

More on Intermittent Fasting

Intermittent Fasting (IF) has been shown to help many health conditions, such as obesity, diabetes mellitus, cardiovascular diseases, cancers and neurologic disorders. [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#) My previous posting on this website, (Experimenting with Intermittent Fasting – Home > Old Items 2022 on this website), generated some questions and difficulties in complying with the requirements of IF among my readers and friends. Whilst most were not questioning the concept of IF, concerns were about the difficulties in maintaining the fast and sticking to low carb diets. These issues are well documented in literature and many Y-tube videos go into details to answer those questions (some listed below).

In this write up I want to discuss my further experience with opportunities for exercising and fasting.

In August 2018, I posted an article on this website with the caption, “Office Worker’s Dilemma”. (See under Home > Old Items > August 18, 2018). This came about when some of my colleagues complained that they did not have enough time to indulge in time based physical activity. I shared some of my experience and other examples of how one could do sufficient physical activity during a routine busy office day. At that time, I had not considered IF, as it is understood today and was keen on hearty breakfast just before going to office and utilizing every opportunity to do physical activity during working hours. How I wish I could have combined dieting and exercise along with IF.

Looking back, for a considerable period of time earlier, I had remained without breakfast inadvertently. It so happened that each one of the MPH students, at the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, had to spend three months on overseas assignment to gain health service experience of different countries. Five of us were assigned to spend time in Turkey, whilst the rest of the class was divided into four other countries, Sri Lanka, India, Jamaica and USA.

In Ankara, for better understanding of the health care system in the country, I opted to spend my time in a rural health center. I spent one month at the health center with the medical officer and his trainee. First morning, as I get up early, I was waiting for my colleagues to get up and show me where to take breakfast. To my surprise, at about 9.00am the doctor in charge got up and came straight to the consultation table and started seeing patients. My hopes for any breakfast vanished and I continued to have hunger spasms. The only thing available was sugary tea and everyone had to be content with that. It certainly gave some comfort to my stomach but we did not see anything to eat long after the morning outpatient work was finished. After the morning outpatient, the doctor came to the kitchen and started preparing for lunch. I must say he was the most patient cook I have ever come across and I continued to be tortured with hunger. At last, around 2 pm the lunch was ready and three of us ate without uttering a word. I must hasten to add that he was a good cook. It took a few days for me to adjust to this

torture, after which I never missed breakfast. In fact, on return from Turkey for many years, I rarely took breakfast. At some stage, I think in Laos, because I did not want to take fish oil as supplement on empty stomach, I started taking breakfast again. The reason for relating this story is that it is difficult to start fasting, but in a few days, one gets used to it and there is little problem of hunger spasms.

In spite of my missing breakfast for all this time, I made it up with the other meals. Although, I have never considered myself fat, I have been overweight, never touching BMI 25 or below. Reason being eating more than I needed and that too a lot of rice and bread. My experience teaches me that exercise alone is not sufficient for weight loss and what you eat matters. In addition, some physical activity is essential to maintain good health. In fact, for the past two months, since I started IF, along with selective diet and physical activity, within two weeks my weight came down and has remained around the BMI of 24.5 (BMI=Weight in KG divided twice by Height in meters; Wt/HtxHt)[\[3\]](#). Of course, I was not too overweight and I saw the results rather quickly, but IF works for anyone.

A growing body of research suggests that the fasting time is the key, and can make IF a more realistic, sustainable, and effective approach for weight loss, as well as for diabetes prevention. Dr Jason Fung in the Obesity Code[\[4\]](#), successfully combines plenty of research, his clinical experience, and sensible nutrition advice, especially the market pressure, forcing us to eat unhealthy food. He is very clear that we should eat more fruits and veggies, fiber, healthy protein, and fats, and avoid sugar, refined grains, processed foods, and stop snacking.

There are a [few different approaches](#), but the two most popular are 16:8, which calls for squeezing all the day's meals into an eight-hour window and fasting for the remaining 16 hours, and 5:2, where five days of the week are spent eating normally and two are spent fasting. The first method is easier to follow. We all sleep 7-8 hours and simply have to delay breakfast as much as possible, say between 10-11am and to eat early in the evening to enable total of sixteen hours of fasting period. Let the body burn fat between meals. Physical activity by being active throughout the day and building muscle tone are essential, especially among the elderly.

Avoid snacking all the time. Between meals, as long as we don't snack, our insulin levels will go down and fat cells can then release their stored sugar, to be used as energy. The weight loss is due to our insulin levels going down. The entire idea of IF is to allow the insulin levels to go down far enough and for long enough that we burn off our excess body fat for sustaining the normal body functions, such as breathing, circulation and digestion etc.

There is plenty of evidence to show that the quality of life improves, for most feeling energetic and in better control of one's health. I am listing some of the benefits of IF

without going into details, as there is ample of information readily available in the literature (e.g. Google Search for IF).

1. Weight Loss;
2. Lowering blood pressure;
3. Reduced Inflammations;
4. Reduces cholesterol;
5. Better outcome for stroke survivors;
6. Boosted brain function;
7. Cancer protection;
8. Increases autophagy – Increased Cell turnover;
9. Reduced Insulin resistance;
10. Lower risk of cardiovascular issues;
11. Increases longevity; and
12. Better night's sleep.

It is worth giving it a try. All the best.

Please see Y-tube videos on various subjects on IF by:

Dr Jason Fung

Dr Sten Ekberg

Dr David Sinclair

Dr Pradip Jamnadas

References

- [1] Rafael de Cabo and Mark Mattson. Effects of Intermittent Fasting on health and aging and diseases. NEngJM 2019;381:2541-51.
- [2] Bhutani S, Klempel MC, Berger RA, Varady KA. Improvements in coronary heart disease risk indicators by alternate-day fasting involve adipose tissue modulations. Obesity (Silver Spring). 2010 Nov;18(11):2152-9. doi: 10.1038/oby.2010.54.
- [3] Normal Body Mass Index (BMI)=Below 18 Underweight; 18-25 Normal; Overweight 25-30; and Obese over 30.
- [4] Jason Fung. The Obesity Code. Greystone Books, 2016.