or drinks, except for water, for a set period. Traditional fasting, for lengthy periods of time, isn't a healthy means of weight loss and can be extremely dangerous. In fact, long-term fasting starves the body of essential nutrients, causes the body to shut down (metabolism slows dramatically), and can be life threatening.

CLARIFYING STARVATION MODE: HINT, IT'S A MYTH

This nutrition myth pervades the dieting world, with confusion occurring because the term *starvation mode* means many different things to many different people. The often-repeated belief is that when trying to lose weight, you shouldn't drop your calories too low, because your body will go into starvation mode, and you'll hold onto fat and stop losing weight. This is 100 percent false. You don't gain weight or fat from eating too little. You won't go into a starvation mode during your intermittent fasting regimen.

Consider these facts:

- The starvation mode refers to the reduction in metabolic rate that occurs when the body is starved for long periods of time, such as observed in severely malnourished people with anorexia nervosa.
- During severe starvation, the body does in fact slow its metabolism down, dramatically; the body's natural physiological response to an extreme reduction in calorie intake, a technique the body uses as a survival mechanism. Without it, humans would have become extinct thousands of years ago.
- The starvation mode does *not* occur during most people's dieting experiences. Dieting, even low-calorie diets, don't catapult your body into starvation mode.
- When you lose weight, your body will require less calories to maintain your new body weight because there's less of you, so you require fewer calories, a concept referred to as *metabolic adaptation*.
- You can offset this metabolic adaptation and keep your metabolism as high as possible when losing weight by adding in strength-training exercise and making sure you eat enough protein.

However, *intermittent fasting* differs from traditional fasting. As the name suggests, intermittent fasting refers to alternating periods of fasting with periods of eating. It's a broad term, encompassing several specific types of short-term fasting protocols. The common theme among intermittent fasting regimens is that people periodically abstain from eating for periods longer than the typical overnight fast. Individuals either fast during a certain window every day or block out certain days of the week. These short eating rest periods allow the body's numerous systems to rest and reset without triggering the risk of malnutrition and metabolic slowdown that accompanies severely restrictive long-term fasting regimens.

Here I take a closer look at what intermittent fasting is and some of the dos and don'ts of getting started on your intermittent fasting journey.

Recognizing the nuts and bolts of intermittent fasting

Here are the key principles of intermittent fasting lifestyle methods:

- » **All intermittent fasts restrict eating and drinking for set, short periods of time.** Every method of intermittent fasting outlined in Part 3 has feasting and fasting periods that vary, depending on the regimen.
- » **The intermittent fasting approach involves alternating periods of eating and fasting.** These time periods differ depending on the variation of intermittent fasting, so you choose the method that works best for your lifestyle.
- » **All intermittent fasting protocols are safe and effective for healthy individuals.** Each of the methods in Part 3 are safe and have been shown to improve a person's health and well-being, if practiced correctly.
- » **All intermittent fasting protocols have certain rules you must follow during your fasting window.** These steps include drinking plentiful amounts of water, black coffee, tea, and any other non-caloric beverage during your fasting window; just no solid foods allowed. Make sure to stay hydrated during your intermittent fasting periods.
- » **All intermittent fasting protocols prohibit you from eating excessive amounts of junk food during your eating windows.** This habit will negate the many benefits of intermittent fasting. The biggest mistake people make is eating too much and eating unhealthy foods during their eating periods.

» **Intermittent fasting can be practiced for health and fitness and not necessarily for weight loss.** Although weight loss is one of the most common reasons for trying intermittent fasting, many people choose to get leaner and fitter and tap into the numerous health benefits intermittent fasting provides without the goal of losing weight. In fact, some follow an intermittent fasting program with the primary goal of gaining muscle weight and losing body fat.



WARNING

Although intermittent fasting is a healthy choice for some, for others, it can be dangerous. Several groups of people who absolutely *should not fast* include the following:

- » Pregnant or lactating women
- » Individuals who have eating disorders
- » Individuals with type 1 or type 2 diabetes unless working with their healthcare professional (physicians *must* be consulted if you have any underlying chronic disease)
- » Individuals using medications that they must take with food, unless working with their physician
- » High-level endurance athletes
- » Elderly individuals with balance issues
- » Children

Chapter 7 discusses in greater detail who should and shouldn't follow an intermittent fasting plan.

