

Time for a Spring Clean up? The Importance of Cleansing and Detoxification

By Julie Zepp Rutledge ND

Detoxification importance

As a Naturopathic Doctor, one of my main goals in helping my patients work back to a state of health and well being is to address the underlying causes of their health concerns. At the root of arguably all health issues is a system overloaded and overwhelmed with different stressors – notably toxic stressors in the system. The simplest way to think of toxins in the system is to compare the blood in the blood vessels of our body to a stream that is polluted with oil, muck, pop cans, chip bags, plastic bags. This stream will not have a lot of oxygen in it, and the fish and plants living in the stream will suffer due to lack of nutrients and fresh clean water. If our bodies have become accustomed to living off nutrient poor foods, highly processed foods, foods filled with chemical flavors, preservatives and pesticides, our blood stream begins to look like this stream and the blood we carry to our muscles, organs and brain is sluggish, and filled with toxins. It becomes easy to see why we might feel tired, sore and achy and have some difficulties with concentration, memory and headaches!

Compare this with a stream (blood in the blood vessels) that is pure clean and unpolluted. The water has a high oxygen and nutrient content and the fish and plants living in it (our cells) are able to survive and thrive!

Detoxification or cleansing refers to the process of clearing toxins from the body by neutralizing or transforming them into less harmful particles in the liver and then removing them from the body through our bodies' "emunctories" – the bowels, the kidneys, the lungs, the menstrual flow and the skin. Poor digestion, colon sluggishness, reduced liver function, and poor elimination through the kidneys, respiratory tract, and skin all increase toxicity in the body. The goal in detoxification is to enhance the body's ability to remove toxins by improving the health and function of the organs involved in carrying the toxins to the outside of the body.

Detoxification involves dietary and lifestyle changes that reduce the intake of toxins while improving elimination. Avoiding chemicals from food or other sources, including refined food, sugar, caffeine, alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, helps minimize the toxin load. Drinking extra water and increasing fiber by including more fruits and vegetables in the diet are also essential.

Cleansing is best carried out under the care and supervision of a qualified health care provider. The information presented below is intended to give you some guidelines of where to start if you were to begin a cleanse of your own. If you have any significant health concerns it is best to contact a natural health care provider before starting your cleanse. When you begin to improve the functioning of the liver, some of the medications you might be taking may become too strong for your body, and this should be monitored carefully under supervision.

Decide when to start

- Pick a week without a demanding schedule or a food related function

You may want to start on a Friday; you may experience some minor side effects, such as headaches, during the first few days. These may be easier to handle at home than at work.

General detox guidelines

- The day you begin, you may want to start a journal. Each day you can record any changes in the way you feel, physically and emotionally. Some days will be more difficult than others, keeping a journal is a good way to stay on track.
- Avoid drinking during meals. Drink liquids one half-hour before and one hour after a meal in order to avoid diluting your digestive enzymes.
- Chew all food WELL. Aim for 20 times per mouthful.
- Choose organic foods when possible, to limit your exposure to pesticides and other chemical additives.
- It is important to be nice to yourself during the cleansing period! Be gentle with yourself, remind yourself that you are worth the efforts you are putting in to making adjustments to your diet and lifestyle. Engage in positive and affirming self talk.
- Optimally you will take no supplements, aside from your detoxification herbs. Taking even vitamins and minerals can be work on your liver as it processes them. I like powdered detoxification supplements (such as Mediclear, UltraClear, RevitalX, Detoxitech) that contain a number of vitamins, minerals and amino acids and cleansing herbs in a form that is easily assimilated by the body. If you take supplements or medications for therapeutic purposes (for example high blood pressure or low thyroid) these should be taken while partaking in the cleansing process, and no detoxification herbs should be utilized unless your program is supervised. Following the cleansing diet alone (without detoxification herbs) is fine and highly recommended, whether or not you are taking medications or therapeutic supplements.
- You will want to cut down on your vigorous exercise during this time; your body needs to conserve its energy for the cleansing process. Walking, swimming, yoga and stretching are good activities. Try to incorporate saunas a few times a week.
- Fresh air and sunshine are needed to support cleansing and oxygenation of the cells and tissues.
- It is very important to cleanse the skin at least twice daily in a bath or shower. Alternating hot and cold showers provide cleansing, increases circulation and metabolism
 - o Begin with 10 minutes warm water, then 1 minute cold (as cold as tolerable), then alternate 3 minutes hot, 1 minute cold. Repeat 3 times. End with cold.
- Dry skin brushing helps to clear toxins via the skin (the largest detoxifying organ of the body). With a dry, natural soft bristle brush, lightly brush the skin in

circular motions starting at the feet and hands and working your toward the heart. This can be done every day prior to bathing.

