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# DETOX DIETS: SAFE OR SHAKY?

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**H**ave you been burning the candle at both ends? Eating junk food, drinking too much (alcohol, juice, soda) and not exercising? You may think it's time for a change; you want to "detox" from all your indulgences, and feel better.

I just typed "detox diets" into my web browser, and was surprised to see close to 3 million hits for all types of programs and products, promising weight loss, energy, immunity, even virility! Simply said, can you "detox" your way to better health?

Save your money, and possibly a trip to your doctor, or worse, the hospital. The human body is a "detoxifier" naturally. Your liver, kidneys, respiratory and gastrointestinal system all work together to detoxify your body daily. The average person does not need a "neutralizing" diet and better health is certainly not available in an elixir, a pill, a powder or a potion. Since the Food & Drug Administration does not regulate or supervise production of dietary supplements (the category these products are sold under), "detoxifying" your body may have unintended and unfortunate consequences.

## THE POWER OF WORDS

The word "detox" has morphed from the original meaning of "to treat (an individual) for alcohol or drug dependence, usually under a medically supervised program designed to rid the body of intoxicating or addictive substances" to today's "miracle cure," usually connected to a weight loss diet. An alcoholic may undertake a "detoxifying" regimen to wean his or her dependency from a highly toxic and debilitating drug but this regimen may involve medications and will be supervised by a healthcare professional. Consumers mistakenly think that a nutritional detox is benign and beneficial but beneath the surface, most detox diets are nutritionally shaky, not providing even the minimal daily needs for calories, protein, fat and carbohydrates.

Toxins are byproducts of food, air and water and our bodies process and eliminate them through sweat, urine and feces daily. We go merrily along, eating, drinking and functioning without paying attention to these natural processes; but when we overeat, drink too much alcohol or otherwise abuse our body, we gain weight, feel tired...and look worse.

Stay clear of programs that require "cleansing" substances to "purify," "cleanse" or "detoxify." These are buzzwords for laxative and diuretic substances. Programs that claim to cure diseases or medical conditions should also be given a wide berth. Enhance your body's natural processes with good food, in the right portions for your unique lifestyle requirements. Drink water for hydration, absorption and elimination...and get enough sleep and regular activity. I guarantee you'll feel like a new person!

## FACTS ABOUT DETOX DIETS

**FASTING:** Some proponents of fasting state that it "rejuvenates" the body and rests the digestive track. Absolutely not recommended for people with diabetes, pregnant women, children or the elderly. Fasting is another term for "starving" and most health experts would not recommend it. Fasting produces headaches, fatigue and "fruity breath" from ketosis. It's not pleasant and not healthful.

**JUICE FASTS:** Your body can function on just juice and water for a period of time, but not optimally. Juice contains some fructose (fruit sugar) and some vitamins and minerals, but not in the amounts necessary for good nutrition. People with diabetes on medication should never juice fast...ever.

**CLEANSING PRODUCTS AND SUPPLEMENTS:** Many "detox" regimens involve "cleansing the colon" with herbal supplements that encourage bowel movements. Citing "waste buildup," manufacturers describe their products as what's needed to free the body of built-up toxins and wastes accumulated in the colon. Many contain laxative ingredients, including senna, which is habit-forming, and overuse may harm the colon and permanently change the digestive track.

**COLONICS:** Some detox plans advise "high colonics;" more than an enema, colonics involve inserting a rubber tube into the colon. This procedure runs the risk of damage from perforation.

**RAW FOODS:** Without merit: many foods have far more nutritional value when cooked. A good example is tomatoes, which contain lycopene, an antioxidant that is enhanced by cooking, especially with a little fat (think olive oil – and don't forget the basil – a good source of more antioxidant vitamins). Limiting your diet to only raw foods is boring, and diminishes the variety in tastes and textures that cooking brings to foods.

**DELAYING MEDICAL ADVICE:** Are you "de-toxing" because you feel sick? Because you have pain or cramps? If you need to seek medical advice, do so. Improve your diet, yes. Ignore important symptoms, no!

**MEDICATIONS:** Never stop prescribed medications, often advocated by detox programs! Insulin and heart regulation and blood clotting medications are essential to daily health, and must be regulated closely by your physician.

**WATER:** The most effective substance to include in your personal "purifying" diet is water. The effects of dehydration include poor elimination and unhealthy looking skin.

Yes, you are what you eat – and drink. If you drink soda and alcohol to excess, and eat a diet high in sugar and fat, you'll certainly feel like you need a detoxifying diet, so stay healthy naturally. Live within the boundaries for general good health by keeping treats and sweets to an occasional indulgence, and avoid radical diets.

Registered and licensed dietitian Susan Burke March, MS, CDE, is the author of *Making Weight Control Second Nature: Living Thin Naturally* – a book intended to liberate serial "dieters" and make living healthfully and weight-wisely intuitive and instinctual over the long term. She may be reached online at [www.SusanBurkeMarch.com](http://www.SusanBurkeMarch.com).