Delving deeper into how intermittent fasting works

Intermittent fasts cycle between periods of fasting with periods of eating. Whether or not you're fasting, the body still requires energy to run efficiently. The body's main source of energy is a sugar called *glucose*, which typically comes from carbohydrates such as grains, fruits, vegetables, and even sweets. Both your liver and muscles store the sugar and release it into the bloodstream whenever the body needs it.

Looking closer at the physiology

To understand how intermittent fasting works, you need a quick adaptive physiology refresher. Because food wasn't always abundant, and sometimes wasn't available at all, the human body was forced to adapt to fasting involuntarily — and

then, when Stone Age humans found food, they would feast. Because of those evolutionary conditions, human bodies evolved to permit their bodies to thrive by adapting to those cycles of feasting and fasting. In order to survive in such environments where food was scarce, humans had to possess the ability to quickly shift their metabolism from fat storage to fat breakdown for energy. This metabolic flexibility became built into human's genetic code, producing a system where energy was stored in the form of body fat when food was available and then easily accessed for energy to enable humans to perform at a high level, physically, during extended periods when food wasn't available. This pattern enabled human brains and bodies to function optimally in a food deprived/fasted state, giving the human race a survival advantage.

Scientists have hypothesized that the human body's adaptive benefits of intermittent fasting led to the superior cognitive capabilities (brain power) of humans compared to other mammals. These brain adaptations facilitated human's ability to invent tools, novel hunting methods, animal domestication, agriculture and food storage, and processing.

Because intermittent fasting patterns can replicate the feast-or-famine diet of human ancestors, many researchers have now recognized the advantages of periodically fasting (such as increased brain power, physical enhancements, and disease prevention) for the multitude of health benefits this lifestyle gives rise to.

Examining the timeline of events

What is the physiology of fasting? Although everybody responds to fasting a little differently (genetics, health, and age all play a role), there is a general timeline of events — a predictable set of metabolic responses as your fast stretches from hours into a day or longer. (For a much more detailed discussion of the different metabolic states your body goes through when practicing intermittent fasting, refer to Chapter 5.)



REMEMBER

After fasting for a mere eight hours, here is the timeline of what happens in your body:

- 1. You have no food coming in, so you exhaust your supplies.**

Your body has tapped into your liver reserves of blood sugar to continue to keep your blood sugar level in the normal range. You're now in what's termed a *catabolic* or breakdown state.

- 2. You enter the fasted state; your liver has run out of its sugar reserves.**

This triggers the liver to manufacture new sugar from noncarbohydrate sources (scientifically termed *gluconeogenesis*) to continue to supply energy to the cells. With no carbohydrates consumed, the body creates its own sugar by

using mainly fat. This marks the body's transition into the fasting mode. Studies have shown that gluconeogenesis increases the number of calories the body burns, meaning when your metabolism starts to increase.

3. **You flip your metabolic switch.**

One key mechanism responsible for many of the beneficial health effects of short-term, intermittent fasting is flipping of the metabolic switch. The *metabolic switch* is the body's preferential shift from utilization of blood sugar to fat and fat-derived ketones for energy. In this step, your body breaks down fat, shuttling it to the liver, which creates ketones from fat to use for energy. The metabolic switch typically occurs between 12 to 36 hours after cessation of eating.

4. **Extended fasts (longer than 36 hours) begin to slow metabolism down.**

That's why you shouldn't practice extended fasting with intermittent plans. After about 36 hours, the body stops using these energy sources (sugar and fat). The fasting mode then transitions to the more serious starvation mode.

5. **You enter starvation mode.**

At this point, your metabolism has slowed dramatically, and your body begins to burn your own muscle protein for energy. The lack of essential nutrient intake plus using muscle for energy sets off an alarming cascade of dangerous complications.



WARNING

During your recommended intermittent fasting periods, your fasting periods shouldn't extend beyond 36 hours. Although some people choose to fast for up to 48 hours, I recommend your intermittent fasting periods don't extend 36 hours because of the physiological reasons I mention here. Chapter 5 probes much deeper into the science of intermittent fasting.

Considering Your Intermittent Fasting Options

The most effective dietary plan is the one you can adhere to for the long term while still living your best life. If you want to lose weight and are sick and tired of counting calories, then this eating pattern may be the right fit for you. The popularity of intermittent fasting lies in its simplicity and the fact that the fasting periods are time-limited, which people find easier to maintain than traditional diets.

Intermittent fasting is not only for people who want to lose weight, but it's also a phenomenal lifestyle plan for individuals who want to improve their health, fight

aging, and simplify their lifestyle. The scientific data shows intermittent fasting has powerful effects on your body and brain and may even extend your life. Chapter 6 discusses the miraculous health benefits linked to intermittent fasting.

