

Spring Cleaning from Inside Out

Does your body need a spring cleaning? A small but growing number of doctors believe that this may be a good idea. The internal cleansing program – called detoxification, or detox, in natural medicine – is designed to rid the body of harmful chemicals that may be causing fatigue, aches and pains, digestive upset, or less-than-optimal health. Consumers, too, are embracing detox. Stores are full of pills, powders, teas, and creams that claim to “cleanse the skin and colon,” “purify the blood,” and “flush out toxins.”

The concept sounds appealing. Detoxification, proponents claim, is like an oil change for the body, eliminating harmful poisons and natural waste products that can build up in the liver, skin, gut, and other areas. Cleansing is achieved through various regimens, including modified fasting, saunas, and a range of vitamins, herbs and nutrients.

Avoid dairy, wheat, and other foods that may trigger allergies, for example, and you give the colon a rejuvenating rest. Or take an herb like milk thistle to boost the liver – the body’s main organ of detoxification, which filters and cleans the blood – and you’ll speed up the elimination of all kinds of toxins. Clean, nourish, and rest your body – even for only a day or two, the argument goes – and you’ll enhance its natural restorative powers, helping to fend off illness.

Detoxification is not a new idea. For centuries, different cultures have promoted fasting and dietary restrictions for therapeutic and religious purposes. And detoxifying spa treatments have long been offered in Europe under medical supervision. But most doctors in the U.S. are not familiar with the concept. And many of those who remain skeptical, partly because of a dearth of scientific data.

Although a handful of reports support the benefits of detoxification, rigorous studies are lacking. One commonly cited report from the 1980s found that fasting speeded recovery in people who had accidentally ingested cooking oil laced with industrial poisons (*American Journal of Industrial Medicine*, 1984). Another found that dietary changes and saunas helped to reverse memory and nerve problems in firemen who had inhaled toxic chemicals in an electrical fire (*Archives of Environmental Health*, 1989). An NIH-sponsored trial of detoxification for patients with advanced pancreatic cancer is currently under way at Columbia University in New York. Should the results prove positive, more doctors will take a closer look.

Seven –Day Detox Plan

Still, many physicians schooled in natural medicine advise routine detoxification for their patients. All the smog, pesticides, heavy metals, and pollutants now crowding our environment, they say, give the recommendation current urgency.

“We are the first generation to be exposed to so many toxins, which overload our natural detoxification system,” says Frank Lipman, M.D., a holistic practitioner in New York City who recommends detox at least once or twice a year for almost all his patients. Spring, a season of renewal in the natural world, is an excellent time to do it, he says.

“Virtually everyone feels better after a detoxification,” reports the *Advisor’s* chief medical consultant, Dr. David Edelberg, though he believes that some or much of the effect may be psychological. “A person who drinks too much, or eats too much sugar and junk food, or smokes too much will definitely feel better after a detox simply because it clears all that crud out of the system.” A good generic detox can last up to a week, he says, “usually about as long as people can stand it.”

Here's the simple seven-day detox plan that most people in good health can follow. It's always a good idea to do so under professional supervision.

- 1) **On days one and two**, stick with liquids. Drink only pure spring or filtered water. Water with lemon squeezed into it, herbal teas, and diluted fruit juices (half water, half juice). It's a good idea to drink at least eight glasses of water or other fluids daily during this period – and all the time. Avoid fasting if you are taking prescription drugs: if you have hypoglycemia, diabetes, or another medical condition; or if you feel dizzy, nauseated, or experience cramps.
- 2) **On days three through seven**, add brown rice, fruits, and vegetables. Try to stick with organic produce. Cruciferous vegetables – such as bok choy, broccoli, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, kale, rutabagas, and turnips – are particularly effective at activating those enzymes in the liver that promote the natural detoxification process.
- 3) **Consider herbs and supplements** in addition to your standard multivitamin. Chlorophyll-rich "green" products – for example, those containing wheat grass, barley grass, or various types of algae – are a source of beta-carotene and other vitamins and minerals. Although studies are lacking, many people claim these green drinks and powders provide an energy boost. Your doctor may also recommend such products as Ultraclear (a low-allergy, nutrient-rich powder sold in doctors' offices) or herbal detox formulas (e.g., Nature's Pure Body Cleanse, sold in health-food stores). Avoid "purging" detox products that contain harsh laxatives, such as cascara sagrada or aloe; they can lead to dehydration.
- 4) **Detox your mind as well.** For example, avoid television, stock ticker, and upsetting news reports. At least an hour every day, try to practice a relaxation technique, such as yoga, breathing exercises, or meditation.
- 5) **Other important measures.** Try to get at least eight hours of sleep a night. If possible, Dr. Lipman also encourages people to work up a good sweat during the detox with a daily sauna. Sweating, he explains, draws toxins from the body and releases them through the skin. Finally, it's important to use common sense: if you feel weak, dizzy, or unwell, stop the detox and consult your doctor.

Caution: Detoxification is not recommended for anyone with any serious medical condition, such as diabetes, liver, or heart disease without the careful supervision of your doctor. Children under 12 or pregnant women are also advised against detox. Never stop taking prescription medications without your doctor's consent.

Further reading: Peter Bennett, N.D., and Stephen Barrie, N.D., *7-Day Detox Miracle* (Prima, 1999).

Detoxification is not for everyone. Moderate life style changes can work wonders with vitamin and herbal support to facilitate changes and establish a sound foundation. Talk to Dr. Green about the different options that are most suitable for you. *Remember: Holistic healing is tailored to an individual's particular constitution—there is no one size, fits all plan.*

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