Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: Nowadays, many people practice intermittent fasting, also known as IF, to lose weight and get fit. What exactly is IF? How do you do IF? How does this diet plan help with losing weight? I'm Emily Yeap.

With me today to answer these questions and more are Natalie Allen, registered dietitian and clinical instructor of biomedical sciences at Missouri State University, and Leah Brooke, a Missouri State dietetic intern. Brooke.

Leah Brooke: Intermittent fasting is a technique typically used for weight loss. You will be fasting for several hours of the day.

Emily Yeap: There are several ways to do IF, according to Allen.

Natalie Allen: There are lots of ways that people are choosing to do intermittent fasting and one is not better than the other. One option is some people choose to eat one day and then eat nothing the next day. Then eat the next day, then nothing the following day. That's a little bit more risky as far as your blood sugars and feeling well, but that is intermittent fasting. The more common way people are doing intermittent fasting now is they're looking at a section or a period of the day and saying I'm only going to eat, let's say six hours of the day. They'll pick a time in the morning and then they'll cut off their eating earlier in the evening.

Emily Yeap: IF helps a person lose weight by reducing the calorie intake.

Natalie Allen: It's a pretty simple technique. If you typically are somebody who eats at night or watching TV or shoveling in the potato chips and you're not really paying attention to that, and all of a sudden you say, "Okay, I'm going to try intermittent fasting and I'm going to stop eating at 4 p.m.," you are going to lose weight because you're not eating anything that you would normally eat at 8 or 9 p.m. That's how it works. It's cutting off maybe some of those problem times for people, and it's also limiting your intake.

Emily Yeap: There are some risks to consider with IF.

Natalie Allen: In general, I wouldn't recommend intermittent fasting for everybody. There are some reported benefits, but again, it can take time for the body to adapt. In general, your brain needs glucose or food to think and work. For some people, doing intermittent fasting, they think it helps with mental clarity, but there's also research to indicate that that's not the case because your brain doesn't have that food that it needs.

The other risk to intermittent fasting for some folks is having a low blood sugar because they don't have that consistent food intake, or also feeling weak or dizzy, and we certainly don't want that in people. I think the key to intermittent fasting is looking at when is your problem eating time, and if you're going to say, "Okay, I'm going to cut off eating at a certain point in the evening so I can save calories and I'm not really full right before I go to bed," that's a great idea.

If you're going to say, "Gosh, I'm not going to eat for a whole day and then eat as much as I want the next day," that's a little bit confusing for your body. It can cause metabolic changes that we don't really want. It's difficult to control your metabolic rate then, and we don't recommend that.

Emily Yeap: Who should avoid IF?

Natalie Allen: I would not recommend intermittent fasting for anyone who's still growing. So a teenager, even somebody in college at Missouri State here, we don't want them to be doing intermittent fasting typically. Certainly not anyone who's pregnant or breastfeeding. That would be a definite no because the fetus needs that continual food supply to grow. The other thing would be somebody who has a metabolic or a medical condition such as diabetes. This would not be for those people. Somebody undergoing some kind of medical treatment like chemotherapy, you wouldn't do this if you had cancer. Also, I certainly wouldn't recommend it for athletes. I do not want them to be doing intermittent fasting. I want them to have that fuel and energy to play their sport and practice well.

Emily Yeap: If you're trying IF for the first time, keep in mind Allen's advice.

Natalie Allen: Do the fasting every day, and pick a six hour window that you think that you can eat during that time. For example, let's say you're not going to start eating until 10 a.m. and you're going to cut off your eating at 4 p.m. And then during that time, eat healthy foods. Eat protein, eat carbs. And see if that works for you. Look at that window of time. Maybe you need to adjust up. Maybe you're shaky by 11 or noon and you need to push it up. Maybe you need to go from 9 to 3. People have different times that they feel hunger. We all do different things in the morning. You may need to adjust your workout if you're working out. It's going to be hard to work out in the morning and then not eat until noon or something like.

The things I would look for are what's your energy level? Do you feel dizzy or lightheaded? I don't want you to feel confused or nauseous. Those would all be signs that you probably need to have a quick snack.

Emily Yeap: That was Natalie Allen, registered dietitian and clinical instructor of biomedical sciences at Missouri State, and Leah Brooke, Missouri State dietetic intern. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.