

# New Research on Intermittent Fasting

With the new year come new resolutions that oftentimes involve losing weight. Perhaps intermittent fasting is on the 2020 agenda.

A new paper was published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* on Dec 26th 2019, intended to [help physicians who are supporting patients with Intermittent Fasting \(IF\)](#). The study has shed some light on the science and clinical applications of IF. The author of the paper, Mark Mattson, PhD is a Johns Hopkins Medicine neuroscientist who has studied intermittent fasting for the past 25 years.

Intermittent fasting diets generally fall into two categories: daily time-restricted feeding, which narrows eating times to 6-8 hours per day, and so-called 5:2 intermittent fasting, in which people limit themselves to one moderate-sized meal two days each week. The mechanism that is thought to produce increased cellular health is the metabolic switching that takes place in all intermittent fasting protocols.

In a study by the University Hospital of South Manchester NHS Foundation Trust, 100 overweight women followed the 5:2 protocol. When compared to the calorie-restricted group, the fasting group not only lost the same amount of weight, they reduced visceral fat and improved insulin sensitivity when compared to the calorie-restricted group. Another two-year preliminary study by the University of Toronto observed enhanced brain health in people following intermittent fasting programs. Mattson suggested, "We are at a transition point where we could soon consider adding information about intermittent fasting to medical school curricula alongside standard advice about healthy diets and exercise."

Mattson advises that although initial hunger pangs and irritability are usual, they will normally subside within 4 weeks, and patients can be guided in the intermittent fasting protocols. As with other lifestyle changes, Mattson suggests that clinicians advise patients to gradually increase the duration and frequency of fasting periods.

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