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The rules of 16/8 intermittent fasting are pretty strict, and you will have to understand what you can and cannot eat if you want to succeed. This method breaks your feeding and fasting time into eight and 16 hours, respectively. And since you have only eight hours of your daily 24 to eat, you have to be very careful about what you consume and how you do it. Otherwise, all the sacrifice you did for the 16 hours will be useless. During the eight-hour feeding window, you do not have the liberty to stuff your face with anything you want and binge on whatever food you get hands on. You will be eating, of course, but you will have to focus your attention on foods that will support your diet and not derail it. Here are some examples of what you can and cannot consume while on a 16/8 intermittent fasting diet program. What You Can Eat In IF: During your feeding window, the smart thing to do is to load up on high-fiber and high-protein foods. These include beans, nuts, vegetables and fruit. You may also include tofu, lean meats and fish. Some people combine intermittent fasting with other types of high-protein and low-carb diet programs, such as Paleo or Keto, which they apply during the eating window. Those who have tried it say that such types of meal programs will help maximize the potential benefits of IF. For one, it can help you get into that state of ketosis faster, thus leading you closer to your weight loss goal much sooner. Stay away from sugar and sugary drinks and opt for water instead. If you must have your coffee, take it black, without any creams or sweeteners. According to the The MIND Diet author Maggie Moore, MS, RDN, women on intermittent fasting need at least nine cups of water daily, while men should drink 12 cups. However, if you do not eat much while on IF, you will need to drink more (at least 11 cups for women and 15 cups for men) because the body will be getting most of its hydration of plain water. What You Cannot Eat In IF: When on IF, you must avoid anything with crystal light or artificial sweeteners at all cost. You should also steer clear of coconut oil, butter, milk or cream. Technically, there are no restrictions to your diet while on IF. However, whys crucial is that you manage your food and drink intake. The goal is to to give your body the nourishment it needs while staving off hunger. Do not overwork your digestive system. Generally, you can have a small meal that contains about 400 calories, plus some easy protein snacks and fruits. Don't forget to include a fat source (such as whole eggs, olive oil or nuts), because you might feel hungry again fast if you keep fat too low. 16/8 intermittent fasting, or any other IF strategy for that matter, requires a conscious effort on your part because you really have to watch not just the time but also what you consume. When you count your calorie intake as you make this diet happen, the better it is for you in achieving your fitness goals. With these basic rules about what you can and cannot eat while on intermittent fasting, a popular version of intermittent fasting, the 16:8 diet is a simple plan that restricts eating to an 8-hour window each day. Imagine Credit: Stephanie Frey/Stock/Getty Images Fasting that is, abstaining from food for set periods of time is a longstanding practice that has been part of various religions and cultures around the globe for thousands of years. Recently, though, fasting has reached trend status among dieters and health-seekers alike in the form of intermittent fasting (IF) with advocates claiming that its benefits include long-term weight loss, improved health and even anti-aging effects. What Is Intermittent Fasting? Intermittent fasting is a structured fasting method that restricts eating (and drinking any calorie-containing beverages) to certain hours of the day. One of the primary goals is to help followers decrease their overall calorie consumption, to promote weight loss or support weight control. One of the most popular versions of IF is the 16:8 diet, which allows for an eight-hour window to eat, followed by 16 hours of fasting each day, the latter of which includes the time you're asleep. This dieting method may owe its growing following to the fact that it can feel simple. Besides the eating and fasting windows, there are no rules to follow no restricted foods or calorie counting, and no need to track your macros. Just eat what you like from, say, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., then don't eat until 8 a.m. the next day. While the science on intermittent fasting is still in its early stages, promising research has shown a variety of potential health benefits for followers. Intermittent fasting has been shown to reduce overall calorie consumption throughout the day by restricting the time you're allowed to eat. Indeed, a December 2019 review in The New England Journal of Medicine found that in short-term studies involving adults who have overweight or obesity, IF is just as effective as overall calorie restriction for weight loss. IF might also be a boon for dieters who've hit a weight-loss plateau. A February 2018 study in the International Journal of Obesity found that alternating periods of energy (calorie) restriction which can be achieved via fasting with periods of energy balance allowed subjects to achieve greater weight and fat loss. In other words, IF may help you avoid the metabolic process that causes you to stop shedding pounds during a weight-loss attempt. In a nutshell, while more research needs to be done, it shows promising results for weight loss without the need for counting calories. Budding research also suggests that IF may help decrease inflammation in the body. Inflammation is your immune system's natural response to injury or infection, according to Harvard Health Publishing. When you sprain your ankle or come down with a cold, your body mounts an attack led by an army of white blood cells to help you heal. While inflammation can be a good thing in small doses, chronic inflammation caused by toxins in food or the environment, or sometimes excess fat cells in the body has been linked to serious health conditions, from diabetes to heart disease and cancer. But the December 2019 review in the New England Journal of Medicine found that intermittent fasting reduces widespread inflammation in the body, which means IF may help lower your risk of developing certain chronic diseases. 