

FREE E-BOOK! Includes coaching questions, Amy's food diary & top tips!

A beginner's guide to

INTERMITTENT FASTING



**Amy Rumball,
Holistic Wellbeing Coach**

www.thewomenswellbeingcollective.org

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Introduction

After many years of struggling with my weight, trapped in a toxic cycle of yo-yo dieting, shame and self-loathing and creeping up to a UK size 22 in my early 40s, I discovered, quite by accident, the idea of intermittent fasting. To be completely honest, I thought that there was no way on earth that I would be able to do it. I could not see how I could 'starve' myself for 18 hours a day or two days per week, when, despite vehemently hating my body and being desperate to lose weight, I couldn't seem to put the doughnut down!

I was dependent on crappy food, my portion sizes were enormous, I was eating more than I needed and too much of the wrong stuff. I was miserable, demotivated and couldn't be bothered to exercise. It was a pretty sad place, but I did want to make changes, so I decided to give intermittent fasting a go!

Fast forward two years - I lost six stone, four dress sizes and maintain a healthy weight- all because of intermittent fasting. I still fast everyday - it has

become my lifestyle and I explore why later on- but IF has been the only approach that has ever actually worked for me and my body in a sustainable way.

This is an introduction to the concepts of time-restricted eating and intermittent fasting, through my own lens and an overview of my journey and how it worked for me. We are all different and what works for one may do little for another but it is up to you to do your research and make your choices. Always take advice from your GP/health practitioner before starting IF if you have underlying health conditions or a history of disordered eating.

Amy x

What is TRE and IF?

TRE stands for Time-Restricted Eating and IF stands for Intermittent Fasting - they mean the same thing. Both terms refer to an eating pattern where you eat within a certain number of hours and fast the rest of the time. There are many different patterns to choose from:

14:10

Fast for 14 hours and eat within a 10-hour window. Have breakfast at 8am and dinner at 6pm for example, then fast from 6pm until 8am the next day. This is a good starting point for people who are completely new to IF and want to build up fasting hours gradually. If IF is going to be a massive shock to the system, start slowly and build up.

16:8

Fast for 16 hours and eat within an 8-hour window. Eat between 10am and 6pm for example then fast from 6pm until 10am the next day. This is the most popular IF eating pattern.

18:6

Fast for 18 hours and eat within a 6-hour window. Eat between 12pm and 6pm for example then fast from 6pm until 12pm the next day.

5:2

Eat normally for five days - don't go mad, make healthy choices - but you don't have to count calories, then fast for two days per week. Restricting your calorie intake on those days to 500 calories for women and 600 for men.

IF doesn't work like a diet in the sense that you are told **what** to eat - the focus is on **when** you eat. It has become a very popular approach to losing weight and maintaining weight loss.

The pros and cons

The benefits of Intermittent Fasting

- IF can help you reduce the number of calories consumed overall - to be fair, there is only so much food that you can eat in 6 hours! Creating a calorie deficit across the week will lead to weight loss.
- Some studies have shown that IF can improve heart health and lower blood sugar.
- By fasting for 16+ hours you get into ketosis and burn stored fat.
- By fasting for 16+ hours you give the digestive system a chance to rest. If the body isn't constantly working to digest, absorb and sort the semi-constant stream of snacks you keep feeding it, it has a chance to do other important jobs.
- IF can reduce inflammation and improve gut health.
- IF can help with gut issues like bloating and constipation.

The downsides

- IF has to be paired with healthy eating for success and sustainable weight loss. If you're eating in a 6 or 8-hour window but you're eating Greggs for breakfast and KFC for lunch, you're potentially consuming the same number of calories across the day. You need to create a calorie deficit to lose weight.
- When you start to follow an IF approach, you may well feel like death warmed up! You may experience hunger, nausea, headaches, cravings, fatigue and low energy, dizziness - this is the worst case scenario - I did experience all of these initially but they do pass with time as your body adapts.
- IF is safe for most people but may not be suitable for people with health conditions like diabetes or elderly or frail people.

