



The Athena Wellness Podcast  
Episode 045 – What is Intermittent Fasting (and why you should try it)  
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Welcome to the Athena Wellness podcast, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

Hello and welcome to Episode 45. Thanks so much for joining me.

Here's a question for you. What drives your eating habits and what impact does that approach have on your wellness? For years, my eating habits revolved around my schedule. I would find small periods of time during days of back to back work meetings, late nights in the office, and family responsibilities during the weekends. Does that strike a chord with you?

I became much more attuned to *when* I was eating when I began training for ultra endurance events, which coincided with the last few years of my corporate career. I had to be very intentional on minimizing inflammation, eating nutrient dense foods, and keeping up with sleep so my body could repair itself.

Here's what I learned about myself during those years of intense cross training. I feel my best when I eat unprocessed whole foods. I feel my best when I move my body. I feel my



best when I'm in a certain weight range. And I feel my best when I get a solid night of sleep.

If you're nodding your head thinking, "Yeah, me too," what if I told you, there's a framework that holds all of this together that's super simple, yet has big impact? The solution I found that fits the bill for me is intermittent fasting or IF. And that's what we'll be exploring today.

We'll cover:

- What intermittent fasting is
- The benefits along with who should *not* practice it
- How to do it and why I love it, and
- Tips if you'd like to give it a try

So sit back, take a nice long breath to ground yourself in presence, and let's get started.

Before we dive into this topic, it's a good time to remind everyone that while I'm a certified wellness coach, I'm not a doctor and I'm not a nutritionist. So please consult your health professionals before considering any change to your health and wellness routines.

So what is intermittent fasting? IF is basically an eating pattern that cycles between periods of eating and not eating. I like to think of it as a strategy of *when* to eat versus a diet that imposes *what* to eat.



So why would we even consider doing this? Here's a quote from an article that was published in *Scientific American* in 2020 that sums it up so much better than I ever could.

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Quote, "Scientists attribute many of the positive effects of IF to something called metabolic switching. After 10 or 12 hours of fasting, the body depletes its supply of glycogen, a stored form of glucose, and starts burning ketone, a fuel made from fat by the liver. This switch affects growth factors, immune signals and other chemicals. But ketones are not the whole story. These periods of fasting-eating-fasting-eating activate genes and signaling pathways that make neurons more resilient. It stimulates a process called autophagy where cells go into a stress resistance and recycling mode, where they get rid of damaged proteins." Unquote. I'll put a link to that article in the show notes.

Here's how I think about it in layperson's terms. When I'm in a feeding cycle, my body is digesting and absorbing food several hours after a meal, my insulin levels naturally elevate, making it harder to burn fat. When I'm in a fasted state and my body isn't processing food, about 12 hours after the last meal, my insulin levels lower making it easier to burn fat.

There are many other benefits along with fat burn and autophagy and there's a helpful article on the Healthline website that I'll link to. It's called "Ten Evidence-based Health Benefits of Intermittent Fasting."

Along with the science that's evolving around this topic, here's what I feel is beneficial:



1. **It's simple.** There's nothing new to learn, no new foods to shop for, nothing to prep, no tracking of calories or macros required. It's merely an experiment with my schedule and I adjust it depending on how I feel.
2. **It's calming.** I pair IF with eating whole foods, exercising and being mindful of sleep. When these things are all in sync, there are no cravings for unhealthy food or drink and inflammation stays in check.
3. **It's flexible.** I can adjust the fasting windows as needed based on schedule or workouts.
4. **It's disciplined.** It's a daily practice that impacts my body, mind and spirit. The process of allowing the body to recover through a fasted state physically gives me more energy during the day and it mentally prepares me to ride out the times when good food choices are not readily available. It's also consistent with the religious practice of abstinence. For me personally, it can feel like there's more spiritual receptivity when I'm fasting.
5. **It's about the long game.** I feel like I'm investing in my longevity by lowering my risk of disease and living with vitality.

And lastly, if you think about it, we've been fasting throughout evolution from our hunter-gatherer days, long before food was available on demand or refrigeration existed. So it can be argued that fasting is more natural than the constantly grazing practices many follow today.

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Let's talk about how to do it. There are many different options and ways to practice IF. Here are some of the most popular ones to split the day or the week into fueling and fasting periods.



### *Daily Patterns*

Daily fasting periods can range from 12 hours to 20 hours with fueling periods ranging from 12 to 4 hours. From a sustainability and impact perspective, most people opt for fasting periods of 14 to 16 hours and fueling periods of 10 to 8 hours.

Growing in popularity is the circadian pattern, which I define as 13 hours of fasting and 11 fueling, approximating the daily daylight and night rhythm.

It doesn't matter when you start or stop the fast. For example, for a 14 fast/10 fueling pattern, you can choose to start the fast earlier in the evening, say 6pm and break the fast at 10am. Or start it later and break it later. It's up to you. But whenever you choose to start your fast, I suggest not eating too close to bedtime.

