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How To Maximize Muscle Growth With Intermittent Fasting

Want more size and strength gains while doing intermittent fasting? Follow these IF guidelines to maximize muscle while losing body fat.



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Updated February 24, 2020

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If you've been using Intermittent Fasting (IF), congratulations on the fat loss you've likely already experienced!

But if you're less impressed with the muscle gains and strength levels (meaning, the lack thereof) you're experiencing with IF, this article is just for you.

Intermittent Fasting's Downfall: Too Much Breakdown

Intermittent Fasting works incredibly well for dropping body fat relatively easily. It's also arguably the healthiest way to eat.

But let's be honest: When it comes to packing on muscle mass and making strength gains, IF falls flat. There's not a Mr. Olympia competitor alive who uses this technique; it would never allow him to maintain muscle mass. And if you're over 200 pounds and lean, you'll have a hard time holding onto that size, not to mention getting bigger, while following IF.

The problem with IF, as it pertains to building muscle, is precisely its defining characteristic: the very long periods of fasting. Here, muscle tissue is literally being eaten by the body. This is called muscle protein breakdown (MPB).

The key, then, to growing muscle with IF is maximizing *muscle protein synthesis*— the opposite of MPB — during the feeding window.

Countering Muscle Breakdown With Synthesis

When you eat a high-protein meal, muscle protein synthesis (MPS) is spiked. This means the muscle is building protein (i.e., muscle). The amount of muscle you carry is dependent on the difference between MPS and MPB. If you have more breakdown (MPB) than synthesis (MPS), you lose muscle; more synthesis than breakdown, and you build muscle. It's really that simple, and this balance goes on every day.

Unfortunately, with IF the periods of MPB are much longer than the periods where you can spike MPS. With a daily 16/8 IF diet (fasting for 16 hours, eating the remaining 8 hours), you essentially have 16 hours of MPB but only 8 hours to spike MPS.

Because IF causes massive amounts of MPB during the fasting periods, you need to maximize MPS. To do this, you need to (1) maximize the magnitude of the spike in MPS from each meal, and (2) maximize the number of spikes in MPS you can get in the eight-hour feeding window.





(1) Maximize the Muscle Protein Synthesis Spike with BCAAs

To maximize the MPS spike you get when eating, you need to ensure that you're getting adequate amounts of leucine with each meal. Research suggests that it takes a minimum of 3-5 grams of leucine to maximize the spike in MPS.

Because of this, I suggest that 15 to 30 minutes before each meal, you take 6-10 grams of BCAAs at a 2:1:1 ratio of leucine to isoleucine to valine. Then, make sure that the subsequent meal provides at least 40 grams of protein, whether that protein comes from a protein shake or, say, a steak.

The ability to maximize the MPS spike in this matter is one of the main reasons I created a stand-alone BCAA product, which will be available on Bodybuilding.com in a matter of weeks. Pre JYM and Post JYM both contain BCAAs (in addition to many other ingredients, like creatine, betaine, and beta-alanine), but a BCAA-only product is ideal when you're taking it with multiple meals every day.

(2) Maximize the Number of MPS Spikes by Eating Frequently

Now that you know how to maximize the MPS spike, you need to maximize the number of spikes you can get in your eight-hour feeding window. To do this, I suggest you eat about every 2-2½ hours while taking the 6-10-gram dose of BCAAs before meals as I just described.

This is similar to [Intermittent Fasting](#) (yes, *eating*), where you're eating meals every four hours with BCAAs taken two hours after each meal. With IF, you only have eight hours to eat, so you don't have time to wait four hours between meals.

Instead, you have your BCAAs about two hours after your last meal, and then eat your meal within 30 minutes after the BCAAs, versus eating two hours after the BCAA dose.

With the two-hour eating plan for IF, you get the same outcome as the IE plan. Research shows that when you eat a high-protein meal (providing 3-5 grams leucine), it spikes MPS due to the leucine. But the leucine levels drop quickly in the blood, and after about two hours the leucine levels in the blood are so low that MPS drops. Yet the other amino acids from the meal are still in the blood at high levels.

When you feed a dose of BCAAs that delivers at least 3-5 grams of leucine, it spikes MPS again and uses the same aminos from the previous meal that are still in the blood to build the muscle protein.

Then, you have a meal 15 to 30 minutes after taking BCAAs to provide any amino acids the muscles need to maximize MPS. The aminos from this meal will still be in the blood at high levels two hours later when you take your next dose of BCAAs to spike MPS yet again.

Sample IF Eating Schedule

To make sure you're not confused, below is a sample IF eight-hour feeding window showing you exactly what times to take your BCAAs and when to eat meals to maximize both the magnitude and number of MPS spikes.

This example is for a feeding window from 4:00pm to 12:00am (midnight), with a workout in the middle of it. If your feeding window is different than this – say, 12:00pm to 8:00pm – move the times up accordingly (in this case, four hours early).

3:30 pm: 6-10 g BCAAs

4:00 pm: Meal 1 (Breakfast)

6:00 pm: 6-10 g BCAAs

6:30 pm: Meal 2 (Pre-Workout Meal – take [Pre JYM](#) and [Pro JYM](#) here)

8:30 pm: 6-10 g BCAAs (from [Post JYM](#), since this would be post-workout; can take Pro JYM here as well)

9:00 pm: Meal 3 (Dinner)

11:00 pm: 6-10 g BCAAs

11:30 pm: Meal 4 (Bedtime Snack)

Training in Your IF Feeding Window

Another strategy that you MUST use to maximize muscle growth and strength gains while using IF is to make sure you train within your feeding window. Sports nutrition is the study of eating around exercise to promote performance and recovery. Training fasted is basically Sports *ant*-Nutrition.

If you're fasted, you won't have ingredients like BCAAs, carbs, beta-alanine, etc., to push your performance to new heights and optimize recovery and muscle growth. This can hold back your results. While training fasted is okay from time to time, don't do it chronically for long periods; otherwise, your performance and results may actually suffer.

Best Supplements for Intermittent Fasting

Another thing you might want to consider when following IF is to use certain supplements that can decrease MPB and increase MPS. I already covered BCAAs, but you should also consider HMB and fish oil (namely, [Omega JYM](#)).

While HMB is typically not a useful supplement that benefits trained lifters, it can help even the most seasoned lifter during periods of low-calorie eating, to prevent muscle loss and even help promote muscle gains and strength improvements.

If you opt for HMB, take 3-6 grams of it, in 1-2 doses, with meals such as your workout shake.

Fish oil may be the last thing on your list of muscle builders, but research suggests it should be on top. The omega-3 fats from fish oil have been found to increase the rate of MPS to help maximize muscle growth.

Take enough fish oil to provide 1,500 mg of DHA, 1,500 mg of EPA, and at least 300 mg of DPA (the newly discovered third omega-3 fat), [Omega JYM](#) provides all of this in just four capsules.

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