

THE

FAST

DIET

By Frankie Rozwadowska



Photography by Chris Ryan. Image courtesy Getty Images

Quickly becoming one of the most popular diet trends, the Fast Diet sheds pounds and supposedly has a ton of health benefits. Frankie Rozwadowska tries it out herself.

Forget Atkins, Dukan, The South Beach Diet and surviving off cabbage soup - there's a new weight-loss plan in town, which not only promises to rid you of those excess pounds, but also boasts a staggering list of health benefits. The idea is that for two days a week you 'fast', eating one-fourth of your daily calorie intake (500 calories for women, 600 for men) and on the other five days you can eat what you want. That means cakes, chips and chocolate - if you really want it. And let's be honest, who doesn't? Hailed as the diet for foodies, it's revolutionized the way people eat and think about food, simply by dedicating two non-consecutive days a week to 'fasting'. The Fast Diet book has topped the UK's bestseller list and word is rapidly spreading around the world of its success. It's even reported that stars like Beyoncé, Jennifer Lopez, Forget Atkins, Dukan, The South Beach Diet and surviving off cabbage soup - there's a new weight-loss plan in town, which not only promises to rid you of those excess pounds, but also boasts a staggering list of health benefits. The idea is that for two days a week you 'fast', eating one-fourth of your daily calorie intake (500 calories for women, 600 for men) and on the other five days you can eat what you want. That means cakes, chips and chocolate - if you really want it. And let's be honest, who doesn't? Hailed as the diet for foodies, it's revolutionized the way people eat and think about food, simply by dedicating two non-consecutive days a week to 'fasting'. The Fast Diet book has topped the UK's bestseller list and word is rapidly spreading around the world of its success. It's even reported that stars like Beyoncé, Jennifer Lopez and Hugh Jackman are fans of intermittent fasting. So is the 5:2 for you? Well, I decided to give it a go and see if I really could have my cake, eat it, and lose weight too.

What drew me to the diet wasn't just the obvious weight loss, but the other ways it's said to boost your body and health. Yogis, monks and numerous religions have recognized the benefits of fasting for centuries, and it's used in Indian Ayurvedic medicine, Chinese Medicine and South American Medicine to aid the detoxification and cleansing processes. It's therefore no wonder that after health tests revealed Dr. Michael Mosley, an award-winning British medical journalist, wasn't in the best of shape, he decided to investigate fasting further - testing the theory that drastically cutting back on calories can affect your health. Not only did he lose a lot of weight (one stone in five weeks), his post-fasting test results were staggeringly different. His blood glucose levels (which had been borderline diabetic) were back to normal, his cholesterol levels (previously high enough to warrant medication), were down to a healthy range, and his IGF-1 levels (insulin-like growth factor hormone) stayed low. This is vital for being slim and

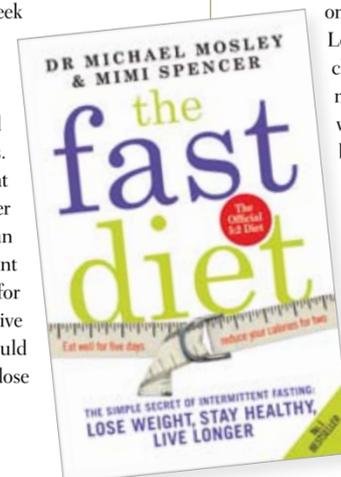
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Mimi Spencer



healthy because, as its name suggest, IGF-1 has growth-promoting effects on almost every cell in the body, keeping cells constantly active. It's important to have sufficient IGF-1 levels when you are young and growing, but in later life high levels lead to accelerated aging, diabetes and diseases - including cancer.

At the University of Southern California, ongoing research by Professor Valter Longo (whom Dr. Mosley worked closely with) has also shown that a number of repair genes switch on when IGF-1 levels drop. So to look better, cut your risk of illness and live longer - intermittent fasting seems to do the trick. It lowers blood pressure, reduces the risk of Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, asthma and mental illnesses (including Alzheimer's and Parkinson's), while increasing focus, concentration, mental clarity and, of course, fat burning.



I was still a little reserved, worried that on my 'fasting' days I would turn into a food obsessed demon, foaming at the mouth while dreaming of donuts but with no energy to actually go and get one. So I caught up with Mimi Spencer, a top London journalist and Dr. Mosley's co-writer of The Fast Diet book. 45 years old, she looks like she's in her 30's, and is lean and slim having lost 23 pounds since starting the diet in October last year. In fact, she's lost so much weight that she now only fasts once a week to maintain her fabulous figure. After trying (and failing) numerous diets (ring any bells?), she was attracted to the idea of only watching what she ate for two days a week instead of denying herself her favorite foods all the time - the main reason she thinks The Fast Diet has proven so popular. "The success lies in compliance - the idea that you are not dieting all the time, so it's psychologically far easier to do than a traditional long-haul diet regime. There are no complicated rules to follow; the strategy is flexible, comprehensible and user-friendly. There's no daily slog of calorie control - none of the boredom, frustration or serial deprivation that characterizes conventional diet plans. It's part-time, so you never feel serially deprived, and you will still enjoy the foods you like - some of the time. Tomorrow is another day - when you eat normally without worrying about calorie counting."

She advised I fill up on lots of nutrient rich proteins and vegetables on my fast days, as this satiates hunger and won't cause a peak in blood sugar levels. Also, it is crucial that I listen to my body. Some days you just won't feel up to fasting. Don't stress, do it the next day. That's the beauty of it - you can pick and choose the days that work for you.

So that was that. I've now been on the 5:2 diet for just over two weeks, and although my first 'fast' was by no means easy (do not use it as an excuse to consume everything in sight the night before, bad idea) I've realized that hunger is easily managed, the pangs pass and on my 'feed days' I (amazingly) am not tempted to binge. Herbal tea, miso soup and carrot sticks are saviors, as is The Fast Diet Cook Book, where they've kindly counted the calories for you. I've lost four pounds, am able to go about my daily activities with the same, if not more, energy than before, my cravings for junk food are decreasing, and I'm becoming more aware of how I eat. I'd almost go so far as to say I look forward to my fast days. Maybe. It's early days, but so far The Fast Diet and I are fast becoming friends. ♦

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