

DETOXIFICATION AND CLEANSING DIETS



**What are
detoxification
and cleansing
diets?**

Detoxification (detox) and cleansing diets are claimed to be natural methods to rid the body of harmful toxins.

A detox or cleansing diet may start in two ways:

- Fasting (limiting how much food you eat).
- Taking certain foods out of your diet (e.g., “inherently toxic foods” such as: meat, certain grains such as wheat, dairy, sugar, caffeine, or alcohol).

The second part of a detox or cleansing diet includes one or more of these items:

- Eating a rigid diet (e.g., only eating raw vegetables, fruit, juice, and water).
- Taking herbal laxatives or medication that induce diarrhea.
- Taking antioxidants (substances that can stop cell damage in the body).
- Having an enema (a process which causes bowel movements).

Each phase of the diet can last for several days or weeks.

**Why do
people use
detoxification
and cleansing
diets?**

People use detox and cleansing diets because of the health claims associated with these diets. These include:

- Elimination of harmful waste and toxins from the body.
- Removal of harmful waste and toxins from some organs (e.g., large intestine, liver, gall bladder).
- Removal of poisonous blockages in the gastrointestinal tract, resulting in better nutrient absorption.
- Reduced cancer and cardiovascular disease risk.
- Weight loss.
- Allergy reduction.

**Do detoxification
and cleansing
diets offer any
of the above
health benefits?**

No. There is no scientific proof to support the health claims listed above. Actually, these types of diets can be harmful. The possible negative health effects related to detox and cleansing diets include:

- Malnutrition.
- Vitamin and mineral deficiencies.
- Anemia (a decreased ability of the red blood cells to carry oxygen).
- Low blood sugar.
- Diarrhea.

- Headaches.
- Dehydration.
- Electrolyte imbalance (compounds needed for muscle contraction and nerve impulses).
- Irregular heart beat.
- Large intestine perforation (rupture or hole in the large intestine).

Detox and cleansing diets, and the herbal remedies needed for these diets, aren't regulated in Canada. This means the dietary recommendations and nutritional supplements associated with these diets could be unsafe.

Unfortunately, supporters of these diets may be more concerned about making money than the health of their clients. The supplements required for these unhealthy and dangerous diets can cost anywhere from \$20 to over \$1000.

How can I safely rid my body of toxins?

You don't need to go on a special diet to rid the body of toxins. The human body does this naturally. Our bodies are designed to take in the nutrients we need from the foods we eat. Our bodies are also designed to remove the waste that our bodies don't need:

- The liver filters the blood. Waste in the bloodstream is sent to the kidneys and the kidneys remove this waste using urine.
- The small and large intestines only absorb the water and nutrients the body needs. Anything the body doesn't need is removed through feces.

What can I do to keep my body healthy?

You can eat according to Canada's Food Guide (www.myfoodguide.ca). It's designed to help you:

- Meet your needs for vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients.
- Reduce your risk of developing a chronic disease (e.g., obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer).

There is no such thing as "inherently toxic" foods. As you'll see in Canada's Food Guide (www.myfoodguide.ca), we should limit our intake of certain types of foods, such as those containing high sugar, high fat, and high sodium. We should also choose vegetables and fruit, whole grains, lean sources of protein, and unsaturated fats more often. Eating a well balanced diet is a great way to keep our bodies healthy.

You can also keep your body healthy by practicing the following lifestyle behaviours:

- Reaching and keeping a healthy body weight.
- Being physically active every day. Following Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living (<http://origin.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/>).
- Quitting smoking or cutting back. Limiting exposure to second-hand smoke.
- Limiting alcohol. Following the Low Risk Drinking Guides (www.lrdg.net).

Remember, though detox and cleansing diets have big health claims, these are not proven. Furthermore, these diets can be dangerous and unsafe.

KEY REFERENCES:

- Ayoob, K. T., Duyff, R., & Quagliani D. (2002). Position of the American Dietetic Association: Food and nutrition misinformation. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 102(2), 260-266.
- Dietitians of Canada. (2007). *Detox and cleansing diets – fact or fiction?* Ottawa, ON: Author.
- Mayo Clinic. (2008). *Detox diets: Do they offer any health benefits?* Retrieved November 20, 2009, from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/detox-diets/AN01334>

