

## Can intermittent fasting help you lose weight?

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Intermittent fasting describes a type of dieting that involves periods of routine fasting. This includes alternate-day fasting (ADF), where dieters typically have a 'fast day', where energy intake is strongly reduced (or no food is eaten), with a 'feast' day, where food is consumed without caloric restriction. Other popular examples are the 5:2 diet, which allows five days of eating without caloric restriction and two consecutive or non-consecutive 'fast' days, and the 16:8 diet, which restricts food intake to a single 8-hour period each day.<sup>1</sup>

Research shows that intermittent fasting can be an effective strategy for weight-loss.<sup>1</sup> However, these effects are probably due to an overall calorie deficit, as a result of a lower energy intake throughout the week, rather than an outcome of fasting periods.<sup>2</sup> A study comparing fasting diets with calorie-restricted diets found that while intermittent fasting seemed effective for weight loss, it was not superior to calorie restricted diets.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, depending on your age, health and lifestyle, fasting, unless properly-managed, could have negative side effects. For example, it could result in a lack of concentration, low mood and tiredness due to insufficient energy intake on certain days.<sup>2</sup> The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends that energy intake (calories) should be balanced with energy expenditure to allow us to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle.<sup>3</sup>

### Is the wait worth the weight?

Although intermittent fasting is unlikely to be sustainable for most of us in the long-term, if fasting periodically suits your lifestyle, then it might be an effective strategy for weight-management. Nevertheless, it should be carefully planned to meet all the nutritional needs set out in current dietary guidelines. If you are thinking of fasting, make sure to do it in a healthy and safe way by following current dietary guidelines and seeking the advice of a suitably qualified professional, like a registered dietitian, before you start.