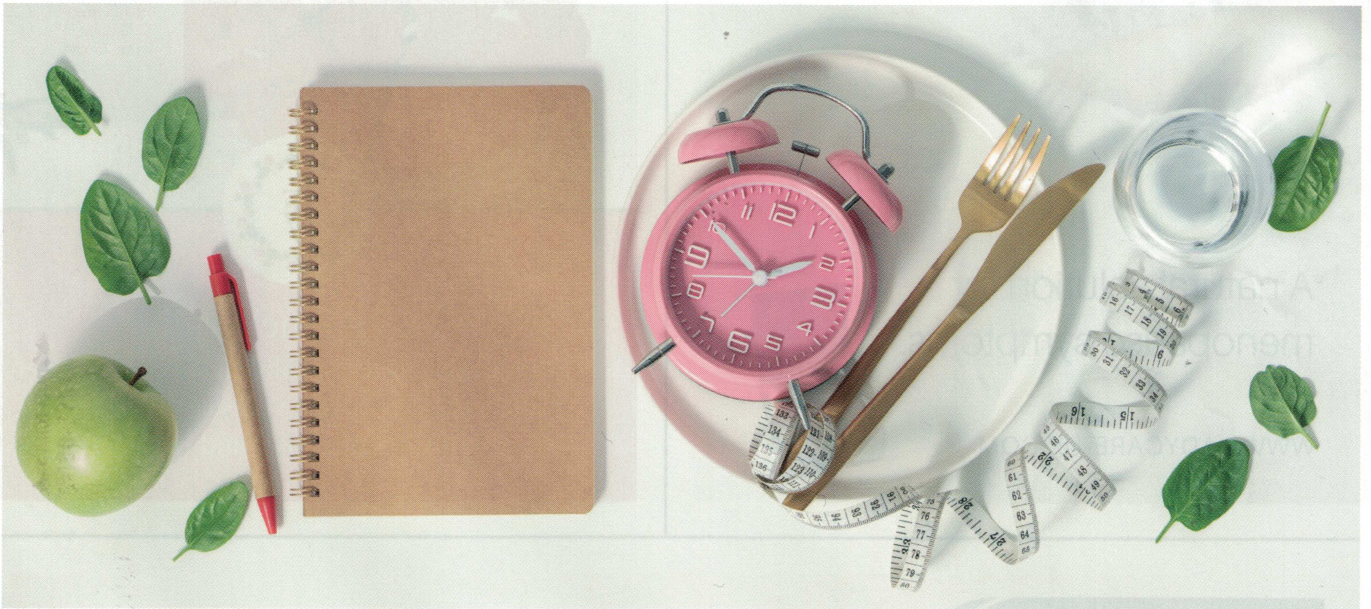


Intermittent Fasting:

Top Tips for Menopausal Women



It's always interesting to see people's mixed reactions when I tell them how intermittent fasting has transformed my menopause.

I feel about ten years younger than I did a decade ago in my 40s. Every year, my blood tests indicate improved heart health (cholesterol and triglycerides), decreased inflammation (C-reactive protein) and lower diabetes risk (HbA1c). I've lost weight and maintained it without counting a single calorie. Yet I'm still met with plenty of scepticism. There's really no catch – it just requires consistency and patience.

For those who aren't familiar with the term, intermittent fasting, aka time-restricted eating, is a pattern of eating where you only consume food during a certain window of time during the 24 hours in your day. You decide the timing as well as what you eat during that window.

One popular regimen is the "16:8". For example, you might close your window (stop eating) at 7pm and open it again at 11am the next day. During the fasting time, you are limited to drinking unflavoured water, black coffee, black tea or green tea. It's not as daunting as it may sound, considering many people spend half of that time asleep anyway.

Women come for weight loss, but stay for the health benefits

Intermittent fasting isn't a magic bullet, but it can be an amazing tool for supporting your menopausal health in conjunction with other healthy lifestyle choices. In my experience, most (peri)menopausal women initially decide to try fasting for weight loss as I did, but they stick with it because of the numerous health benefits, which can pave the way for a smoother menopause.

After all, why would you stop doing something that's simple and makes you feel so much better?

Besides weight loss, some of the symptoms that intermittent fasting may help (peri)menopausal women get relief from include:

- Sleep problems
- Brain fog
- Sugar/junk food cravings
- Joint and muscle pain
- Hot flushes/night sweats
- Digestive issues/bloating
- Low energy
- Mood swings
- Loss of joy/motivation
- Skin problems

While there are no guarantees, I have seen women improve all the above when they started an intermittent fasting lifestyle.

Research into intermittent fasting has picked up in recent years, but scientists are still working to gain a better understanding of exactly what happens to our bodies when we fast. Nevertheless, there are some well-documented physiological changes that are thought to be responsible for relieving these common menopausal symptoms.

