

Intermittent Fasting – Personal Experience (Good & Bad)

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I thought I would provide a short piece on my journey with Intermittent Fasting which I have been undertaking for the past 20-months.

As someone with a professional interest in body composition (assisting athletes/clients in getting in shape), I was interested in personally experimenting with a variety of different diets (Which I have undertaken for >20 years).

I have tried a vast variety of different eating plans, including the following:

1. Zone
2. Extreme Paleo
3. Modified Yo Yo
4. Low Calorie
5. One Meal A Day (OMAD)
6. Intermittent Fasting (IF)

Interestingly I put on a lot of weight (muscle) with the Zone, but lost a lot of weight (fat & muscle mass) on the other plans.

My most recent experimentation has been with Intermittent Fasting and below is an outline of my eating plan for the past 20-months.

Fasting Plan

- 36hr fast (Sunday evening to Tuesday morning).
- Two meals Tuesday, no dinner Tuesday evening.
- Remainder of week – eat as normal.

Starting weight 82.7kg (June)

End weight 76.6kg (November)

I then maintained around 77-78kg for the next 12-months.

During this period I typically overate on the weekends (will get to that issue in a minute).

Also I experimented with how long I could go without food and feel OK and completed a 60-hr fast (Sunday evening to Wednesday morning). There was no real desire to eat after the 60-hrs, I just felt that I should resume eating well.

During each of these fasting periods, I only drank water & still trained as hard as I could (there was no reduction in my energy levels for training during these times).

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT INTERMITTENT FASTING?

1. Without going into too much personal detail, I have had an issue with my gut for most of my life, with wind and bloating being a normal part of my digestion every since I was old enough to remember.

The great thing about IF was periods of a “quiet gut” which was a real change from my normal digestive behaviour.

2. Easy weight loss. What I found amazing was that IF made weight loss quite easy to achieve. By reducing my weekly intake by a normal day intake ~2000Kcal (8000kj) I was able to reduce my weight by several 100g/week for as long as I continued this weekly eating plan.

3. Good for your microbiome – There has been plenty of research to show that having periods of fasting is good for your gut microbes (I think much of my poor digestion issues was due to an imbalance in good vs bad microbes in my gut). Hopefully regularly fasting was a first step towards improving this imbalance.

4. IF is good for your resting insulin levels and cell insulin sensitivity. Cell insulin insensitivity is one major factors in the current state of obesity & Type II diabetes. Not that I am in either of those categories, but a good idea giving my pancreas a much needed rest.

5. Finally, I like to eat, calorie restriction doesn't work for me – if I am going to eat I like to eat well (volume) so I found IF a perfect way of me being able to continue to eat reasonable volumes of food but still maintain/lose weight and get some additional gut benefits along the way.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT IF?

My negative views on IF are less about the methodology itself but more about my propensity to over compensate for the fasting period by overeating leading up to each week's fast.

1. My weekends became an exercise in high calorie intake, with hamburgers & desserts becoming the standard foods of choice as well as a grazing mentality that I am sure compounded my digestive issues (not only eating poor choice foods, but having a constant flow of food through my system during the two days of the weekend would often lead to very poor gut issues during those two days).

In fact, I tried OMAD (One Meal A Day) almost a decade ago – lost a huge amount of weight but was eating so bad on this meal plan that I renamed it the “Hamburger Diet” – as I would eat hamburgers, chips & dessert most days, then nothing for 24-hrs. On this diet I lost >10kg in 6-months!!

2. Headaches – I have never been a huge water drinker and so often would complete my fasting with little fluid at all. This would result in the occasional headaches which I can only assume was due to me placing my body in not only a fasted but also dehydrated state.

Interestingly enough, with recent fasting periods I have consumed as much water as I could but would still get headaches (albeit much less intensity than before), so the lack of food causing some other physiological response that results in my developing these headaches. (Initially it was a lack of caffeine, but I have weaned myself off caffeine for several months now and the headaches still come and go – Almost always at the base of my skull on one side!). I think this is a response to the lack of sugar in my system (like caffeine, it will take a bit of adjusting to wean myself off sugar).

3. Blood Pressure – There is research stating that IF reduces blood pressure, but in my case, I have seen a rise in blood pressure – mainly Systolic only (Diastolic is still in the 80's)!! Initially I thought again that it was due to the lack of water intake, but after drinking plenty of fluid and only fasting 1 day out of 7 my blood pressure is still high.

I went off this diet for a while and the high blood pressure remained (albeit at a lower level), so it might also be age/genetic factors as much as my eating habits that cause this hypertension.

HOW TO MOST EFFECTIVELY INCORPORATE IF INTO YOUR LIFE?

Based on my experiences with this type of eating plan, I would recommend the following:

1. I wouldn't immediately go to full 24-hr fasting periods.
 1. I like the idea of missing dinner occasionally and thereby creating a fasting period of mid-afternoon to next morning which is around 16-18hrs fasting.
2. Only fast 1-2 times per week to get started. You don't want to rapidly lose weight (the body's set weight will fight against this and maintenance will be almost impossible).
3. You need to ease back into eating after you fast with good quality food (no junk food, no sugary food).
4. Try to ensure you are well hydrated going into and during your fasting period.
5. Understand that your hunger hormone (Ghrelin) will create false hunger during your typical eating cycles (Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner) – so try to do something during those times that keeps you busy – b/w these times there should be little hunger pains.
6. IF can be as much for gut/Insulin health as it is for weight loss – it would be quite easy to regularly IF and not lose any weight if you ensure your weekly calorie intake is what is required to maintain your weight – you are just mixing up when during the week you intake these calories.
7. IF doesn't work for everyone, I have several clients who didn't like doing it and would rather just eat well and reduce calories a little at a time.

Check out my other articles on nutrition and weight loss:

[Metabolism - A current review](#)

[NEAT - Non-Exercise Activity Thermogenesis](#)

[Weight - "Set Point"](#)

For a review of IF by the world leader in this type of eating plan - check out Jason Fung's excellent blog ([The Fasting Method Blog](#)).

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