

Changes in meal times can reduce body fat

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During a 10-week study on 'time-restricted feeding' (a form of intermittent fasting), researchers, led by Dr. Jonathan Johnston, investigated the impact changing meal times had on dietary intake, body composition and blood risk markers for diabetes and heart disease.

Participants were split into two groups – those who were required to delay their breakfast by 90 minutes and have their dinner 90 minutes earlier, and those who ate meals as they would normally (the [control group](#)).

Unlike previous studies in this area, participants were not asked to stick to a strict [diet](#) and could eat freely, provided it was within a certain eating window. This helped researchers assess whether this type of diet was easy to follow in [everyday life](#).

Researchers found that those who changed their mealtimes lost on average more than twice as much [body](#) fat as those in the control group.

Those who changed their meal times ate less food overall than the control group. This result was supported by questionnaire responses which found that 57 per cent of participants noted a reduction in food intake either due to reduced appetite, decreased eating opportunities or cutting back on snacking (particularly in the evenings). It is currently uncertain whether the longer fasting period undertaken by this group was also a contributing factor to the reduction in body fat.

As part of the study, researchers also examined if fasting diets are compatible with everyday [life](#) and long-term commitment. When questioned, 57 per cent of participants felt they could not have maintained the new meal times beyond the prescribed 10 weeks because of their incompatibility with family and social life. However, 43 per cent would consider continuing if eating times were more flexible.

Dr. Johnston, Reader in Chronobiology and Integrative Physiology, said: "Although this study is small, it has provided us with invaluable insight into how slight alterations to our meal times can have benefits to our bodies. Reduction in body fat lessens our chances of developing obesity and related diseases, so is vital in improving our overall health.

"However, as we have seen with these [participants](#), fasting diets are difficult to follow and may not always be compatible with family and [social life](#). We therefore need to make sure they are flexible and conducive to real life, as the potential benefits of such diets are clear to see. We are now going to use these preliminary findings to design larger, more comprehensive studies of time-restricted feeding."

Provided by University of Surrey

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