Reduced inflammation: Chronic inflammation is known to negatively impact our health. Inflammation is linked to everything from joint pain to insomnia to brain fog. Research shows that intermittent fasting has an anti-inflammatory effect. For instance, in studies of people who fasted during the one-month religious observance of Ramadan, scientists found that fasting suppressed certain pro-inflammatory molecules and decreased inflammation markers like C-reactive protein.^{1,2}

Balanced hormones/blood sugar regulation: While estrogen and progesterone are usually the hormones that we talk about in the context of menopausal health, we have a lot of other hormones that affect our wellness – for example, thyroid hormones, the stress hormone cortisol, human growth hormone and our hunger/fullness hormones. Fasting is a daily opportunity to balance them.

One of the main hormones that fasting affects is insulin – the hormone that regulates blood sugar.³ Recently, a ZOE study discovered that post-menopausal women had worse blood sugar markers (fasting glucose, insulin and HbA1c) and a greater risk of pre-diabetes than pre-menopausal women.⁴ Fasting allows our circulating insulin levels to decrease for a period, which means the body can heal and repair itself, potentially lowering the risk of diabetes and heart disease, among other health issues.⁵

Better gut health: Having a healthy gut (microbiome) plays a critical role in menopause. Among other things, our microbiome health can cause inflammatory and metabolic changes, as well as affect our immune system and mood. It's also responsible for estrogen regulation.⁶ In its study, the ZOE researchers found that improving one's gut health can help counteract some of the unfavourable health effects of the menopause, including weight gain. According to some studies, intermittent fasting improves our gut microbiome health.⁷

Autophagy: Scientific evidence shows that intermittent fasting activates autophagy.⁸ This is the body's way of "recycling" damaged cells and generating new healthy cells in their place and it happens when we fast regularly. It's akin to a daily natural detoxing process that helps prevent diseases and promotes brain health.⁹ It's also linked to greater longevity!¹⁰

Fat burning: Otherwise known as "flipping the metabolic switch" or ketosis, when we fast long enough, our bodies begin to use stored fat for fuel. Normally, our fuel comes from the food that we eat and excess energy that's stored as glycogen in the liver. Ketosis is known to bolster mental and physical performance, as well as disease resistance.¹¹





8. Be patient – Fasting is a long game and something you have your whole life to get right. It's meant to be sustainable.
9. Join a supportive fasting community – It can be incredibly helpful when you have questions or need to check in with other like-minded women.

It's important to remember that the internal healing will always take place before the superficial weight loss. It's hard not to be disheartened if the weight doesn't start coming off straight away, but intermittent fasting requires a mindset shift: it's not a quick-fix diet that you do temporarily until you reach your desired weight; rather, it's a healthy and sustainable lifestyle with a side effect of weight loss.

Fasting can lay the groundwork for making other healthy lifestyle choices (exercise, good nutrition, etc.) because those things naturally become easier. Of course, we want to look better, but feeling better and being healthier in the long-term is worth being patient for – you can achieve your weight loss goals with fasting, too, but it takes time, consistency and commitment!

Please note that the information in this article is intended for educational purposes and is not a substitute for medical advice. Intermittent fasting is not recommended in pregnancy or for people with eating disorders. If you're interested in trying intermittent fasting, check with your doctor first.



Top tips for intermittent fasting success

So, how do we get started? Here are my top tips for getting optimum results from intermittent fasting so that you can achieve your wellness goals and avoid inadvertently sabotaging your efforts.

1. Clean fast – Limit what you have during your fast to black coffee, black tea, green tea and unflavoured water. This keeps your insulin levels low and allows your body to access stored fat for energy. It also triggers autophagy and lets the body heal and repair itself.
2. Build up gradually – Start with a fasting regimen that's realistic to let your body adjust. Doing too much too soon may lead to quitting.
3. Be consistent – In the first 4-6 weeks, try sticking to a schedule as much as possible, and then as you get more experienced, you can play around with timings and be more flexible.
4. Be sure to eat enough – If you restrict calories, you won't have energy and your metabolism will slow down because your body thinks it's in starvation mode, meaning it will hold on to stored fat.
5. Be kind to yourself – If you can't push through, don't give up. Just start again tomorrow. Focus on the wins, not on what you didn't accomplish.
6. Just try the fasting part first – It can be overwhelming to give up junk food and start fasting all at once. Eventually, your body will intuitively crave healthier options and the processed foods will lose their appeal.
7. Listen to your hunger and fullness signals – With time, fasting allows you to get back in tune with your body and to intuitively know what "real" hunger and fullness feel like.

Karen Finn is a menopause wellness & weight loss coach who is passionate about helping women get their "old selves" back – the ones who felt vibrant, fun, sexy, and had a zest for life. Using personalised intermittent fasting and self-care strategies, Karen works with women to tackle their symptoms and unlock their potential for a happier & healthier menopause!

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