

## Detoxes: A waste of time?

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Date: 12/2015

Detox diets or cleanses may have been around for a while, but when the latest celebrity declares they swear by it then they become all the rage again. But what is a detox? Do they work? And are they good for us?

### **What is a detox diet?**

A detoxification (detox) diet normally consists of a period where there is a strict diet of certain foods that can only be eaten like vegetable juices for example. It is often a period of fasting with very limited calorie intake. Some detoxes involve other products like herbal supplements or procedures like enemas to clean out the intestines. The idea is that drastic eating like this will help get rid of all the toxins and wastes in the body that have built up or after an indulgent period like Christmas<sup>1,2,3</sup>.

### **What types of detoxes are there?**

There are many varieties out there that differ in the period of detoxing, what you can eat in the detox, how strict they are, what area in the body they are focusing on, or detoxing for a specific effect<sup>1,2,3</sup>.

Some detox diets may only allow liquids and no solids, some only fruits, others even purees of food for example. In the case of most detox diets, you can either make it yourself with food you buy from the grocery store or you can buy specific products over the counter marketed for detoxing<sup>2</sup>.

### **Do they work?**

Some detox diets claim that they help flush out toxins, aid weight loss, reduce headaches, improve skin, support the immune system, assist regular bowel movements, and aid digestion<sup>2</sup>. Some people may report feeling more energised with better concentration. There is no research to support this link to the detox diets. This may be due to people cutting down on sugars, refined carbohydrates and high fat foods in the normal diet as well as reducing portion sizes from eating too much previously<sup>1</sup>.

There is limited evidence to support the idea that detoxes eliminate waste products from the body. The body is designed very intricately with many processes to clean itself out without needing a specific diet. For example, the kidneys filter our blood from waste products made during the working of the body. The liver's main function is to detoxify most things that enter the body like alcohol<sup>1,3</sup>.

Be cautious as some claimed detox diets have been linked to scams. For example, a mineral salt bath or foot pads were marketed to flush out all the body's toxins which could be seen as the water turned from clear to brown. It was a scam because any salt water that a current is passed through would turn brown as it rusts the electrodes making the current<sup>2,3</sup>.

### **Are they good for us?**

Diets like detoxes often don't have very good sustainability. Some people may lose weight on the diet as they have drastically reduced their calorie intake however, when they start eating normally again they will put the weight back on and sometimes even more. The best way to allow your body prolonged weight loss/management is to avoid the fad diets like detoxes all together. Rather change your lifestyle to eat healthier and exercise more. Cut down on your sugar, eat more fruits and vegetables, eat more lean proteins, reduce alcohol consumption and choose wholegrain starches over white refined ones. This will allow your natural waste filters, being your liver and kidneys, to be able to work more effectively and therefore, clean your body the natural and healthy way<sup>1,2</sup>.

Caution should be had as some of the over the counter detox products contains laxatives or diuretics which can be harmful if used incorrectly or with the incorrect dosage<sup>2</sup>. Misuse of laxatives can lead to excessive diarrhoea, dehydration which can lead to kidney damage, and death if severe, as an electrolyte imbalance may affect nerve and muscle functioning, weakness, colon damage etc<sup>2,4</sup>. Diuretics are medications that aid the kidneys to get rid of more fluids than what they normally do. If they are abused they can lead to dehydration, kidney damage, electrolyte imbalances, effect beating of the heart etc<sup>2,5</sup>.

Please see a doctor or dietician prior to you considering going on a detox diet. They will be able to advise if it is something you should try and if it is safe. As some detoxes cut out many food groups there can be side effects like fatigue, uncontrolled blood sugar (glucose) levels, or even vitamin and mineral deficiencies. Pregnant women, children, teenagers, elderly and those with chronic conditions like diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease should take extra caution with diets that use extreme measures<sup>1,2</sup>.

### **References**

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