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Intermittent Fasting for CrossFitters: An Introduction and Initial Game Plan

In recent times, intermittent fasting (IF) has gained major traction as an avenue to lose weight, optimize hormonal balance, make significant positive body composition change, feel better, and optimize athletic performance.

IF has been embraced by not just weight-loss candidates but also well-known elite athletes such as multiple-time CrossFit Games Champion Rich Froning and UFC Welterweight Champion Georges St. Pierre who give it credit for taking their performance to the next level.

It's being touted by many in the medical community such as Dr. Jason Fung and thought leaders in the holistic health community, including healthy-nutrition and "primal-living" guru Mark Sisson, as a way of achieving lasting breakthrough in the battle against obesity and in the fight to gain metabolic flexibility.

In our own CrossFit Edwardsville coaching team, we have committed intermittent fasters in Coach Jake Sebok, Coach Mark Donovan, Coach Caroline Skelly, and even the magnificent Coach Kelsey Albers uses variations of IF during certain seasons of life!

Many of our CrossFit clients have also used IF to enhance how they look, how they feel, and how they perform as athletes, career men and women, spouses and parents.



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In this short eBook, we'll introduce intermittent fasting for CrossFitters, teach you what it is, why it might be beneficial for you, highlight best practices, give tips and strategies for introducing it into your healthy-eating game plan, and outline next steps if you need help taking it to the next level!

What is Intermittent Fasting?

Fasting is simply the practice of intentionally alternating between time windows of eating and not eating.

Intermittent fasting (IF) is an eating pattern that cycles between periods of fasting and eating. It doesn't specify which foods you should eat but rather *when* you should eat them. It's also known as time-restricted feeding (TRF), alternate-day fasting (ADF), or periodic fasting.

It's important to note that IF does *not* necessarily mean eating LESS food... often, you'll eat just as much or even more than you're used to, and STILL achieve results like you see above!

That said, IF *does* mean eating *less frequently*, which many people LOVE because they find themselves stressing less often about food... they're liberated to focus on other things for long periods of the day!

IF doesn't mean you won't enjoy your food... in fact, you'll probably find that you enjoy your food *more*!

It doesn't mean that *what* you eat doesn't matter... it's true that your food choices *definitely* matter.

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In these respects, IF is not a diet in the conventional sense but more accurately described as an structured, thoughtful eating pattern.

What are the Benefits of Intermittent Fasting for CrossFitters?

First, you'll enjoy PRACTICAL benefits.

You'll more easily control or lose weight.

You'll more easily cut bodyfat.

You'll enjoy meal time 100x more than when you eat several meals per day.

You won't have to think about food as often, which frees you up to focus on other things.

You'll have more energy once your body adapts to the new fueling pattern (you may feel more tired at first, in the first 2-3 weeks).

You'll have more focus... people who adopt IF often report greater ability to focus and have fewer distractions?

You'll experience greater mental clarity, less brain fog, and a sense of thinking & performing at a higher cognitive level (this is one of the most surprising but common reports from our IFers!)

You won't be constantly obsessing about your next meal.

You'll feel less bloated.

You'll feel cleaner overall.

You'll enjoy a wonderful feeling and sense of self-control.

The program is compatible with paleo, keto, primal, carnivore, omnivore, and other common and popular nutrition approaches.

You'll enjoy the pure simplicity of the program. It's simple, and if you love simple, you'll love this program.

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If you have a structured, planned off-plan meal or food, you'll likely enjoy it more.

Second, you'll enjoy PHYSIOLOGICAL benefits.

You'll achieve greater metabolic flexibility, meaning that your body will more efficiently metabolize (ie, use, or turn in to energy) all categories of food, whether protein, fat, or carbohydrate.

Your hormone levels will be healthier and better optimized. Practitioners of IF (fasters) see lower overall insulin levels on average AND greatly improved insulin sensitivity. Further, your levels of human growth hormone (HGH) in the blood increase up to 500%, which can facilitate fat loss and muscle gain.

