

PERCEPTIONS OF INTERMITTENT FASTING AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS AGE 18-24

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Abstract

Background: Intermittent fasting has become a dietary trend, as it is reportedly attributed to weight loss, maintenance of body composition, appetite control, improved sleep patterns, and disease prevention.

However, current evidence-based research may not fully support these claims. There are discrepancies regarding the definition of intermittent fasting. Additionally, it is commonly confused with traditional fasting.

Objective: The objective of the study was to determine perceptions of intermittent fasting on health in college-aged students and compare to evidence-based findings. It was hypothesized that college students would have an overall positive perception of intermittent fasting based on current popularity of the diet.

Design: Cross-sectional

Methods: An online survey was developed which assessed participants' knowledge and practice of intermittent fasting. Participants were recruited via email and social media. Data was analyzed using SPSS.

Results: Among study participants (N=99), 24.2% (n=22) reported currently or previously following an intermittent fasting diet. There was a positive correlation between reported intermittent fasting and weight loss ($p < 0.01$), as well as increased energy levels ($p < 0.01$). The majority of participants (63.6%, n=63) defined intermittent fasting as "controlling the times throughout the day in which food/drink can be consumed." Participants reported obtaining knowledge of intermittent fasting from internet research (50.5%, n=50), social media (46.5%, n=46), and friends and family (42.4%, n=42).

Conclusions: Overall, participants commonly defined intermittent fasting, with knowledge coming from friends and family, social media, and the internet. If participants had practiced intermittent fasting, the most significantly reported benefits were weight loss and increased energy levels, which may be attributed to the current study populations' motives for diet adherence. Further research should be conducted with a more diverse subject population and include data regarding participants reported desired outcomes prior to starting the diet in order to determine if additional benefits can be attributed to intermittent fasting.

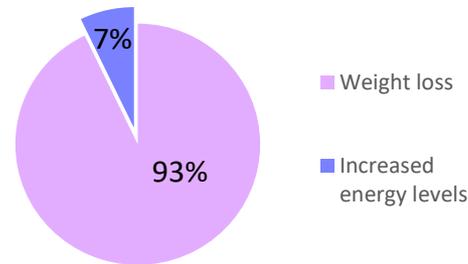
Background

Intermittent fasting has become a popular dietary trend as people are reportedly practicing it to lose weight, control hunger levels, and maintain body composition. However, there are discrepancies regarding the definition of intermittent fasting. It commonly is confused with traditional fasting, which is a universal ritual used for health or spiritual benefit as described in early texts by Socrates, Plato, and religious groups. Additionally, the variations between the perceived benefits and true experiences serve as a barrier when identifying sound health outcomes.

Methods and Design

The cross-sectional study consisted of an online survey that was developed, via Survey Monkey, which assessed participants' knowledge and practice of intermittent fasting. The study was approved by Texas Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants age 18-24 were recruited via email and social media. Participants answered a 13-question survey regarding their current knowledge and experience with intermittent fasting. Once the survey sample of >100 participants was met, data was analyzed using SPSS.

If you have previously or currently intermittent fasted, what did your body experience?

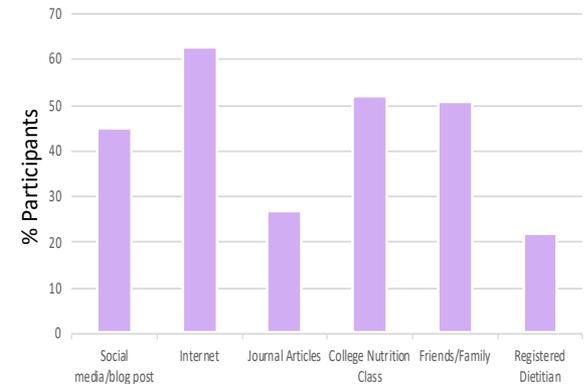


85% vs 24%
Have heard of intermittent fasting vs Have followed the diet

Results

Among study participants (N=99), 24.2% (n=22) reported currently or previously following an intermittent fasting diet. There was a positive correlation between reported intermittent fasting and weight loss ($p < 0.01$), as well as increased energy levels ($p < 0.01$). The majority of participants (63.6%, n=63) defined intermittent fasting as "controlling the times throughout the day in which food/drink can be consumed." Participants reported obtaining knowledge of intermittent fasting from internet research (50.5%, n=50), social media (46.5%, n=46), and friends and family (42.4%, n=42).

How did you learn about intermittent fasting?



Discussion and Conclusions

Based on the results of this study, participants commonly defined intermittent fasting as "controlling the times throughout the day in which food/drink can be consumed", which is consistent with the research regarding the diet's true definition. Participants gained their knowledge from similar sources, including friends and family, social media, and the internet. Amongst the participants that have experience in the practice of intermittent fasting, the most significantly reported benefits were weight loss and increased energy levels, which may be attributed to the current study populations' motives for diet adherence. For more conclusive results, further research should be conducted with a more diverse subject population and include data regarding participants reported desired outcomes prior to starting the diet in order to determine if additional benefits can be attributed to intermittent fasting.

64% of participants defined intermittent fasting as:

"Controlling the times throughout the day in which food/drink can be consumed."