

Healthy Meals Made Easy

Breakfast or Intermittent Fasting?

Is breakfast really the most important meal of the day? What about the new trend of intermittent fasting? It can be so confusing to determine the right choice to make so let's dive into this controversial subject.

What exactly is intermittent fasting?

Intermittent fasting is broadly defined as a type of scheduled eating plan where you simply restrict your normal daily eating to a 6-8 hour window of time, without cutting calories. To put it another way, it's taking the fasting process that naturally occurs while we are sleeping and extends this period into part of our wake time.

There are many different methods when it comes to intermittent fasting but the one that is most commonplace and the easiest to comply with is where you stretch the period of fasting to approximately 16 hours and consume your meals within an 8-hour period.

The case for eating breakfast

For many years, breakfast has been touted as one of the most important meals of the day and the research does in fact support that. After all, breakfast got its name because we are "breaking the fast of the prior night" after the digestive system has had a chance to rest. Fasting periods are usually followed by a replenishing meal and breaking the fast with a balanced meal in the morning (breakfast) has long been thought to set the stage for the rest of the day.

So what does the research say about this? The following are some of the benefits and correlations found from eating breakfast:

- provides protection against becoming overweight or obese
- morning is the best time of the day to eat for weight loss
- more successful weight loss versus eating the majority of calories at dinnertime
- improved glucose control and insulin sensitivity
- lower levels of ghrelin (hunger hormone)
- sustained weight loss

The case for skipping breakfast

More recent research has analyzed this concept called "intermittent fasting" comparing those who eat breakfast with those who skip breakfast. In most cases, there was no difference in weight loss between the two groups. The following are some of the benefits and correlations found from intermittent fasting (which for many means skipping breakfast):

- provides an advantage for weight loss and fat burning
- improves insulin/leptin resistance
- balances blood sugar levels
- ability to burn fat for fuel more easily
- ability to maintain a healthy weight

The verdict?

As it turns out, there are benefits to both eating and skipping breakfast. Where the two cases share a common thread is with the concept of eating larger meals earlier in the day rather than later in the day. So whether eating or skipping breakfast, one thing appears to be unanimous and that is avoiding larger, heavier meals towards the end of the day.

Ultimately, this is an individual decision and one based on the unique characteristics, makeup, and lifestyle of the individual. It's important to listen to your body when it comes to meal timing but equally as important to choose nutrient-dense foods and ones that will leave us feeling satiated.

One important caveat when it comes to intermittent fasting is that it should be avoided or used with caution for those that have hypoglycemia, adrenal stress, or diabetes. In the case of Type I Diabetes, it should be avoided all together. When dealing with stress, particularly chronic stress, the body may respond with a fight or flight response by storing energy as fat due to uncertainty around the timing of the next meal. Not knowing when the next meal is coming can be perceived as a stressor and can exacerbate excess levels of cortisol (known as the "stress" hormone).

Bottom line: if you are a generally healthy individual and don't struggle with any of the above mentioned health conditions, you may choose to try intermittent fasting and see if it works for you. On the other hand, if you're a "tried and true" breakfast eater and that's working for you- by all means, keep doing what works for you as an individual.

No matter your meal timing (which is a personal preference), the following general guidelines should be taken into consideration:

- Quantity and quality of foods
- Practice mindful eating by paying attention to hunger/fullness cues
- Eating a balanced meal for breakfast that includes nutrient-dense foods
- Balance meals with each of the 3 macronutrients (carbohydrates, fats, protein)

References:

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