

# THE FASTING PHENOMENON

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Since Dr Michael Mosley brought fasting to the masses, it's become the go-to approach for weight loss and improving our overall health.

Is it time to give it a go?

**W**hether you've set your sights on looking leaner on holiday, or you're just keen to optimise your health, the warmer weather brings a renewed focus on looking and feeling good. For many of us, that means turning to intermittent fasting - that is, eating minimal food for a set period of time - and reaping the weight-loss and health rewards.

Since BBC journalist Dr Michael Mosley presented a Horizon documentary on intermittent fasting in 2012, the method has become one of the most popular ways to manage weight and health, recently garnering 22,000 searches a month on Google in the UK, and propelling books on fasting by Dr Mosley and his wife Dr Clare Bailey up the bestseller charts in record time, with millions of copies sold around the world. So what exactly is intermittent fasting - and how does it work?

There are many evidence-backed ways to give your system a beneficial break from digesting. You might opt for time-restricted eating (TRE), in which calories are consumed within a limited number for hours. Or maybe you'll choose to go for some regular low-calorie fasting days, where



415 CALS  
RICH IN  
PROTEIN

## Tandoori lamb cutlets with garlic and ginger spinach

'Thanks to tandoori seasoning, lamb chops just got more interesting. This is a simple dish packed with flavour.'

### NUTRITION NOTES

**SERVES 2 GF**  
**HANDS-ON TIME**  
10 mins  
**TOTAL TIME**  
25 mins

**PER SERVING**  
415cals; 24g fat  
(7g sat fat); 39g  
protein; 8g fibre;  
7g carbs; 3g total  
sugars; 1g salt

### YOU'LL NEED...

- ◆ 2 tbsp full-fat Greek yogurt
- ◆ 1 tbsp tandoori spice blend
- ◆ 4 lamb chops (about 75g each)
- ◆ 1 tbsp olive oil
- ◆ 1 garlic clove, peeled and chopped
- ◆ 10g root ginger, peeled and grated
- ◆ 350g young spinach
- ◆ 15g cashew nuts, roughly chopped

- 1 Preheat the grill to high and line a tray with foil.
- 2 Mix the yogurt with the tandoori spices in a bowl. Season to taste. Add the lamb chops and toss to coat. Place on the lined tray and grill for 6 minutes on each side. Set aside to rest.
- 3 Meanwhile, pour the olive oil into a very large frying pan over a medium heat. Add the garlic and ginger, and sauté for 1 minute. Add the spinach, in batches, and stir to wilt the leaves. Season and keep warm.
- 4 Divide the spinach between two warm plates, scatter the cashew nuts all over and place the lamb chops on top to serve. ▶

two or three small meals are eaten, totalling around 500 calories. But, whatever method you follow, the basic premise remains the same. By skipping meals, you consume less food overall – without having to obsess about calories the rest of the time.

'Fasting is a clever way of cutting back on food intake without having to meticulously analyse everything you put on your plate,' says nutritionist Rob Hobson (robhobson.co.uk), 'But, remember, it doesn't give you a free ticket to the all-you-can-eat buffet the rest of the time!' If you do give it a whirl, you're in good company – Hollywood hot shots such as Jennifer Aniston, Nicole Kidman and Hugh Jackman are crediting their lithe physiques to various forms of fasting, and the hashtag '#intermittentfasting' has received over 100 million TikTok views.

#### A MODERN PHENOMENON

A classic fast normally means going without any food for days, or even weeks. But intermittent fasting such as TRE is a gentle approach, which aims to harness the health benefits of giving your body a few extra hours rest from having to digest and process food.

You can choose to fast by pushing breakfast back by a few hours, extending your overnight break from food, or finishing eating in the afternoon before dinner (recent research found that obese people lost significantly more weight if they ate all meals between the hours of 7am and 3pm). Or perhaps it would suit you better to reduce calories to a minimal 500-600 every other day, or for two days a week, as advocated in Dr Michael Mosley's '5:2' approach. Dr Mosley is also the brains behind The Fast 800 – a fasting weight-loss plan in which you reduce calorie intake to 800 calories a day for 12 weeks before introducing non-fasting days. Mosley suggests a low-carb, protein-rich, Mediterranean-style approach; see the recipes on the following pages, extracted from *The Fast 800 Keto Recipe Book* by Dr Clare Bailey and Kathryn Bruton (Short Books, £18.99), for some ideas.

There's also the one-meal-a-day fast (OMAD), adopted by Coldplay's Chris Martin and Bruce Springsteen, which effectively means you are fasting for around 23 hours a day; or the 'fasting mimicking diet' by longevity expert Professor Valter Longo, which research suggests has powerful health benefits. The plan requires you to eat 750 calories for five days periodically; or you can buy the commercial version, ProLon, at [prolon.co.uk](http://prolon.co.uk).

When it comes to losing weight, studies show fasting can be very effective. A review of 27 trials conducted

found people reported weight loss with no serious side effects. But whether you want to drop pounds or not, what is clear from scientific research is that giving your body a period of rest from eating is beneficial to health, allowing it to switch priorities away from digestion and on to other important functions such as 'autophagy' (the process of clearing away old cells to make way for new ones). This has a wide-reaching impact on many areas of the body and brain, and extends life expectancy.

#### BRING ON THE BENEFITS

Studies into the impact of fasting suggest that it might improve the body's ability to fight inflammation; reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes by improving the body's ability to respond to insulin; aid better sleep by causing levels of the sleep-promoting hormone melatonin to rise; boost heart health by lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels; and improve brain function and protect against disorders such as Parkinson's and Alzheimer's disease. Fasting appears to trigger the release of a protein called BDNF (dubbed 'Miracle Gro for the brain' by medics), which stimulates the creation of new brain cells and connections.