Time to reflect:

Think about how you eat now.

- What time do you have breakfast?
- What time do you eat dinner?
- How many snacks do you eat in a day? What kind of time?
- Do you like to have a snack in the evening or while watching TV?
- Do you have a treat or a glass of wine when the kids go to bed?
- Do you drink alcohol or fizzy drinks in the evening?

My Journey

Although keen to lose as much weight as quickly as possible - that hard-wired get-thin-quick programming kicking in- I decided to start with 16:8. I chose to eat within an eight-hour window and fast for 16 hours (which includes the time that you're in bed asleep).

Breakfast was at 10am and dinner at 6pm. The hardest part about this initially was the evening snacking. I was always one for a large glass of wine and a big bag of Kettle chips in the evening - a welcome reward after a long day of parenting! That had to go. All that could pass my lips once I started my fasting phase was black tea or coffee, herbal tea or water. I didn't even drink black coffee at the time, so that took some getting used to. But I did and now I only drink coffee black.

I saw results in the first few days - of course I did- it was a shock to my system and I had a lot of weight to lose. I lost 7lbs in the first week. It wasn't without effort - I felt weak, tired and hungry and I had

really bad headaches. What I would say is that if you can get past that discomfort in the first few weeks, it really does pass and you will feel amazing. You feel lighter, have more energy, your skin looks better - the trouble is, lots of people find this bit too difficult and quit early

I think of it as a transition phase. You are transitioning from the old you who lived on a diet of crap, to the new you who eats well and looks after herself. There is bound to be some pain in that phase - physical and emotional - as you detox.



TOP TIPS

Try to manage this phase rather than let it beat you and lead you to giving up before you've really started. This is a temporary phase and it will pass.

- Drink lots of water to help the body detoxify
- Take a painkiller to keep headaches at bay
- Include gentle exercise at this time - nothing too strenuous if you're feeling weak and tired - you'll feel pumped and energised later on
- Nap if you really need to - after all, if you're sleeping, you're not eating!
- If you're really struggling with hunger, add some MCT oil to a black coffee

Shrinking the Window

I followed my 16:8 plan for a few months. I felt like I had IF under my belt, I had gotten into the groove of it, but the weight loss started to slow down as my body got used to the plan.

I switched to 18:6 - which is the eating pattern that I still follow today. This means I still eat my day's calories in a six-hour window. I break my fast around 10:30 and eat my dinner with the kids at 4:30pm with a light lunch/snack around 12:30/1pm.

Now, this wouldn't work for lots of people, but it worked for me. In practical terms, I was able to break my fast at work, as my first break was at 10:30. I always took my breakfast to work with me in a Mason jar and have eaten pretty much the same breakfast for two years!

I feed my kids early - I like to give them dinner soon after getting home from school as it avoids snacking then not eating dinner, so I just switched to eating dinner with them.

The key to successful IF is making sure the timings fit with your personal schedule. You have to be realistic and consistent; it's no good thinking you'll have dinner at 5pm if you don't get home from work until 7!

Time to reflect:

Think about your day and your commitments.

- Could you make an eight-hour or six-hour eating window work?
- Be practical - would it work with your real life?

What If I'm Going Out Out?

Obviously we want to live a full life as well as practise intermittent fasting and there will be meals, parties and nights out. There will be food and wine and cocktails past 4:30pm! All of which is wonderful and should be embraced.

If I'm having a night out with food and booze, I either 1) have a night off or 2) initiate 'damage limitation' the following day with a slightly shorter eating window. For example - I might do 20:4 (eat in a four-hour window) or OMAD (one meal a day). I'm guided by my body and eat intuitively. If I'm feeling a bit delicate as the result of too much alcohol, and the only thing that will make me feel right is a big greasy fry up - I eat a big greasy fry up! Although, that happens very rarely these days!

