

# Intermittent fasting

## from the viewpoint of Ayurveda



Voluntary fasting is probably as old as the human race, observed for a variety of reasons – e.g. to improve or restore health or as a religious, spiritual practice for connecting more closely with the divine. In the animal world, we also frequently see natural fasting in animals that are sick or hibernating.

Aside from this deliberate abstention from food, until a few decades ago, there were always times when people were forced to go without enough food, be it due to poor harvests, long winters, or wars. Through the ages, the human physiology has had plenty of opportunities to adapt genetically to periods of food deficiency.

The current situation in many countries, namely a permanent oversupply of food, is much more diffi-

cult for the body to tolerate in the long term. Overeating creates a major breeding ground for classic civilization diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and rheumatism. Did you know that 90% of all risk factors for cardiovascular diseases can be eliminated through proper nutrition, exercise, and stress management?

### Why interval fasting has become trendy

Intermittent fasting is a short-term abstention from food with the aim of consuming fewer calories than usual and giving the body extra time for regeneration. Here, the calorie reduction is not achieved by restrictions during meals, but by longer breaks between meals.

The effect on the body has been scientifically studied since the 19th century, and research on animals has documented that lifespan increased when body weight was reduced. At the same time, vital parameters such as blood pressure and blood sugar improved. Restricted food intake even impacted positively on the growth of tumor cells.

These results received little attention for a long time, until in 2016 Japanese scientist Yoshinori Ohsumi was awarded the Nobel Prize in Medicine and Physics for his outstanding research results on autophagocytosis. A process that describes the recycling of cell components triggered by temporary food deprivation.





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In Ayurvedic terms, this means systematic decomposition of Ama (toxins) by the cell itself during longer pauses in the food intake.

Thus, modern medicine confirmed what Ayurveda has known and used therapeutically for thousands of years: Moderation leads to a longer and healthier life.

## Intermittent fasting in practice

Probably the best-known method of interval fasting is the so-called 16:8, where you fast for 16 hours each day – meals are taken within the remaining 8-hour window. This schedule can be implemented



easily, also by beginners, because it is quite similar to the usual eating rhythm. For example, if you eat your last meal of the day at 6 p.m. and postpone your breakfast until 10 a.m. the next morning, you have already fulfilled the 16-hours rule.

This approach is also in line with the Ayurvedic recommendation to have the evening meal as early as possible and, for better digestibility, without animal products.

An early, light supper also supports the quality of sleep, which is unnecessarily compromised in many people by late, heavy meals.

Even with just 14 hours of fasting, there will be some positive effects on cell metabolism.

Other forms of interval fasting describe models such as eating normally for 5 days and fasting for 2 days, or alternating between eating one day and fasting the next. But neither is suitable for long-term use and is hardly a viable option for most people in everyday life, with family and work.

In addition, Agni, the digestive power, is weakened if you don't eat anything at all for a long time, just like a fire goes down when it isn't fed.

## Benefits of intermittent fasting

Intermittent fasting has many advantages and is easy to implement, because you only have to organize the timing – no need to pay attention to complicated dietary rules. People who are familiar with therapeutic fasting and the complete renunciation of food may have experienced fasting crises, hunger, and malaise. When toxins are mobilized and eliminated from the fat tissue and then lead to so-called "back poisoning", such symptoms can come up. This doesn't happen with intermittent fasting, as the body does not go into starvation mode.

At the same time, the digestive system benefits enormously from longer meal breaks, providing freedom for regeneration and healing, while the blood sugar level becomes more stable. In addition, the body produces more growth hormone HGH, which helps build muscle and lose fat mass. All these effects support natural weight regulation and help to increase well-being and lightness in everyday life.

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### What Ayurveda says about fasting

According to Ayurveda, how we eat is of great importance for how well the meal is digested. The conclusion is that food should be eaten in peace, in a pleasant environment and chewed well enough. In addition, adequate intervals between meals are frequently emphasized to allow the digestive system to break down the food completely. In this way, pauses of several hours serve to maintain health and can help to reduce weight.

If, on the other hand, we eat at short intervals, our digestive power Agni is reduced, food is not metabolized properly, and toxins (Ama) are increasingly deposited in the tissues. The consequences may manifest as joint problems, fatigue, or a sluggish intestine.

Thus, intermittent fasting, such as the classic 16:8, helps to reduce Ama, while Agni is stimulated. For most people, this form of fasting is therefore an excellent way to do something good for their own health.

In classical (longer-term) fasting, on the other hand, there is a decrease in digestive power, which is why it is extremely important to end such a fast very slowly in order to gradually build up Agni again. For this reason, prolonged complete fasting, such as full days of abstinence from food, is not recommended from an Ayurvedic point of view.

Only when Agni is functioning well, Ojas, i.e. vitality and immunity, can be generated.

Those who enjoy good health constantly produce Ojas and only little Ama.

If this delicate balance is disturbed by eating too frequently and too heavily, more and more Ama is formed instead of Ojas, which creates the basis for the development of acute as well as chronic illnesses.



### Intermittent fasting and the Doshas

Some people find it easier to go without food, while others seem to have difficulties. This depends on their constitution.

People with a high proportion of Vata Dosha need smaller portions at shorter intervals and have more difficulty tolerating long breaks. They may want to shorten the interval from 16 to 12–13 hours and use Vata tea to help bridge the breaks.

Also people with Pitta predominance, who have pronounced hunger pangs, might find it challenging at first to take breakfast only after 10 a.m. They can start the morning with warming teas and hot water to calm their stomachs. Usually, this sharp hunger disappears within the first 2 weeks of transition, as the body becomes accustomed to the new situation.

People with high Kapha Dosha find it easiest to do intermittent fasting. Their Agni is still weak in the morning anyway – often they only eat breakfast out of habit, without a real feeling of hunger. For them it is quite comfortable to simply postpone breakfast for a couple of hours. In this case, even



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an extension of the interval to 18 hours is conceivable, especially if a simultaneous weight reduction is aimed for.

### The three nutritional archetypes in Ayurveda

In addition to the familiar distinction in three Dosha types, Vata, Pitta and Kapha, Ayurveda also distinguishes three kinds of people according to how they take food: Yogi, Bhogi and Rogi.

The Yogi shows the highest consciousness concerning their nutrition, may eat just once a day and then only that, which their body demands. They maintain an ascetic lifestyle and derive pleasure from requiring very little to live.

The Bhogi, on the other hand, is a bon vivant, loves food and life. Nevertheless, they follow a balanced regimen of 2–3 meals a day and enjoy good health. Only, when the Bhogi gets out of balance, they slide towards the Rogi. A Rogi is the sick person who eats in an uncontrolled way and is not (any-more) aware of their own eating habits. In addition to three main meals, many snacks are consumed in the form of soft drinks, sweets, snacks and alcohol, producing Ama and causing diseases.

Seen from this angle, intermittent fasting can help create greater awareness of one's own nutrition and health and thus provide the basis for more lightness, vitality, and well-being.

***Just try it out for a few weeks!***

