

## **Intermittent Fasting: What It Is and How It Might Help Your Health**

Many people are curious about intermittent fasting — a way of eating that focuses on *when* you eat rather than just *what* you eat. As a GP practice, we want to explain what it is, how it may benefit your health, and what to consider before trying it.

### **What Is Intermittent Fasting?**

Intermittent fasting is an eating pattern where you alternate between periods of eating and periods of not eating (fasting). There are several common approaches:

#### **The 16:8 method**

You eat during an 8-hour window each day and fast for the remaining 16 hours (for example, eating between 12pm and 8pm).

#### **The 5:2 approach**

You eat normally for five days of the week and significantly reduce your calorie intake (around 800 calories) on two non-consecutive days.

These approaches are flexible and can often be adapted to fit around work and family life.

### **How Might Intermittent Fasting Help?**

Fasting is not a quick fix or a miracle solution, but some people find it helpful as part of a healthy lifestyle.

#### **1. Weight Management**

Intermittent fasting can help reduce overall calorie intake, which may lead to gradual weight loss if combined with balanced eating. Some people find it easier to limit calories by restricting eating times rather than counting calories daily.

#### **2. Blood Sugar Control**

Periods without food allow insulin levels to fall, which may help the body use stored energy more effectively. Some evidence suggests this can improve blood sugar control, particularly in people at risk of type 2 diabetes.

#### **3. Metabolic Health**

During fasting, the body shifts from using glucose for energy to using stored fat. Over time, this may support improvements in metabolic health.

#### **4. Improved Eating Habits**

Some people find that having set eating windows reduces grazing and late-night snacking, helping them develop more structured meal patterns.

### **Important: It Is Not Suitable for Everyone**

Intermittent fasting is not appropriate for everybody.

It may not be suitable if you:

- Are pregnant or breastfeeding
- Have a history of eating disorders
- Are under 18
- Are underweight
- Have certain medical conditions

If you have diabetes, take medication that needs food, or have any long-term health condition, it is essential to speak to a GP or healthcare professional before starting.

Some people experience side effects when they first begin, such as headaches, irritability, tiredness or difficulty concentrating. These often improve as the body adjusts, but if symptoms persist, medical advice should be sought.

### **A Balanced Approach Is Key**

Intermittent fasting does not replace healthy eating. During eating periods, it is still important to:

- Eat a balanced diet
- Include fruit and vegetables
- Choose wholegrains
- Limit ultra-processed and high-sugar foods
- Stay well hydrated

Sustainable changes are more important than strict rules.

### **Final Thoughts**

Intermittent fasting can be a useful tool for some people, particularly for weight management and metabolic health. However, it is not the only way to improve health, and it is not right for everyone.

If you are considering intermittent fasting and would like personalised advice, please speak to a member of our clinical team. We are here to support you in finding a safe and sustainable approach to improving your health.

Dr Maya Chowdhury