3. Improved Blood Sugar Control Restricting the number of hours you're eating each day has a direct effect on your blood sugar and insulin levels. Why? Well, when you eat food with sugar, your body releases insulin, which brings the sugar into your cells to be used as energy. When you fast for 16 hours at a time, though, your body gets to take a break from producing insulin. The December 2019 review in the New England Journal of Medicine concluded that practicing IF improves blood sugar regulation, which may reduce the risk of developing pre-diabetes or diabetes. Plus, an early eating window (say from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.) seems to be more beneficial for your blood sugar (i.e., improved insulin resistance) than a late eating window, according to a July 2021 study in Nutrients. One of the still-budding areas of research around IF shows that it may help fight the effects of aging at least in animals. An old study in the June-July 2011 issue of Mechanisms of Ageing and Development found that a restricted diet using alternate-day fasting increased the lifespan of laboratory rodents. Researchers measured the rats' ERK and PI3K signaling molecules, which are associated with age-related health failure, and concluded that alternate-day fasting may provide a cardio-protective effect against aging. The research in this area is new and still being done in animals so far, but the results are promising and could lead to greater understanding of aging in humans. How to Start a 16:8 Fast Diet When you begin a 16:8 diet, the first step to determining your eating and fasting window. Many people who follow this plan prefer to eat between noon and 8 p.m. For most people, it's easier to skip breakfast, have dinner before 8 p.m. and forego any late-night snacking. Other people may prefer a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. window, though, or even a 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. option, depending on different lifestyle factors that affect their ideal mealtimes. In the first week or so, it may be necessary to experiment with a few different timeframes to determine which works best with your hunger and lifestyle. For example, if you are active and exercise regularly, it's a good idea to time your eating window to begin within a half hour after your workout, so you can properly refuel. If your goals include increasing your muscle mass, you'll want to eat protein immediately following strength training. You don't need to jump feet first into a 16-hour fasting window. If you've never fasted before, begin with a 10-hour window and gradually work your way up to 16 by increasing your fasting time by an hour each day for a week. This will allow your body time to adjust and should help you avoid potential side effects like low blood sugar, fatigue and headaches. While it doesn't matter when you eat during your selected window, spacing meals and snacks throughout the day will help to keep hunger at bay as well as stabilize your blood sugar. Eating just one large meal per day, on the other hand, could lead to dizziness, headaches and fatigue, and is not recommended. 3. Fill Up on Nutrient-Dense Foods With intermittent fasting, there's no restriction on the foods you can or can't eat. But if you want to reap the biggest benefits, you'll want to opt for nutrient-rich foods. Fruits, veggies, whole grains, healthy fats and lean sources of protein will keep you feeling full longer and maximize the amount of vitamins and minerals you're taking in. It's also important to keep meals balanced and include a mix of lean protein, healthy fats and carbohydrates at each meal. This will make sure your body is getting the nutrition it needs to sustain your energy, muscle mass and metabolism during the fasting period. Staying hydrated is also important while fasting. Drinking water and black coffee, tea, or herbal tea are all good options during the fasting period. Bonus: They may help reduce hunger, too. It's important to note that the amount of activity level and personal needs. If you are more active and live in a colder climate, you may need more calories. If you are less active and live in a warmer climate, you may need fewer calories. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, which is still considered the standard by the majority of healthy people, says the daily 16:8 diet would be letting third guide them. The publication's general daily recommendation is 2.7 liters (11 1/2 cups) for women and 3.7 liters (15 1/2 cups) for men, which includes total water from all foods and beverages. Intermittent Fasting Risks and Drawbacks Restricting your food intake to eight hours per day isn't right for everyone. Pregnant or breastfeeding people and those who struggle with hypoglycemia (low blood sugar), have a history of an eating disorder, are taking certain medications or have a chronic condition like heart disease, diabetes or kidney disease should talk with a doctor before starting 16:8 fasting or any type of fasting diet. Also, some studies have shown that limiting food throughout the day can cause increased eating outside of the fasting window. For some people, this can lead to stalled weight loss or even weight gain in the long-term due to the increased number of calories eaten during a session of overeating. Symptoms such as hunger, weakness, fatigue, dizziness and headaches have all been reported by those just starting out with intermittent fasting. While these symptoms resolve within a week or two for most people, some may have continued side effects, and should stop IF or consult with an expert to make sure their approach is healthy and sustainable. Close Banner This ad is displayed using third party content and we do not control its accessibility features. Fasting is an ancient practice that's been used for spiritual and religious purposes for thousands of years. Nowadays, it's the physical benefits of fasting from blood sugar balance to enhanced energy that are the buzziest. There are different types of fasting, but 16:8 is one of the most popular and well-studied. Not only has 16:8 fasting been shown to be effective for improving multiple health outcomes, but its less restrictive and easier to follow than other types of fasting. In this article, we'll explore the benefits and risks of 16:8 fasting, how to get started, and what to eat during your fasting window. 16:8 fasting is a type of intermittent fasting that involves restricting your eating window to 8 hours per day, typically from noon to 8 p.m. This means you'll be fasting for 16 hours each day. 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