### *Weekly Patterns*

Now let's talk about some weekly options. You can also choose to eat your regular way and then select one day a week to fast, either a calendar day, like Tuesdays, or a meal from one day to the next, say lunch to lunch the following day, effectively cutting out one dinner and one breakfast.

You can also choose an alternate day pattern by having a regular day of eating followed by one where your calories are restricted to 500 or less.

And then there's also a 5:2 pattern, where you would eat your normal way for five days and then reduce your calorie count to a quarter of your recommended daily intake for the remaining two. And those two days don't need to be side by side; you can break it up.



### *OMAD*

Lastly, there's an option called OMAD or one meal a day. This approach is the most extreme in my view and I don't recommend it, but it's defined as an eating plan where a person usually consumes only dinner with no other calories during the day.

So by now you've gotten a sense of all of the benefits, the positive effect on insulin sensitivity, cellular repair, hormones, inflammation, heart and brain health, weight maintenance and longevity. But is IF for everyone? And like everything else in the wellness space, this is not one size fits all.

For those who are underweight, struggle with eating disorders, are pregnant or nursing, on medication, or are ill, for example, IF is not a recommended practice.

Let me share a bit about my practice - and keep in mind this has evolved over the years, but it will give you a sense for why I love it.

If I had to give my IF preference a name, it would most closely align with the circadian rhythm pattern. I like the idea of aligning my eating and sleeping to the day's sunrise and sunset, because it changes slightly every day and I feel in tune with the seasons. I also like that by following this pattern, I naturally go to bed on an empty stomach. When eating lasts past darkness, it can impact the body's preparation for sleep, in particular the release of melatonin.

So at a minimum, I try to leave at least 13 hours, but usually more, between the last meal of the day and the first meal of the following day. That leaves me plenty of time to consume my meals when the sun is up.



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I like the circadian rhythm pattern because it's less about skipping meals and more about being in tune with what my body needs and when.

Here's what a typical day looks like for me: I'm up around five, workout at 6:30, and I'm working by eight. If I'm hungry then, I'll have half of a Fast Bar, which is made from nuts, with water, or maybe some tea. I have a cup of coffee and breakfast around nine, usually coconut yogurt and fruit. My largest meal is midday around one. I go for an afternoon walk before an early dinner that's done by six. If I'm hungry on a particular day due to activity, I may have an afternoon cup of decaf and a small snack a few hours before dinner.

So what do you think? Does this make sense for you?

If you'd like to give it a try, here are a few ideas for you to consider:

- **Start gradual.** You can begin with tracking your current patterns and begin to adjust. For example, if you like to snack in the evening, you can begin by not eating after your dinner. Once you're comfortable with that you can start to eat a little later the next morning, trying for 12 hours first, and then increasing an hour over a period of time. You can also play with the timing. If you're not a breakfast fan, you can adjust your hours so you begin fueling later in the day, or vice versa. Notice how you feel as you play with the timing and try to consume the majority of your calories before late afternoon.
- **Eat whole foods.** When you do fuel, choose nutrient dense foods and enjoy well rounded meals. My suggestion is plant based with appropriate portions.
- **Hydrate.** The only liquids I have during the day are water, tea and coffee.



- **Stay busy.** I find when I adjust my fasting period during the most engaging parts of my day, I don't even think about fasting or fueling. And you can also occupy your time by moving your body and getting good sleep.
- **Use tracking apps.** You can track your fasting and fueling hours with a free app called Zero, which is what I use. And I get into cycles when I use my Fitbit tracking for movement and sleep, as well as the Loselt! app to get a sense of my fuel intake when I make changes to be able to see how I feel as a result.
- **Honor your inner wisdom.** Listen to your body, notice *your* cues and adjust accordingly.

For me, intermittent fasting is a helpful lifestyle strategy. I think of it as a wellness lever I can pull, along with eating whole foods, moving my body and getting quality sleep. IF keeps me mindful of the food decisions I'm making and it helps me intuitively connect with what my body truly needs.

One of the loveliest byproducts of practicing IF is how grateful I feel at mealtime, appreciating the blessing of the food I'm about to enjoy. That alone makes the practice worthwhile for me.

I'd like to wrap up this episode by stressing that intermittent fasting isn't about depriving your body of food for long periods of time. It's about working with your physical systems and giving your body a break so it can do its work of removing waste and toxins.

IF alone won't work if your health habits are poor. IF doesn't negate the need to eat healthy, nor is it a green light to overindulge when you fuel. But IF is a great tool when it's paired with healthy wellness practices.





Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying “The best of all medicines is rest and fasting.”

I'd like to leave you with another quote from the *Scientific American* article that stresses the role of rest: Quote, “Fasting and eating cycles can be compared to exercise and rest. Your muscles don't get bigger during exercise, they get bigger during recovery.”  
Unquote.

Here's to a summer of enjoying wholesome food, time spent outdoors with friends, and many nights of deep rest.

16:23

Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me. Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love.

If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. And many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

If you'd like to access the show notes, have a question you'd like addressed on a future episode, or would like a transcript of this episode, visit [www.AthenaWellness.com/podcast](http://www.AthenaWellness.com/podcast).

Until next time, be well!