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Detoxification Has a Myriad of Health Benefits

This is the fourth in a series of articles on food and optimal health

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We've all heard about the benefits of cleansing and detoxifying our bodies. Most people who decide to go on a detox diet usually do it to lose weight. Losing weight *is* a byproduct (for most) of cleansing and detoxifying, but there are so many *other* reasons why we should consider detoxifying, not to mention all the benefits of a cleansed body!

Why should anyone consider a cleansing diet? Our bodies already have self cleaning mechanisms, as 80%-85% of our daily energy and resources go towards cleansing our systems. Yet, environmental toxins, poor quality foods, unhealthy eating habits (most people eat excessively or binge), and inactive lifestyles are creating a heavy burden on our bodies' ability to completely rid our system of the common and increasingly dangerous toxins.

When we talk about detoxification, we are talking about the body's ability to effectively eliminate substances it does not need or cannot use. Furthermore, illness and disease are a result of poor assimilation (your body's ability to use and facilitate nutrients) and poor elimination. Since our bodies are overworked, our systems are not as affective in detoxifying as they should be, and as a result, our bodies are not assimilating nutrients very well. This is especially true for people who smoke, who do not exercise, and who eat poor and unhealthy diets.

When we talk about toxins, there are two types. The first includes **endogenous toxins**, which are those that originate from within the body, and the second type includes **exogenous toxins**, which are those that originate from outside the body.

Endogenous toxins, which are metabolic waste, are released through our lungs (expel carbon dioxide), our liver (expels urea), our colon (through fecal matter), our kidneys (through urine), and through our skin (via sweat).

Exogenous toxins include heavy metals, free radicals, industrial and agricultural chemicals (such as environmental pollutants, pesticides, antibiotics and hormones fed to animals that we eat). Exogenous toxins also include processed foods, preservatives, additives, food coloring, food allergens (such as wheat, dairy, gluten, certain fish), and drugs (prescription and over-the-counter).

It's clear to see that detoxifying goes beyond losing weight. The main benefit is to cleanse your body of toxicity and have a start fresh. It gives your body a chance to rest, replenish, and restore. It's the best way to begin taking on healthier lifestyle.

If you decide to take on a detoxification or cleansing diet, try it out for a week to begin with, and see how you feel. Be prepared to feel uncomfortable for the first few days, as you may experience headaches, fatigue, and certain withdrawals, especially from sugar and processed foods. If you have special dietary needs or any health problems, you are advised to consult your doctor before starting a detox plan.

What to Eat

A detox plan should include fresh and raw fruit & veggie juices, since they increase the amount and intake of fruits and vegetables. These juices have an increased concentration of vitamins and minerals. If you have blood sugar problems, BE CAREFUL with fruit juices, because the natural sugars are boosted with the removal of fibers.

You should also *eat* raw fruits & veggies, since they contain a concentrated source of vitamins and minerals that are destroyed in cooking. Raw fruits and vegetables are also high in enzymes which are also killed off in cooking. Enzymes detoxify the body and help dissolve excess fat and protein, and enzymes have the ability to break down tumors as well. Cooked veggies should also be included in a detox program.

In general, your detox program should be made up of plant foods, because they are high in antioxidants. Include beans and lentils (fresh or dry, not canned), the fiber will eliminate toxins from the colon. Raw nuts and raw seeds are also healthy protein options. Quinoa, wild rice and brown rice are great grains to incorporate into your detox program. Psyllium husk and flaxseed will also help with the elimination process. In terms of oil, cold pressed EV olive oil is the preferred choice while you are detoxing.

Remember to drink lots of water.

What to Avoid

For starters, you will most probably (or should) eat less while detoxifying. If you get hungry, drink water. Completely eliminate processed foods, salt (unless high quality sea salt), all refined forms of sugar, artificial sweeteners, trans fats, commercial dairy, wheat, gluten products, refined carbohydrates, over the counter drugs, foods that contain yeast, caffeine, alcohol, cigarettes, and animal proteins (chicken, beef, lamb, fish).

After you've completed your detox diet, you should review your eating habits. Your overall quality of life will improve if you change the way you eat and incorporate a daily exercise routine. Eliminating processed foods, sodas, refined sugars, trans fats, and refined carbohydrates is a good place to start. And of course, if you smoke, do your best to quit.

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