



How to Gently Introduce Intermittent Fasting for Health and Healing

Intermittent Fasting is catching on as a simple way to boost health, create more energy, improve sleep and if right for you, release extra weight. I've heard many people say "I could never do that", and I too once held that thought. But what is it exactly that we can't do?

The idea of "fasting" can seem quite daunting and I will admit when I started this practice five years ago I was filled with fear about missing a meal or feeling hungry. And I quickly learned both were okay. When I teach people about stepping into an Intermittent Fasting lifestyle, my approach has always been one of moderation. Sometimes baby steps are all we need. Sometimes, less truly is more.

According to Harvard researchers, simple fasting improves metabolism, lowers blood sugar levels; lessens inflammation, and even helps clear out toxins and damaged cells, which lowers risk for cancer and enhances brain function. I invite you to take this four week challenge, which is really a gift of better health.

Below I have outlined four simple steps that you can take to introduce fasting into your lifestyle. Plan to adopt (and maintain) one new habit each week and at the end of the month you will have layered four wonderful health habits into your routine. I encourage you to make a note of how you feel each day to track your progress and become more aware of any changes you may experience. No need to be fancy, just take a few minutes to jot down key markers such as (1) quality of sleep (2) energy level (3) hunger level and (4) clarity of thought (meaning no brain fog!).

Tip: It can be much more fun and lead to greater success if you embark on these changes with a friend or family member. You can cheer each other on, hold each other accountable, brag, commiserate and celebrate your accomplishments together. Use the outline below to get started. And don't forget to celebrate your successes!

Week One: Stop snacking after dinner. It is so easy to grab a bowl of popcorn or ice cream when relaxing on the couch, and yet if we just finished dinner we are likely not hungry! For many this evening snack is an automatic habit. Once dinner is over, you might brush your teeth, turn off the kitchen lights and enjoy a cup of tea or glass of water. I've even known people who choose to paint their fingernails as a way to avoid nibbling... find what works for you! After seven days this new habit should be easier to maintain moving forward.

Week two: Allow three hours between dinner and bed. If you finish dinner at 7:00 pm, aim to go to bed at 10:00 pm or later. This pause allows your body to spend energy on sleep and nightly repair rather than digestion.

Week three: Allow a minimum of 12 hours between dinner and your first meal of the day. This means if you finish dinner at 7:00 pm you would wait until 7:00 am to eat. If you go to bed at 10:00 pm and sleep for eight hours, that means you are only awake for one hour before you enjoy breakfast! Don't be surprised to find that once 12 hours have passed you actually may not be physically hungry yet! Listen to your body and the feedback you are getting. If you wish to postpone breakfast a bit more please feel free to do so, eating when you are naturally hungry.

Week four: If you typically have one or more snacks a day, this week your new goal will be to eliminate one snack. True confessions, before I began an Intermittent Fasting lifestyle, I was accustomed to eating three meals and two snacks every day. Originally it was very hard for me to drop this habit, but here is what I learned: (1) Most of the time I ate a snack because it was what I always did. It was 3:00 pm so that meant it was snack time, right? And then after a few days I gained some clarity and recognized that when 3:00 pm rolled around, I really was not hungry. (2) If I ate a healthy, protein rich lunch I didn't actually need or want a snack. This exercise is not about cutting back calories; it is about minimizing how often we eat to give our body a chance to rest and to limit the insulin spike that typically follows eating. Too much insulin can lead to several challenges including storing excess body fat, developing type 2-diabetes, inflammation, and many other chronic illnesses.

Finally: Commit to one day at a time, drink water or call a friend if you hit a road bump and after four weeks, celebrate your gift of better health.