Mayo Clinic minute: Intermittent fasting facts

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Intermittent fasting is cutting yourself off from any food or beverages, other than water, for a certain amount of time. Some fasting is for religious reasons, while others fast for weight loss. But is it a healthy way to lose weight?

"We're hearing a lot more about intermittent fasting, and it essentially means the voluntary abstinence of food or beverage for a prolonged period of time," says Mikel Bryant, a Mayo Clinic dietitian.

Bryant says, while fasting can be a tool that helps some people with weight loss, "it's not necessarily the entire answer to everybody's problem. Our body needs a given amount of nutrients every day."

Denying your body of calories for an extended period of time isn't recommended for anyone who's physically active, pregnant, under 18 or has certain medical conditions, such as diabetes.

She says, if you're considering fasting as a weight-loss tool, make sure that, when you do eat, you're taking in quality, healthy ingredients, such as the proper amount of fruits and vegetables, whole grains and lean protein.

"So, bottom line, fasting may not be for everyone," Bryant says. "But it is worth taking a look at your individual diet, your lifestyle, your behaviors and seeing if there can be any improvements that can be made to reach your weight goals."

And talk to your health care provider before beginning any type of fasting weight-loss plan.