Like anything in life, it's all about the balance. If you mostly and consistently follow IF and make healthy food choices, you will lose weight - despite the occasional night off and a big blow out. Just make sure that a night off is a night off - not a week or a month off - because then you're undoing all your good work!

What If I Plateau?

From time to time the body settles into a groove and you notice that you're still on plan but the scale isn't shifting. Firstly, and I know this sounds counterintuitive, but try to cultivate a relationship with your body and weight loss that is more than the number on the scales. How do you feel about yourself? How is your energy?

I always had a weight loss goal and a number I would like to get to but I didn't actually obsess about it - because women's weight can fluctuate - for no apparent reason sometimes.



TOP TIPS

- Go back to keeping a food log for a few days/a week. People can underestimate what they eat and overestimate how much they move by as much as 30%. Tracking these things closely for a week gives you really valuable insight. See my template on the next page.
- Introduce a bit more cardiovascular exercise - more walking or rebounding on the mini trampoline- find something you can enjoy!

You can use an app on your phone or a notebook- whatever works for you. This template is a tool in my coaching journal - it is a holistic approach as it tracks a range of healthy habits and encourages you to think about how food and mood are interconnected.

Day/date: _____

HEALTHY HABIT TRACKER

TRACK YOUR HABITS | ACHIEVE YOUR GOALS



Time of day	Food/Drink	Mood 

Movement

Self-care

Goals/ reflections/ successes

Water



~250ml

Fruit & Veg



Sleep

Mood



Amy Rumball

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Time to reflect:

- What barriers can you foresee?
- Think about work timings, commitments, parenting, caring responsibilities...
- How tired are you when you get home from work?
- How organised are you? How likely are you to be able to meal prep or batch cook?
- Are there any financial barriers?
- What habits or patterns will you need to change? How will you do that?
- What personal triggers around food/eating/dieting do you need to be aware of?

A Final Note

You may think that losing weight is the end of the story. You set a goal, follow a plan, lose the weight you want to lose and... happy ever after! Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that.

Research suggests that around 80% of people who lose a significant amount of weight regain half the weight they lost within two years.

A lot of inner work needs to happen, big mindset shifts, radical self-love and reprogramming those unhelpful and entrenched beliefs, and we have to continue to practise our new healthy habits.

As mentioned, IF has become my lifestyle. I still follow the 18:6 model, sometimes it's 19:5 - depending on what is going on in my life. I'm not in an active fat burning phase anymore, I'm in a maintenance phase so I don't restrict what I eat in my eating window but, having changed my mindset and internal landscape when it comes to food and holistic health, I do, invariably, make healthy choices. THAT has become my entrenched habit -

not the doughnuts! It is a cliché, but it's true - holistic health and sustainable weight loss is a long-term change of lifestyle. Boring! But there's no getting away from it.

I continue to use an IF approach because it helps me manage my appetite and my weight, and I like to give my body and my digestive system time and energy to do other important jobs. I also think that it is important and natural for the body to feel hunger. We dull our bodies with near-constant eating and snacking and don't give it a chance to do what it is supposed to do - to tell us that we are hungry. We are depriving the body of its natural urges and instincts .

Long-term and consistent fasting trains the mind and body so an IF lifestyle becomes easy! When my eating window ends at 4:30pm, I very rarely even think about food. I drink black coffee and water and this is completely fine for me. I do not wake up ravenous and can quite easily not break my fast until lunchtime - my point here is that the more you practise this, the easier it gets.