You'll heal faster at all levels of your body, including the cellular level. When fasted, your body is enabled to redirect resources away from digestion and toward healing processes, including cellular repair & autophagy, where cells digest and remove old and dysfunctional protein accumulations.

You'll enjoy greater longevity and immune health. Fasters may see increased expression of genes related to longevity and immunity.

You'll enjoy lower bodyfat percentage and better overall body composition: Fasters report it's easier to break through fat-cutting and weight-loss plateaus because of the hormonal benefits noted above.

You can lower your blood pressure and resting heart rate, two important biomarkers of heart health.

Third, you'll enjoy PERFORMANCE benefits.

You'll naturally reduce inflammation in your body, leading to fewer aches and pains and faster recovery times from your CrossFit workouts.

You can naturally increase your body's testosterone production, which aids with pure strength and energy in your CrossFit workouts.

The same testosterone benefits will aid your energy levels to live your best life as a spouse, parent, and professional man or woman.

You can cut bodyfat while maintaining lean muscle tissue, making CrossFit bodyweight exercise (pull-ups, running, push-ups) easier to do.

You may potentially improve your running endurance (early animal studies show improvements in running stamina in fasted animal populations).

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In summary...

You'll look better.

You'll feel better.

You'll perform better.

CrossFitter Case Study: CFE Coach Jake Sebok. *"I've been doing IF for about 5 or 6 years at this point. I used to keep an explicit window of 18/6 [18 hours fasting, 6 hours feasting]. Now, I just stop eating somewhere between 7-8pm and start eating anywhere from 12 - 5pm. I eat intuitively when I'm hungry, usually post workout. Biggest benefits include: decreased inflammation, faster recovery, additional free time not associated with food prep, it's cheaper, and I also never experience mid-day crashes as a result of glucose spikes and slumps. I also do an extended fast once per week for anywhere from 42 - 50 hours. During that one, I've seen some of my greatest energy and hit the majority of my PRs in the last few years. I also wake up feeling more refreshed and ready to go during those fasts. I also feel as though I have a greater metabolic flexibility as a result of IF. I can workout fasted as easily as after eating. I'm not dependent on glucose for energy and can adapt pretty easily."* -Jake Sebok

Will This Work for Me?

As long as you fully commit to the process and do the program exactly as we recommend, then yes, this will work for you.

Where Should I Begin?

If you'll be eating less often, it's even more important that you put the right, high-octane fuels in to your body in the first place.

Step One is to be sure you're getting the RIGHT fuel – prioritize real, whole foods, that give you real, whole benefits.

In CrossFit founder Greg Glassman's seminal text, "World Class Fitness in 100 words", he outlined the absolute start point for healthy eating: eat meat and vegetables, nuts and seeds, some fruits, little starches and no sugars."

This is an excellent general guideline for your start point.

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To elaborate....

- Eliminate all sugary drinks- especially sodas & soft drinks.
- Eliminate grains, cereals, pastries, breads, pastas, and other carb-dense but nutrient-poor foods.
- Avoid or eliminate dairy (milks, cheeses). This can be a difficult adjustment, but the payoff can be incredible.
- Eat foods with a shelf life. Almost all real, nutrient-dense foods have an expiration date.
- Eliminate all processed, "fake" foods. One guideline that helps: if the ingredients list has more than 3-5 items, it's probably not a good choice.
- If there's no ingredients list at all, even better.
- Use lots of spices and seasonings to achieve a diversity of exciting flavors with your meal prep.

It's extremely important that you start by eliminating the problem foods that screw things up for you, and adopt a pattern of eating healthier foods FIRST.

Otherwise, you risk having a pretty dramatic crash.

ie, if you take a body that's getting a lot of low-quality, processed, nutrient-poor foods regularly, and then cut down to eating those same crappy foods far less regularly...

...now, you're both malnourished AND underfed.

So start by cleaning house and eliminating temptations.

Then, go shopping for foods that NOURISH your body, and fill your fridge and pantry with them.

Consider using [this Whole30 shopping list when you go shopping for food](#). This list of proteins, fats and carbs is an excellent general guide for what to eat and not eat to optimize leanness, energy and performance.

