



Common Fasting Mistakes

Let's review some of the most common fasting mistakes that we see.

Mistake: Inconsistency

This is probably the most common mistake that we see, inconsistency. People will tell me, for example, that they couldn't fast for this month because they had to attend two weddings. But think about it, in a month you are going to have maybe 90 meals, two of which you can't miss but that's it. You have to stay consistent.

Make fasting a habit. Most of our life really runs on autopilot. We don't think about what route we are going to take to work, the days we are going to work, the chores we are going to have to do, the bills we pay. We just do it because really it's the same. That's good, because otherwise we'd spend our entire day figuring out what we need to do. If you play squash, for example, every Monday and poker every Thursday night, then you don't need to spend precious mental energy figuring out your weekly schedule. Similarly, if you decide that you are going to make a schedule, you are going to fast for 24 hours every Monday and Thursday, then after a few weeks you are just going to likely fall into that habit so you don't have to think about it and then you are going to be able to make the weight loss automatic. So, decide on the schedule that fits you, and then make it a habit and that will be the key to being consistent. Sure, it'll feel strange for the first few weeks that you do it, but pretty soon it's going to be your new normal.

If, on occasion, you have to go to a work function on a Monday, you can always change your fast to a Tuesday. Or, if you have a lot of work functions, then you might make a habit of doing a 16-hour fast up to those events. You can always adjust your fasting for life events. If you want to look really good for an upcoming high school reunion, you simply need to tweak your original schedule, rather than come up with something brand new.

Mistake: Not Fasting Enough

Many people will say, "I did a 16-hour fast for four days, and I'm still nowhere near my goal weight. Fasting doesn't work for me." Well, imagine you went to the gym four times over an entire year. Would you expect to get much stronger? Probably not. It's the same with fasting. Body fat is a very efficient store of calories. You need plenty of time to burn it off. Remember

the general rule that it takes about one day of fasting to burn half a pound of fat. So if you want to lose 20 pounds of fat, you would need to plan for about 40 days of fasting, assuming your other diet didn't change. Most people should strive to follow a minimum of three 24-hour fasts per week.

But it's also possible to fast too much and burn out. It's a marathon, not a sprint, so pace yourself to what feels realistic. When people fast too much, they often limit themselves socially. Sometimes they still go out, but become a fasting martyr, announcing loudly that they don't want to eat. Either way, they become more socially isolated, which is not a healthy situation, and usually leads to a breaking point. Make fasting part of your regularly scheduled programming. Work it into the other parts of your life.

Mistake: Mixing Calorie Restriction

Some people, in an effort to 'turbo-boost' their fasting, also severely restrict their calories and combine that with fasting. When they break their fast, instead of listening to their body and eating until they are full, they deliberately try to eat less because they want to lose that weight quickly. This makes fasting much more difficult and can also lead to a depressed metabolism. When you fast, your body is fueling itself on its body fat. When you eat, your body can't access those stores of body fat, and uses the energy in your food. Your body also naturally produces satiety signals to tell you when to stop eating. That's why you can't eat a whole side of beef at one sitting. If you deliberately stop yourself from eating before you are full, your body may slow its metabolism to cope with the reduced energy availability. So remember, when you are eating, eat until you are full. When you are not eating, or you are fasting, don't eat. Don't mix the two things up.

Mistake: Too Much Consistency

Sounds counter-intuitive, right? You need consistency, but when you do the same thing over and over again, your body adapts. If you do the exact same fast all the time, your body will eventually reach a new steady state. That's a plateau. And if this plateau is at a weight that is higher than you really want, then you do need to change things up a bit.

There are an infinite number of ways to mix things up. Most religions, for example, have a regular fasting period, but once a year may have a longer, more stricter fasting period. In the Muslim tradition, there is the holy fasting month of Ramadan. In the Catholic tradition, there is more fasting around Lent. So, one simple way of mixing things up is to use a longer fasting period once in a while.

If you have been doing a 16- or 18-hour fast daily, try extending it to 24 hours two or three times a week.

If you have been doing 24 hours of intermittent fasting, then try to extend it to 36 or 42 hours.

If you are eating one meal a day or OMAD, change the meal timing. Instead of eating dinner every day, eat breakfast and lunch to change things up.

If you like having one meal a day, then try alternating between lunch and dinner Monday through Friday. This means you will be doing two 30 hour fasts per week, which is a great way to change things up and still eat one meal a day.

Mix in a longer multiple-day fast. Try fat-fasting to get to the longer fasts.

You may also want to try to mix in some shorter but more frequent fasts. If you are using fasting training wheels, you can try a stricter fast by cutting the cream, broth or pickle juice out.

Mistake: Sweeteners

Avoid all sweeteners – natural or artificial, including stevia and sugar alcohols. The sweetness will stimulate your appetite and make fasting much more difficult than it needs to be.

Sweeteners, even the non-caloric ones, such as stevia, still stimulate insulin, which signals your body to store fat. Consider how commonly sweeteners are found. Do you know anybody who has lost significant weight by switching to a non-caloric sweetener? Me neither.

Mistake: Snacking

‘Grazing’ throughout the day is fine if you are a cow. Humans, not so much. We follow a natural cycle. Feed and fast. Fast and feed. Don’t eat a little all the time. Your grandmother knew all about it. She would tell us, eat three square meals a day and no snacks. Stick to your meals and your eating windows.

If you constantly ‘graze’ on small amounts of food throughout the day, you are constantly stimulating insulin, keeping your body in fat-storage mode. Remember that the baseline is really a 12- to 14-hour fasting period every day. But it’s harder and harder to avoid food in our current modern environment. Well, change your environment and set yourself up for success.

Throw out or give away snack foods, including nuts and cheese. Don’t work in the kitchen. Go to a desk in the study. Don’t allow food in front of the TV or in the car.

If you have a habit of snacking, try changing that habit to something healthier. Instead of going cold turkey, drink a glass of green tea instead of munching on snacks in front of the TV. Changing

one habit for another is easier and more successful than simply trying to stop altogether. That's the same reason most smokers trying to quit chewing gum.