Grammar Reference

When and if

The main difference is to do with certainty. Compare these:

1) **If** the coin lands on **tails**, I'll eat these sweets.

2) **When** the coin stops, I'll know what to do.

In the first sentence, we don't know what will happen. The coin could land on **heads** or **tails**. Both consequences are possible, so we use **if**.

But in the second sentence, we are certain that the coin will stop. It's a question of **when** it stops, not **if** it stops.