Rule: you must buy proteins, fats, and carbs that you (and your family?) would ENJOY eating! 😊

Once you've cleaned out your pantry and fridge and eliminated all the problem foods...

...and you've filled your kitchen with healthy, nutrient-dense, energizing, real foods...

...it's time to move onto Step Two.

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I'm Eating the Right Foods. What's Next?

Now it's time to introduce the Intermittent Fasting meal-timing protocol!

Based on whatever best matches your lifestyle (ie, what's practical for you?), **CHOOSE ONE OF THESE THREE INTERMITTENT FASTING STYLES.**

Time Window: choose an 9-hour window of continuous time (example: noon-9 pm) to be your "feasting or eating time window"; the other 15-hour time block will be your "fasting time window" every day. This is also commonly known as an 9/15 split.

2MAD: Two meals a day, every day, at times of your choosing. The meals you eat, and the time of day you eat them, can change every day, but you'll only eat once per day.

OMAD: One meal a day, every day. One large meal, at a time of your choosing. The meal you eat, and the time of day you eat it, can change every day, but you'll only eat once per day.

While it's 100% true that intermittent fasting can be much more sophisticated than any one of these three procedures (ie, some experienced fasters do a complex combination of all three every week), it is not necessary to be any more sophisticated than the three approaches above when this is new to you.

To put it another way, don't make a simple thing complicated.

Choose one simple approach and commit to go all in on it, for at least four weeks.

In the future, when you're more experienced with this, you can add different layers and strategies based on what your coach tells you.

How's This Work With My CrossFit Workouts?

The people in our CrossFit community who've experienced the best results, do their intermittent fasting with this strategy.

Your eating time window should either begin right after your morning workout, or end shortly after your evening workout.

Either of these is designed to allow you to have at least one meal right after your workout, so that you can replenish the fuel sources you've used and begin the healing & recovery process in your body.

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So, what's your usual workout time?

Examples of "Time Windows":

Morning workouts: Christian does CrossFit in the morning from 6-7 am on an empty stomach. His first meal of the day OR beginning of his "eating time window", should be right after his workout- sometime between 7 & 10 am. His time window for eating will end 9 hours later. If he eats at 7 am, his feasting time window ends at 4 pm- meaning he must be done eating by 4 pm.

Evening workouts: Jash does CrossFit in the evening from 6-7 pm. He should end his "eating time window" right after his postworkout dinner. So, for example, if he has postworkout dinner by 9 pm, then his "eating window" should begin exactly 9 hours before that: 12 pm. Therefore, his eating time window is 12-9 pm daily.

Midday workouts: Delani does CrossFit at lunchtime, from 12-1 pm, then has lunch at her office desk from 1-1:30 pm. She could either have her eating window go from 5 am- 2 pm, or from 1 pm-9 pm daily.

Examples of 2MAD:

Morning workouts: Angie does CrossFit at 5 am daily, has a breakfast after showering & dressing for work, then goes into fasting mode. She doesn't eat again until dinner at 7 pm with her husband.

Evening workouts: Mark does CrossFit at 5 pm daily. He has lunch at work and has a big dinner postworkout each evening. He fasts after dinner until lunchtime the next day.

Midday workouts: Caroline does CrossFit at 11 am daily. She has lunch postworkout and has a big dinner with her family each evening. She fasts after dinner until lunchtime the next day.

Examples of OMAD:

Morning workouts: Jake does CrossFit at 8 am daily, then has his one meal of the day right after his workout. He goes into fasting mode right after this big meal, and doesn't eat again until after his workout the next day.

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Evening workouts: Aaron does CrossFit at 5 pm daily, then has his one meal of the day right after his workout. He goes into fasting mode right after this big meal, and doesn't eat again until after his workout the next day.

Midday workouts: Dallas does CrossFit at 2 pm open gym daily, then has his one meal of the day right after his workout. He goes into fasting mode right after this big meal, and doesn't eat again until after his workout the next day.

