



Intermittent Fasting Protocols

The most common types of intermittent fasting protocols are the overnight 14 hour fast, 16/8 or the 18/6 protocol and then we go into the longer ones, which are the 24-, 36- and 42-hour protocols.

Overnight 14-hour fast

If you eat breakfast at 8:00 am and dinner by 6:00, then means you are eating for 10 hours of the day and fasting for 14 hours. That is how most Americans ate up until the 1980s, every day of the year without really even thinking about it. They also refrained from snacks in between meals or at bedtime. If you asked for an after-school snack, your mother would say 'No, you'll ruin your dinner'. If you wanted a bedtime snack, your mother would say, 'No, you should've eaten more at dinner'. If you were naughty, you were sent to bed without dinner, further lengthening your fasting period.

And guess what? People were healthy. Nothing bad really happened from not putting a muffin in your mouth every two hours. The balance between feeding and fasting periods naturally allowed Americans to maintain their weight effortlessly. They were not following any special diets. They weren't counting calories. They were eating white bread and jam. They were eating cookies and cake. But they were not eating all the time. That's the key. They fasted overnight almost every day of the year.

The overnight 14-hour fast should be considered a baseline for the way we should eat. It can maintain a stable weight but is not always strong enough to cause weight loss. To lose body fat, we simply need to tip the scales in favor of fasting.

16/8 or 18/6 fast

The 16/8 fast refers to the duration of the fasting period. In this protocol, you fast for 16 hours of the day, and feed during the other 8 hours of the day. For example, you might start eating at 11:00 am and finish by 7:00 pm. Alternatively, you might start eating at 8:00 am and finish by 4:00 pm. You may only eat during that 8-hour feeding window, so this is also called time-restricted eating.

You can eat two or three meals within that feeding window but generally, we suggest that people eat only twice during this time and drop either breakfast or dinner. This is the least disruptive strategy, since it is not always easy to plan for a 11:00 breakfast, 3:00 pm lunch and 6:00 dinner.

We continue to discourage snacking. We recommend the 16/8 fast at least 6 days out of 7 days of the week. By making this a habit, it makes weight loss more automatic, as you do not have to 'think' about which days are which. After an initial adjustment period, most people have no difficulty doing this fast. Many celebrities also use this fasting protocol, such as Hugh Jackman and Jennifer Aniston.

If you want to push the time-restricted eating protocol, you can extend the fasting period to 18 hours, which gives you a bit more power for weight loss. For example, you might start eating at 12:00 noon and stop by 6:00 pm.

24-hour fast

In a 24-hour fast, you skip two consecutive meals. For example, you might eat dinner on Sunday evening and then fast 24 hours until Monday evening. Because you are eating once a day, this 24-hour fasting strategy is also called 'One Meal a Day' or OMAD, since you still are eating every day but only a single time instead of the usual three or four times. You may also fast from breakfast to breakfast or lunch to lunch, but the dinner to dinner fast is the most popular, because it still allows a regular dinner together with family and friends. This fasting protocol also allows you to take medications with food if you need to.

We suggest starting a 24-hour fast three times per week. It can be three days in a row, or on alternate days, or in any other combination. Some people even do this every day as they find it easy to fit into their schedule. This often works great, but eventually many people find that their body weight plateaus. If this plateaus at a weight more than you would like, then change up the fast.

For example, alternating between 30- and 16-hour fasts may keep your body from getting stuck. You eat dinner on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays and lunch on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays. On Saturdays, you can eat both lunch and dinner. For 6 out of 7 days of the week, you are still eating one meal a day, but varying the length.

The 24-hour fasting protocol is great for weight loss, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), non-alcoholic fatty liver disease and type 2 diabetes.

Appetite often drops when people start fasting and they only end up wanting to eat once a day. They often say their stomach shrank. That's great. If you are fueling with more body fat, there is no need to eat more. When you are full, stop eating, even if it is only a small meal once a day.

36-hour fast

During a 36-hour fast, you skipped three consecutive meals. For example, if you eat dinner on Sunday night at 7:00 pm, then fast all of Monday and do not eat again until Tuesday morning 7:00 am, that is a 36-hour period of fasting.

The 36-hour fast is very powerful because it takes advantage of the two sleeping periods to increase the duration of fasting. From the 24-hour fast, which is the one-meal-a-day, if you drop that single meal, you extend the fast by a whopping 12 hours because when you are sleeping, you are getting an extra 8 hours of fasting for 'free' during which time your body continues to burn body fat.

Many people who fast are accustomed to skipping breakfast and may not want to break their fast at 7:00 am. Many people are simply not hungry in the morning, and if you are not hungry, you should not eat if you are trying to lose weight. You may elect to skip breakfast which pushes the 36-hour fast more towards 40- or 42-hour fasts. The 36- and 42-hour fasting protocols are ideal for individuals looking to lose a significant amount of weight or with severe metabolic syndrome.

If the longer fasts seem daunting at first, just work up to it. Start with shorter fasts and extend it a little bit more each week.