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LET THEM EAT CAKE

LOSE WEIGHT, LIVE LONGER
AND STILL EAT WHAT YOU LIKE
THE NEW BUZZ IN DIETING

5
NEW
HEALTH
PRODUCTS

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HEADED FOR
A WINTER
PLAGUED BY
ILLNESS

SWEET!

EAT WHAT YOU LIKE AND STILL LOSE WEIGHT

Intermittent fasting – where you restrict calorie intake a couple of days a week and eat what you want on others – is being heralded as the secret to losing weight and living longer. By **Lara Brunt**

For years we have been told to “eat little and often” and “never skip meals” in order to lose weight and keep it off.

Now, scientists are discovering that short periods of fasting could not only help us beat the bulge, they may also protect against age-related diseases.

Intermittent fasting, where you eat about 25 per cent of your daily energy needs for a couple of days a week, is being touted as potentially “revolutionary”.

Studies suggest it could lower the



Dr Michael Mosley. “And from the human trials, there seem to be similar benefits to the ones they found in animals.”

But, he cautions, “You can do lots of things in animals that don’t work in humans.”

The longevity link

Animals can live longer when their calorie intake is reduced. Studies show mice reared on a low-calorie diet can live up to 40 per cent longer. A similar effect may occur in humans.

One of the key factors linking fasting and longevity seems to be the hormone insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1).

risk of heart disease and protect against diabetes, cancer and neurological diseases such as Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s.

“All the studies that were previously done with animals are now being trialled on humans,” says UK medical doctor and health journalist

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Tip If you want to try the 5:2 diet, check with your GP first if you have a health condition and make sure your restricted-calorie days are not consecutive.

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High levels of IGF-1 seem to lead to accelerated ageing and age-related diseases, while low levels protect against them.

"Where fasting comes in is that studies suggest it can restrict the growth of IGF-1 in adults as long as you simultaneously cut the amount of protein you eat," Mosley says.

He says many people eat more protein than is recommended in dietary guidelines.

Alternate fasting

While the word "fasting" may sound daunting, advocates swear it is easier than conventional dieting.

Research scientist Dr Krista Varady from the University of Illinois says most dieters opt for daily calorie restriction, where they reduce their food intake by about 15 to 40 per cent every day.

"The problem is people tend to do quite well for about eight weeks and then get bored or find they can't adhere to the diet. I think it's because they feel deprived, as they're dieting every day," she says.

Varady has been studying the effects of alternate-day fasting (ADF) on human volunteers, which allows them to diet every other day.

On fast days, men can eat 600 calories (2500 kilojoules) and women 500 calories (2100 kilojoules).

"Then the next day, which we call the feed day, they can eat whatever they want," Varady says.

"The first 10 days are very difficult," she admits. "But after that, your body just adjusts to it."

Promising results

In various ADF trials where volunteers consumed 500 calories in a single lunchtime meal, Varady found they lost about 4.5 to 13.5 kilograms over an eight- to 12-week period.

More importantly, they also lowered their risk of heart disease and stroke.

"We've seen total cholesterol and the 'bad' LDL cholesterol go down by about 15 to 25 per cent. Triglycerides have also decreased by about 30 per cent, and blood pressure generally goes down by about 10 per cent," she says.

The big question, though, is whether these health improvements are down to fasting or just to weight loss in general.

"Right now, we're not quite sure," Varady says, although she hopes to determine this during a trial later this year.

The 5:2 way

A hybrid version of ADF has soared in popularity in the UK, thanks to a recent BBC documentary, *Eat, Fast And Live Longer*.

In the documentary, due to air on SBS later this year, Mosley tries various forms of fasting under medical supervision. These include an 86-hour fast and ADF, before he settles on a 5:2 pattern.

The 5:2 regimen means you can eat whatever you like for five days, then restrict your calorie intake for two days (600 calories for men and 500 calories for women).

"Because it's only two days a week, you can cope. I was genuinely surprised at how relatively easy it was," Mosley says.

There are no hard and fast rules on whether you should eat your calories in one meal or throughout the day, because, so far, there have been few human trials. But Mosley fasted on Tuesdays and Thursdays and says the days should not be consecutive.

Mass appeal

After five weeks on the 5:2 diet, Mosley lost more than six kilograms and his IGF-1 levels dropped by 50 per cent. Anecdotally, it seems to be working for others too, with social media sites abuzz with success stories.

"It works for me and it seems to work for an awful lot of people, but I wouldn't begin to claim it has been properly road-tested," Mosley says.

In the meantime, the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) recommends sticking to current dietary advice.

Kellie Bilinski, DAA spokeswoman and dietitian, says: "I think most of the evidence is pointing to calorie restriction, as opposed to fasting."

"We advocate eating a healthy, balanced diet so you're getting protein, carbohydrates and healthy fats, and it's not totally restrictive. That's what's going to be beneficial in the long term." **B**

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Find another version of intermittent fasting – and recipes that suit the 5:2 variation – on our website.



Before After
"I'VE LOST 11 KILOS"

+ Francis Smith, 52, has been following the 5:2 diet for five months.

"I have high cholesterol, like my father, and began taking statins three years ago. My father had his first heart attack at 54. He didn't smoke or drink, had a physical job but didn't exercise. I didn't want the same future."

"I was training twice a week and walking a lot, but I still wasn't losing weight."

"The 5:2 diet has almost become second nature now."

"I've gone from 102-centimetre trousers to 86 centimetres."

"In October, I stopped taking statins as a six-month trial under my GP's supervision. I'm hoping my cholesterol levels will remain normal without them."



Before After

"5:2 IS LIBERATING"

+ Karen Burns-Booth, 54, has lost 10 kilos since adopting the 5:2 diet five months ago.

"I wanted to lose weight and see if the 5:2 diet would help my menopause symptoms."

"At the beginning, I felt a little weak on fast days and had hunger pains. But I've found these side effects have abated and drinking lots of green tea helps me feel full."

"On a fast day, I eat three meals so I don't feel deprived."

"The day after a fast, I feel great. I sleep better, have more energy and don't have mood swings."

"My cholesterol has dropped from a high 6.7 to a safe level of 4.8."

"5:2 is a lifestyle not a diet. I don't have to count points every day."

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