The core principle: As mentioned above, **the principle is for your IF pattern to capture and allow a postWOD meal**, when your body most needs nutrients to facilitate recovery and replenish exhausted fuel reserves. As growth hormone is higher at this time, you theoretically will recover and build muscle faster in this state.

CrossFitter Case Study: Rich Froning Jr, Multiple-Time CrossFit Games Champion (speaking to Men's Health Magazine): *"I just generally feel better [while intermittent fasting]. The problem I used to have is that I would eat in the morning, get busy training, and then maybe I'd have a shake or two throughout the day, but I wouldn't really eat anything. Then, at night, I would just kind of eat a larger meal or two, but by my second training session, I was usually kind of beat up or worn down. This actually makes me eat twice in our break [between training sessions] that we usually take from about 1pm to 3:30pm, so I feel way better by the time we train again in the afternoon instead of feeling rundown and depleted."* -Rich Froning Jr.

What Are Some Common Mistakes to Avoid?

Here are some common errors people make when adopting an Intermittent Fasting with CrossFit protocol.

Mistake #1: Skipping Steps and Rushing Into This.

First, be sure you've eliminated temptation foods from your home and office. Create as much distance as possible between yourself and the things that have a history of messing it all up for you.

Second, be sure you've acquired a lot of on-plan, healthy foods that you can count on to nourish your body and fuel your body effectively when you're fasting.

Finally, layer on your fasting plan (option 1, 2, or 3 above).

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Mistake #2: Failing to Anticipate the Initial Difficulty.

Any time you make a meaningful change to your eating pattern, your body needs time to adapt.

Expect the first 2.5 weeks to be pretty rough, with LOWER initial energy levels, LOWER initial workout performance, and some crankiness & irritability.

To put it another way, expect for this to be pretty tough for the first 2.5-3 weeks as your body adjusts.

This is because when you make a dietary change, your body needs about 15 days to adapt to metabolizing different foods in different patterns.

Some challenges you may experience, that are totally normal:

- Hunger, which does go away as your body adapts and becomes more metabolically flexible.
- Headaches, which are a common side effect in the first few days, and can be combated by improving water intake and by some supplementation.
- Irritability (initially, you may be "hangry"), which goes away also as your body adapts.
- Fatigue, which will pass once your body adapts (see notes below).

The magic seems to really happen around days 16-21; that's when you'll see a surge in energy and dramatic improvements in performance across the board (cognitive, emotional, physical benefits noted earlier).

This is because by days 16-21, your body starts to "figure it out" and become more effective at metabolizing the better fuel sources in the new consumption pattern.

Push through those initially difficult 15 days- it won't be easy, but it will definitely be worth it! The payoff will be incredible if you persevere and don't quit!

Mistake #3: Ignoring Initial Warning Signs & Stress Response

As a counterbalance to the point above... while the first 15 days will likely be rough, you should watch for the following signs of trouble.

Jitters, brain fog, or other overall "stress responses" can be a sign that you should make an adjustment to your game plan.

If you experience these stress-response symptoms, talk to your nutrition coach about how to adapt your program.

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Mistake #4: Treating Food as the Enemy.

Let's be super clear: nothing in this text is intended to imply or suggest that this challenge is "you vs food".

Food is not your enemy.

Food is your blessing, and the fuel for you to live and experience your best life.

You need it, and you should embrace it.

Learn to love food... but do not abuse it (ie, don't use food to self-medicate strong feelings, or to achieve a short-term high).

Mistake #5: Starting this Program WHILE Increasing Your Workout Volume.

Don't add extra workouts to your schedule when you start this.

Keep the same exercise schedule you're used to.

After the first four weeks, when you've become adjusted to this new program, you can then add more workouts if you like.

Mistake #6: Failing to Prioritize Sleep.

Sleep is one of the things in life that affects everything.

How you look, feel, perform, and respond to eating & exercise – these are ALL all a function of your sleep.

In this season of personal positive change, be sure to prioritize getting at least 7 hours of sleep every night.

It will absolutely help you see better results, and faster.

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Mistake #7: Failing to Address Disordered Eating.

