



HUNGER STRIKE

Intermittent fasting might actually be worth the effort and restraint for a leaner and stronger body

Card-carrying members of the no-breakfast club might have a new ace, because the latest nutrition trend exhorts you to skip the most important meal of the day. Called 'intermittent fasting', and approved by Beyoncé and Hugh Jackman, this popular method involves strategically fasting for certain hours or days in a week, in a set pattern, to detox the body.

THE OPTIONS

You have two. "The first method, called 5:2, is exactly what our ancestors did in the form of religious fasts," says Luke Coutinho, an expert in integrative and lifestyle medicine, and holistic nutrition. "It calls for eating healthy meals, five days a week, and consuming only 500-600 calories for the remaining two days." But for a more sustainable lifestyle change, Coutinho recommends you follow the 16:8 method: "You limit eating time to just eight hours (called the building stage) and fast for 16 hours (called the detoxification or fasting phase) of the day, with only water or herbal teas as snacking options." This means you automatically finish dinner before 6pm, and resume eating directly with lunch the next day.

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DO IT RIGHT
 Luke
 Coutinho's
 rules to
 intermittent
 fasting

THE SCIENCE

By eating throughout the day, your digestive system, liver and kidneys are working continuously to absorb nutrients and flush out toxins. "But during the fasting phase, the body gets some rest and is able to break down leftover food effectively, leading to detoxification and reduction in gut inflammation," says Coutinho. "Short-term fasting also increases your metabolic rate, insulin levels and uses stored energy (fat) to function, which ultimately leads to weight loss." But, Coutinho warns, be careful never to binge or diet excessively during the building stage. "Loading up on excess food or eating less can deprive your body of nutrients, and lead to headaches, low blood pressure, hypoglycemia (low sugar levels) and muscle loss."

Though it might seem counter-intuitive to some, intermittent fasting has found many believers. One of them is Urmi Kothari, fitness expert and founder, Kinetic Living, Mumbai. "I followed the 16:8 method for just three months, as it was difficult to squeeze in my meals in such a short period while I was training," she says. "But I saw aesthetic changes in just 10 days, and never experienced an afternoon slump, in spite of my high activity levels."

— TRISHA CHAWLA

1. Start with a 12-hour fast and gradually build your capacity to 16 hours.
2. Start and break your fast at the same time every day, so your body and mind can adapt easily.
3. Eat wholesome, well-balanced meals during the building phase to avoid nutrient deprivation.
4. Avoid milk-based tea and coffee while fasting as they can lead to acid reflux or constipation.
5. Since you are eating less, choose simple, preferably only hour-long workouts, or you could experience cramps or fainting.

Photograph: Angélica Heras