



The time is now

a healthy detox strategy

BY KATHRYN NOBREGA-PORTER, ND

While it may be true that you are what you eat, you're also what you breathe, drink and touch: in fact, research now suggests you are what you can't eliminate. Although naturally our body can metabolize and eliminate many substances, there are times when it needs additional support. Health is a result of everything you consume balanced by your ability to detoxify or rid the body of harmful substances.

Toxin plight

A toxin is anything that has a harmful effect in the body. Internal toxins may include unhealthy bacteria in the gastrointestinal tract due to factors like stress, unhealthy foods and recurrent antibiotic use.

External or environmental toxins include chemicals and pollutants from plastics, pesticides, heavy metals, cigarette smoke and exhaust. These end

HEALTH

up in our air, soil, food and water supplies and, eventually, accumulate in the body.

If there are excess toxins, your system is slow, or the required detoxification nutrients such as amino acids or B Vitamins are unavailable, the body becomes overwhelmed and can't remove them. Often there are no immediate signs of toxicity, but long-term, low-level exposure can disrupt normal function of the kidneys, nervous, immune, gastrointestinal and endocrine systems as well as trigger asthma, allergies, chronic fatigue, headaches, joint or muscle pain, acne or dermatitis.

Detox managers

Although most detoxification occurs in the liver, the first step takes place in the gut. Over a lifetime, the gastrointestinal tract processes over 25 tons of food; representing the largest load of toxic exposure. The gut should provide a physical barrier to external toxins: if it's compromised by malabsorption or leaky gut syndrome, toxins can enter blood circulation. Because intestinal flora can either encourage or inhibit the detoxification process, regular consumption of probiotics help support a healthy gut.

The liver shuttles residual toxins such as pesticides through two phases of detoxification, and in the process converts fat-soluble toxins into water-soluble substances that are excreted from the body. But the liver is a hard-working organ, and detoxification is only one of its jobs. Regularly reducing your toxic load is good for your liver, and for you.

SWEAT IT + BREATHE IT OUT

Some toxins leave through the skin via perspiration; movement, activity and saunas are beneficial to facilitate detoxification through the skin. We also exhale other toxins from the lungs when we breathe.



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Plan your detox

The word ‘detoxification’ often elicits thoughts of juice fasts, purges and hunger concerns. Fortunately, a gentler form of detoxification based on science uses food and supplemental nutrients to support the body’s natural elimination process. Consult a health care professional before starting a detox program if you are on medication, pregnant or have a pre-existing health condition, and do some prep work:

Mental preparation. Become aware of the daily steps required for your cleanse.

Get support. Ask family and friends for support. Share your plans with them, especially food-related activities.

Set a start and end date. Allow time to plan meals, grocery shop and ease into the program. Weekends are ideal to start, with extra time to prepare and see how your body responds. Pick weeks light on social events. A minimum of two weeks is required for a wellness-based detoxification; four to six weeks may be recommended to help manage health conditions such as fatigue, digestive concerns and headaches.

Decrease exposure to toxins. Avoid exposure to cigarette smoke, off-gassing fumes from paint, a new carpet or shower curtain. Switch body care products to less toxic alternatives, and avoid aerosols and strong chemical cleansers. Opt for organic lettuce, strawberries, peaches and carrots as these are some of the most pesticide-laden produce.

Keep waste moving. Before starting your detox, ensure that you have regular bowel movements. Once daily is a minimum, two to three a day is optimal. Increase fibre and water intake to improve regularity.

Drink water. Adequate hydration is essential to eliminate toxins. Gradually increase water intake a few weeks before starting; aim for 2 litres per day.

Plan + stock. Plan your menu with an emphasis on nutrient dense, low-allergenic and organic foods. Make a list and shop with a full stomach. Eliminate common irritants: eggs, dairy, gluten, corn, nightshade vegetables (tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, mushroom, peppers), soy, red meat, sugar, caffeine and alcohol.

Enjoy a variety of fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, along with fresh or water-packed fish, wild game, lamb and poultry. Avoid wheat, and experiment with brown rice,

FASTING FAILURE

Fasting or restricting calories can impair detoxification by breaking down and using muscle tissue for energy. Fasting fails to provide essential nutrients to the liver and gastrointestinal tract.

oats, millet, quinoa, amaranth, tapioca and buckwheat. Try non-dairy rice, oat and nut milks. Use cold-pressed oils like olive, flax, safflower, sesame, almond, sunflower, walnut, canola and pumpkin. Season your foods with herbs and spices, and switch sugar for agave nectar, stevia and molasses. Drink filtered water, herbal teas and unsweetened fruit and vegetable juices.

During the detox

Have three meals and 2-3 snacks daily, eating every 2-3 hours. Include unlimited green vegetables, 3-4 servings of fruit, high quality protein, and 35 g of fibre daily. Fibre such as psyllium supports intestinal health, increases elimination of toxins and helps facilitate bowel movements. Supplement with Vitamin B12, folate, methionine, choline and Vitamin C to promote balanced detoxification and probiotics to support beneficial flora. Green tea and milk thistle offer catechins, known for liver protective and antioxidant benefits.

What to expect

Changing your diet may elicit symptoms like fatigue, headache, muscle aches or cravings for a few days as the body experiences 'withdrawal' from eliminated foods. Symptoms generally don't last long, and most people feel lighter, more energized and focused over the following weeks. Pay attention to how you feel during your detoxification, especially if you introduce new foods. (Do so one at a time, a few times a day for a couple of days.) Puffiness, headache, fatigue or a change in bowel habits may indicate a food is not agreeing with you and is best avoided.

Detox day by day

Although we can't avoid toxins completely, our bodies work hard to eliminate them. Go beyond the 'basic' removal of sugar, alcohol and caffeine. Equip the body with nutrients, water, uncontaminated food, fresh air activity and less toxic skin care products, together with a seasonal detox program to support your body and benefit your health now and into the future. **H&L**

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