TOP TIPS

- Start small and build up. You can always start with a 12 or 14-hour fasting period and increase it gradually.
- Download an app or set timers on your phone to signal your eating and fasting windows.
- Make healthy choices during your eating window.
- Build exercise and movement into your daily plan.
- Avoid low-fat and sugar-free. I eat full fat yoghurt, milk, butter - just eat less of it.
- Eat all the good fats - avocados, nuts, cheese- your brain needs it!
- Avoid ultra-processed food (UPF) where you can - eat (and enjoy) proper food!
- Download the Yuka app and use the scanner to make informed choices. It tells you the nutritional quality of food.
- Plan your meals and prepare things in advance so you don't get caught out.
- Always carry a snack!
- Once your fasting window starts, only drink black tea or coffee, herbal tea or water. No zero calorie fizzy pop or sugar-free gum. These things can interfere with your fast and make you more hungry.
- If you're an evening snacker, find something mindful to do with your hands so you don't mindlessly raid the fridge!

So, what does it look like in practice?

This is my actual food and movement diary from last week! You will see that my eating window is between 10:30 and 16:30, but I don't always use the full six hours.

	Break fast	'Lunch'	Dinner	Snacks	Movement
M	11:00 Keto shake, 2 x boiled eggs	12:00 4 tbsp full fat greek yoghurt, tsp manuka honey, blueberries, raspberries, chia seeds	16:40 Spicy lentil dahl with brown rice with vegetables	85% dark chocolate bar from Starbucks & Americano	8k steps 20-min trampoline 30-min yoga
T		11:30 Jacket potato with beans, cheese and coleslaw	16:30 Pork wrapped in parma ham, sage butter and tenderstem broccoli	2 x mini cupcakes	10k steps 20-min trampoline
W	11:30 4 tbsp full fat greek yoghurt, tsp manuka honey, blueberries, raspberries, chia seeds	13:00 4x corn cakes with hummus and an apple	16:30 Chicken breast, salad, avocado	Small banana Handful of walnuts	8,500 steps Swim - 30 lengths 60-min yoga
Th	11:00 4 tbsp full fat greek yoghurt, tsp manuka honey, blueberries, raspberries, chia seeds	12:30 Celery sticks with peanut butter	16:15 Chicken fajitas with avocado and salad	Small banana Handful of almonds	13k steps 60-min cardio, gym 30-min yoga
F	10:30 Keto shake, 2 x boiled eggs	12:00 Quorn noodle stir fry with loads of veg	16:30 Spaghetti Bolognese with parmesan and broccoli	Handful of almonds Handful of raisins	11k steps 60-min yoga
Sa	10:30 Avocado and poached egg on sourdough toast	13:00 Apple slices with peanut butter	16:30 Salmon, Roasted vegetable couscous with chickpeas and feta cheese, salad	Kefir yoghurt drink Handful of walnuts Handful of blueberries	13k steps 20-min trampoline 30-min yoga
Su	11:00 Cheese, onion, mushroom omelette	15:00 Roast chicken, baked sweet potato and a selection of vegetables	16:30 Pancake with creme fresh and berries		15k steps 60-min yoga



TOP TIPS

- Break your fast with protein rather than carbs - this will avoid a spike and crash which can make you feel tired.
- Eat most of your carbs later in the day - with your last meal.
- Choose to eat whole fruit rather than juices or smoothies.
- Don't cut out whole food groups. I eat a higher ratio of protein and plants but I do eat small amounts of carbohydrates in my meals.
- Eat full-fat rather than low-fat- count chemicals, not calories.
- Manage portion size by eating from a bowl rather than a big plate. If I want more, I can go back for seconds, but I won't feel obliged to finish my plate if I'm full.
- Add vegetables or salad to every meal.
- Avoid ultra-processed food.
- Cook from scratch and try to use ingredients in their most natural form.
- Set a weekly step count - this means you can catch up at the weekend if you've had a bit of a sedentary day. I aim for 70k steps per week.



For support, advice and inspiration follow **Amy** at **The Women's Wellbeing Collective**. Amy offers classes, courses and retreats and works as a Holistic Wellbeing Coach with women 1:1 and in small groups.

Web: www.thewomenswellbeingcollective.org

Email: thewomenswellbeingcollective@gmail.com

Tel: 07818 117872



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