Some studies have also suggested that fasting could bolster immunity and might even help you live longer by reducing the rate at which your body produces a chemical called IGF-1, which appears to accelerate ageing in later life – so the less of it you have at midlife, the better.

If you think this all sounds too good to be true, you may be right... Much of the research is still in its infancy. But Tim Spector, professor of genetic epidemiology at King's College London, and an expert on gut health, offers a voice of reason. He sticks to a 14-hour overnight fast because of

studies which show your gut microbes appreciate the 'holiday', and, when he's feeling 'virtuous or putting on weight', he puts in an intermittent fasting day with minimal food. 'We are learning that some people do better skipping breakfast and only having two meals a day, while for others it makes less difference health-wise,' he says. 'In a few years, we will have developed tests to help us understand which category we are each in, but for the moment we need to experiment and keep an open mind.' What we do know is that fasting helps us feel better and look leaner, which helps with our confidence when it's time to wriggle into a swimsuit in the summer.

## 4 FASTING TIPS

### 1 For weight loss, try a keto approach.

Fasting guru Dr Michael Mosley recommends consuming over 50g of protein and under 50g of carbs daily, while sticking to a limit of 800-900 calories.

### 2 Consider an early supper.

While most people find it easiest to skip breakfast, the latest research suggests an eating window of 7am-3pm is optimal.

### 3 Eat healthily on non-fasting days.

It's important not to overeat outside of your fasting window, says nutritionist Rob Hobson; the basic rules of healthy eating still apply.

### 4 Try TRE.

Time-restricted eating can be adapted to suit your lifestyle; simply choose an eating window and eat all your meals within it.



#### Waste not

Use up leftover ricotta in the runner bean linguine recipe on page 19.

## Veg and egg breakfast bake

'This remarkably versatile dish works well for breakfast, lunch or supper. It can be served hot or cold, can be eaten at home or on the go, and will keep for a couple of days in the fridge. Serve with a light salad, if you like.'

#### NUTRITION NOTES

**SERVES 2**  
**V GF**  
**HANDS-ON TIME**  
10 mins  
**TOTAL TIME**  
30 mins

**PER SERVING**  
276cals; 18g fat  
(8g sat fat); 22g protein; 2g fibre;  
6g carbs; 6g total sugars; 1.2g salt

#### YOU'LL NEED...

- ◆ 2 small red or yellow peppers, deseeded and finely chopped
- ◆ 2 spring onions, finely chopped
- ◆ 80g young spinach, roughly chopped
- ◆ 4 medium eggs
- ◆ 1 tsp harissa (optional)
- ◆ 60g ricotta
- ◆ 40g feta

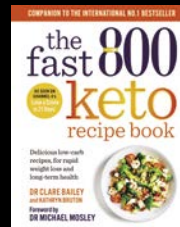
- 1 Preheat the oven to 200°C, fan 180°C, gas 6 and line a 20cm square baking dish with baking paper.
- 2 Place the peppers, spring onions and spinach in a heatproof bowl, add 1 tablespoon of water, cover and microwave for 3 minutes. Tip into a sieve to drain off any liquid.
- 3 Whisk the eggs, harissa (if using) and ricotta in a bowl until thoroughly combined. Season generously with salt and black pepper.
- 4 Add the steamed veg to the egg mixture, stir well to combine and transfer to the prepared dish. Crumble the feta cheese over the top and bake in the oven for 15-20 minutes, or until set. Slice and serve warm or at room temperature. ►

Only  
**£1.33**  
PER  
SERVING

**276 CALS**  
GREAT HOT  
OR COLD



Recipes extracted from **The Fast 800 Keto Recipe Book** by Dr Clare Bailey, Kathryn Bruton and Dr Michael Mosley (Short Books, £18.99). Photographs by Smith & Gilmour



Only  
**£1.55**  
PER SERVING

## Michael's Mediterranean stir-fry

'An (almost) one-pan meal, featuring Michael's favourite secret ingredient chorizo, with its warm, smoky flavour that can transform just about anything.'

### NUTRITION NOTES

**SERVES 2**

**GF**

**HANDS-ON TIME**

10 mins

**TOTAL TIME**

20 mins

**PER SERVING**

449cals; 29g fat (11g sat fat); 21g protein; 10g fibre; 22g carbs; 10g total sugars; 2g salt

### YOU'LL NEED...

- ◆ 1 small head of broccoli, cut into small florets and stalks diced
- ◆ ½ medium onion, diced
- ◆ 30g diced chorizo
- ◆ 2 tbsp olive oil
- ◆ 4 tbsp cold cooked quinoa or bulgur wheat\*
- ◆ 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- ◆ 8 cherry tomatoes, halved
- ◆ 100g feta cheese, diced or crumbled
- ◆ pinch of chilli flakes (optional)

**449 CALS**  
GOOD FOR YOUR GUT

- 1** Place the chopped broccoli in a large pan of boiling water and cook for 2 minutes. Drain well, reserving some of the cooking water.
- 2** Place the onion, chorizo and olive oil in a frying pan over a medium heat and fry for 3-4 minutes until the onion has softened.
- 3** Add the quinoa, drained broccoli, garlic and tomatoes, and heat through. Add 1 tablespoon of the broccoli cooking water, to loosen.
- 4** Scatter the feta over the top and season with plenty of freshly ground black pepper and a pinch of chilli flakes, if using.

\*Use cooked quinoa, not bulgur wheat, if required for gluten-free. ■