

GETTING REAL ABOUT DETOX



Drinking enough water and consuming fiber-rich foods (such as edamame) can go a long way to helping your body cleanse itself.

DITCH THE EXTREME DIETS. YOUR BODY IS ALREADY AN EFFICIENT DETOX MACHINE. HERE ARE FOUR EASY WAYS YOU CAN HELP YOUR BODY SELF-CLEANSE.

by Patti Verbanas

MASTERFILE



DETOX DIETS CERTAINLY HAVE A LOYAL FAN base — from best-selling books to celebrity endorsements, the popularity of these programs that promise to flush poisons from your body, boost your immune system, and purge excess fat can make you start to wonder if extreme measures are essential just to keep healthy. The answer, in short, is no. Your body can take care of toxins very well on its own. Conversely, extreme programs — such as the Master Cleanse — can undermine your health. “Fasting detox programs are extreme, ineffective in the long run, and, in some cases, dangerous,” says Marnie Doubek, M.D., of Summit-Springfield Family Practice. “These programs are high in salt and low in nutrients. People following these plans are at risk of developing dehydration, electrolyte imbalances, muscle breakdown, malnutrition, and fatigue.”

Most health care practitioners recommend more natural methods that help create the best environment for your body to detox itself. Here are four ways that don’t come with warning labels:

EAT RIGHT A well-rounded diet and good digestive habits are essential to maintaining a healthy liver and kidneys, which are the body’s toxin-processing facilities. “Unfortunately, the average person’s eating dramatically hinders her ability to detox on her own; the standard American diet does not supply even a minimal amount of nutrients to our bodies,” says Joel Fuhrman, M.D., a family physician based in Flemington and the

author of *Eat for Health*. “Most people need to detox first by eating right,” says Fuhrman, who advocates for a fiber-rich, near-vegan diet.

Also, take steps to keep your liver and kidneys healthy. Alcohol can harm these organs, so drink moderately. Take medicines wisely: Your liver and kidneys can be damaged if you take too much, take the wrong type, or mix certain medicines. It’s also important to adopt good digestive habits, such as chewing slowly. “If you’re a rapid eater, try putting your fork down between bites,” suggests Samantha Mark, a registered dietitian in Montville. She notes that juicing your own fruits and vegetables can be an excellent way to get vital nutrients you need, but check with your doctor first to make sure your diet will include enough fiber, iron, and protein.

DRINK WATER THROUGHOUT THE DAY

“Staying hydrated will take good care of the liver and kidneys,” says Mark. The benchmark of drinking eight ounces of water eight times a day is still solid, she says, but suggests you also check your urine color: If it’s dark, you’re not hydrated enough.

TARGET FAT CELLS “Studies over the past two years have found that fat cells not only store certain toxins, but also produce hormones that have estrogen-like properties,” says Deborah Neiman, M.D., of Step Ahead Weight Loss Center in Bedminster. Reducing your body fat will help you get rid of fat-soluble toxins and harmful estrogens. “When you lose weight, the toxic estrogens that are stored

in the excess fat are released,” explains Scott Greenberg, M.D., at the Magaziner Center for Wellness in Cherry Hill. “This type of detox is particularly valuable because it reduces your risk of breast cancer from toxic estrogenic exposures.”

REDUCE YOUR EXPOSURE TO

CHEMICALS Limit direct contact with toxins from cleaning and aerosol products, and insecticides. Also, watch your exposure to toxic heavy metals, such as mercury. “A high level of heavy metals in the body can have a negative impact on your endocrine system, which includes your thyroid function and hormonal function,” says Greenberg. Mercury enters your body through consumption of fish (the fish with the highest mercury content are shark, swordfish, and king mackerel), some vaccinations, and through the environment (mercury is emitted to the air and water system by industrial



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practices). While you can't control the environmental exposure, you can inquire about mercury's presence in vaccinations and select fish that contains less mercury, such as cod, any shellfish other than lobster, and canned chunk light tuna.

If you're interested in testing your body's mercury levels, Greenberg advises skipping a blood test — mercury remains in the blood for

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only a short time before entering the organs — or hair test, which he says are "inordinately inaccurate." Instead, he suggests asking for a urine test using chelating agents, which bind onto and then draw the heavy metals out your body through your kidneys. (Greenberg notes that most holistic doctors will administer these tests.)

To keep your mercury levels low, Mark recommends eating foods that contain chelating agents — such as crushed, raw garlic; cilantro; vitamin C (in citrus fruits); or vitamin E (in wheat germ oil, almonds, and sunflower seeds) — which will naturally help your body rid itself of toxins. *

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