

The 5:2 diet: can it help you lose weight and live longer?

A new eating plan that involves 2 days of dieting each week is being promoted as the key to sustained weight loss and increased longevity. Dr Michael Mosley tried it.



Several months ago I set myself an ambitious goal: to find a way to live longer, stay younger and lose weight. I also wanted to go on enjoying the foods I normally eat and make as few changes to my lifestyle as possible. After talking to several scientific experts, I have spent the past few months trying a controversial diet that challenges conventional views about how and when we should eat. It is called intermittent fasting – reducing your food intake on alternate days.

Although most of the great religions advocate fasting (devout Muslims finish fasting for Ramadan this weekend), I have always been sceptical about the medical benefits and followed the standard advice, namely “never skip a meal and never crash-diet”.

The reasoning behind this is that people who skip meals tend to eat high-fat snacks when they get hungry, while those who crash-diet lose weight fast but what they lose is mainly water, with some fat and muscle thrown in. When crash-dieters give up, as invariably they do, they pile on the pounds, mainly as fat. It is known as yo-yo dieting and does you no good.

So before doing anything that involved fasting, I wanted to find out a lot more about what I was getting myself into.