If you have disordered eating, such as binge eating, compulsive overeating, anorexia or bulimia, it's essential that you address these things with a professional.

For your health and safety, it could potentially even be best to postpone beginning this program until after these patterns are addressed.

Mistake #8: Allowing Yourself Any Mindless Eating in Your Eating Window.

Every time you eat, it should be intentional, thoughtful and purposeful.

You should always eat to fuel your amazing, God-given body and empower your best life.

You should never eat just to eat, eat with no clear purpose or intention.

No mindless eating. Period.

Mistake #9: Going Places Where Temptations Abound.

If there are places- restaurants, certain stores- where you KNOW you're extremely tempted to eat off-plan foods or indulge in self-destructive eating patterns...

...do not go to those places.

A wise man recognizes that some paths are more dangerous, and he avoids those paths.

Steer way from trouble, and you exponentially increase your odds of success.

Mistake #10: Mistaking Eating Less Frequently for Eating Less in Total

Eating less frequently is NOT the same thing as saying "eat less."

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If you eat less frequently, you very well may need to eat MORE at each mealtime to hit the protein, fat, carb, calorie, and nutrient needs of your incredible CrossFitter body.

Bigger meals, less frequently- this is likely the way for you!

Elite Athlete Case Study: Georges St. Pierre, Former UFC Welterweight Champion (speaking to GQ Magazine): *"I consume all my calories in a window of eight hours during my day. Normally, I wake up with an empty stomach and I go train. I have found out that training on an empty stomach makes me sharper, because I believe that when you eat in the morning and go train, part of your brain is focusing on digestion. Now, because my stomach is empty, I feel I have more focus on what I am doing.*

"I wish I would have known that before, but like most athletes, we have been raised in a society where they teach you, 'Oh, you need protein. You need to eat a lot of protein after a workout to make sure you recuperate well. Buy this. This supplement is good. This. This.' It's a lot of consumerism. The reason we don't hear so much about fasting is because there's no money to make.

I realized after I started fasting that we're overfed as human beings. That I don't need to eat six times, or even three times a day to recuperate. And the fact that I'm fasting—my inflammation goes down, my water retention goes down, I sleep better. I don't have those colitis symptoms, these cramps that I used to have. I feel so much better, and I'm much leaner. I'm retired now, I'm 39 years old, and physically, I look—in terms of a bodybuilding look—better than when I was 25." -Georges St. Pierre

What Are Some Helpful FREE Apps?

Our CrossFitting fasters have identified the following two apps as their favorite, and most helpful, apps for fasting...

1: Fastic Fasting App by HealthVida GmbH & Co.

2: LIFE Intermittent Fasting by LifeOmic, Inc.

Both of these apps can give you helpful reminders for your eating and fasting times, help you identify when you reach ketosis and autophagy stages, track your progress, and adapt your program as you go along.

We recommend that you use one of these two apps for additional support on your IF journey as a CrossFitter.

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Closing Thoughts

Now you know everything you need to know to get started with Intermittent Fasting as a CrossFitter!

Get excited – you now have the basic tools you need to look your best, feel your best, perform your best, and live your best life!

If you want or need more, we're here to be of service.

Our CrossFit Edwardsville nutrition coaches are ready to guide you along this path, step by step, giving you all the accountability and individualized guidance it takes to fast-track your progress.

What Are The Next Steps If I'm Ready to Proceed?

If you know you need a little extra help or push to bring this plan to life, we're here to help.

Learn more, see more, and do more at our website: www.CrossFitEdwardsville.com

You can also schedule a No-Sweat Initial Conversation with a Coach here: <https://go.oncehub.com/conversationwithcoach>

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Resources & References

[The Obesity Code by Dr Jason Fung](#)

[Two Meals a Day by Mark Sisson](#)

[This article from the CrossFit Journal](#)

[This article about multiple-time CrossFit Games Champion Rich Froning](#)

[Johns Hopkins' medical research \(Institute for Basic Biomedical Sciences\)](#)

[This all-purpose guide from Precision Nutrition](#)

[This episode of the CrossFit Edwardsville Community Podcast](#)

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