Part 3 discusses the five most common ways of practicing intermittent fasting in detail. These different alternative protocols are as follows:

- » **Time-restricted intermittent fasting:** The *time-restricted intermittent fasting*, also called the *eating window plan*, is by far the most popular plan, because many rave about it being the easiest to follow. This plan consists of fasting for a daily 16-, 18-, or 20-hour consecutive period and setting your daily eating window for the remaining 8, 6, or 4 hours (albeit, you can use other time windows). Check out Chapter 9 for more details.
- » **Warrior intermittent fasting plan:** The *warrior intermittent fasting* plan is based on the eating patterns of ancient warriors who ate very little during the day and then feasted at night. Flip to Chapter 10 for the details on this method of intermittent fasting.
- » **Alternate day intermittent fasting:** *Alternate day fasting (ADF)*, another form of intermittent fasting, involves fasting one day, eating the next, and repeating. Chapter 11 gives you the lowdown on this method.
- » **5:2 intermittent fasting plan:** The *5:2 plan*, also known as the *fast diet*, entails eating 500 to 600 calories on two nonconsecutive days of the week. Chapter 12 explains the ins and outs of this plan.
- » **Eat-stop-eat intermittent fasting:** This plan requires fasting for a full 24 hours, once or twice a week. Head to Chapter 13 for how to incorporate eat-stop-eat intermittent fasting into your life.



TIP

Choosing the best intermittent fasting plan is simply a matter of preference. All the intermittent fasts in this book, if followed as directed, will result in weight loss (if desired), maintenance of muscle mass, and myriad additional health benefits. My goal is to explain all of them so that *you* can choose the one that fits you best. Remember, you are the one in control. The ideal intermittent fasting method for you is the one that is most sustainable and easiest to stick with. If you try one and it doesn't help you achieve your health and wellness goals in a reasonable time frame, switch to another. In fact, switching up your fasting plan can be beneficial as well, from a physiological standpoint. You may also consider assessing some of your barriers to change by doing some of the journaling exercises suggested in Chapters 2 and 23.

MAKING THE EVOLUTION CONNECTION WITH TODAY'S INTERMITTENT FASTING

For more than a hundred thousand years, humans roamed the earth. They were foragers, so they'd fast until they found, caught, or killed their food. Like so many animals in the wild, human's paleolithic ancestors regularly experienced extended time periods with little or no food. The timing of eating depended on the availability of food; they ate opportunistically. Because humans evolved in environments where food was relatively scarce, they developed numerous adaptations that enabled them to function at a high level, both physically and cognitively, when in a food-deprived/fasted state. Importantly, metabolic, endocrine, and nervous systems evolved in ways that facilitated high levels of physical and mental performance when in the fasted state (from approximately 12 to 36 hours without food). Both the metabolic shift to ketone utilization (a chemical derivative of fat), and adaptive responses of the brain and nervous system to food deprivation play major roles in the fitness-promoting and disease-allaying effects of intermittent fasting.

Hunter-gatherers gathered berries off bushes; dug up tubers; hunted mammals; scavenged meat, fat, and organs from previously killed carcasses; and discovered how to fish and hunt with spears, nets, bows, and arrows. Furthermore, their activity level is a far cry from the sedentary lifestyle so many people today lead. By the 20th century, most hunter-gatherers had vanished from the face of the earth (currently only a few scattered tribes of hunter-gatherers remain on the planet).

Then came farming

Some 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, things began to change. Homo sapiens altered their lifestyle from hunting and gathering to a more sedentary routine of farming — what's termed the *agricultural revolution*. The human diet also took a major turn with the invention of agriculture. The domestication of grains created a plentiful and predictable food supply — *food security* — which allowed for storing surplus food. Provisions became readily available, hence people no longer had to eat opportunistically, and fasting was no longer necessary. The development of agriculture also brought a great societal transformation. People shifted from a nomadic existence to living in permanent communities, agrarian cultures.

The Industrial Revolution changed it all

Then the Industrial Revolution happened in the United States from the mid-19th century until the early 20th century. This shift in work routines permanently altered the way Americans eat. Refrigeration and transportation allowed for storing, packaging, and transporting of foods. Work shifted from farm to factory, and the human-eating schedule went to the three-meals-per-day routine that is the current eating pattern. Today, most Americans eat three meals and multiple snacks and rarely go more than four day-time hours without eating.