- Squeeze a lemon:

- Start every day with a glass of warm water with the juice of half a lemon to help take a load off your lymphatic system, help cleanse your system and detoxify your liver cells.
- Lemon juice is also full of vitamin C and is antibacterial and antiviral so it also benefits the immune system

Possible detox reactions

- During the first few days of the detox you might start to notice some effects as your body releases stored toxins. These might include: increased bowel activity and urination, mild nausea, headache, flu-like symptoms, muscle aching, irritability, or flare-ups of skin problems. Your reactions will depend on how much toxin removal occurs. The end of the cleanse you will likely have an increase in energy and feeling of well-being.

The protocol

- Days 1 – 5: You'll eat only vegetables, fruits, whole grains, organic meats and drink only water and non-caffeinated herbal teas.

- Days 6, 7: Reduce consumption of organic meats and focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans and legumes.

- Days 8 – 12: Follow the same regime as days 1- 5.

- All days: Flax fiber supplement → 1 Tbsp of ground flax seed in 250 ml of water twice per day; once in the morning and once in the evening before bed. This will ensure proper elimination while your internal organs release their stored toxins.

Sample daily diet

- Breakfast: Between 7 and 8 am eat one piece of fruit (apple, or pear). Fifteen minutes later, eat 1-2 cups of cooked whole grains (amaranth, buckwheat, brown rice, quinoa or millet) flavored with 1 teaspoon of flax seed oil and nuts (almonds preferred)
- Mid-morning snack: Around 10:30 am have a small piece of fruit, and 2 Tbsp of raw nuts.
- Lunch: Between noon and 1 pm, eat steamed vegetables (aim for at least 4 different types of colorful vegetables per meal), grains, organic meat (chicken or fish).
- Afternoon snack: At 3 pm have a plain rice cake with some almond butter and unsweetened jam
- Dinner: Between 6 and 7 pm, more steamed vegetables, grains, organic meat (chicken or fish)

- Evening: Try to consume only herbal teas, giving your body the opportunity to digest dinner before bedtime so that it can concentrate on detoxification overnight.
- Remember that this is not a “diet” so you can eat as much of the “allowed” foods as you want, as often as you want throughout the day.

What’s allowed

- Grains: Amaranth, buckwheat, brown rice, quinoa, millet, oatmeal
- Vegetables: all vegetables (minimizing potatoes and corn) – emphasizing the green veggies: kale, broccoli, leeks, chard, spinach, collards, mixed greens, avocado & beet greens; and for color: sweet potatoes (moderation), yams, carrots, beets
- Fruits: all berries, apples, pears, mangos, papaya (avoid oranges and melons and grapes) – eat dried fruits and fruit juices only in moderation (as these are quite sweet)
- Meats: Organic chicken or fish or bison
- Beans/ legumes: lentils, chickpeas (try to avoid the canned ones)
- Oils: flax seed, olive oil
- Flavors: raw garlic, ginger, sea salt, herbs (basil, mint, oregano)
- Herbal teas: peppermint, chamomile, licorice root, passionflower, dandelion, milk thistle
- Beverages: water (at least 2 liters per day), herbal teas, rice or almond milk (unsweetened)

What to avoid

- Barley, rye, wheat, eggs
- Breads, pastas
- Potatoes, corn, eggplant, mushrooms
- Oranges, melons, grapes, dried fruits, fruit juices
- Red meats, non-organic meats
- Dairy products, including cottage cheese
- Processed foods
- Peanuts
- Caffeine (including black tea), alcohol

After the cleanse

- Be gentle to your body. For the next week, eat a diet as close to the cleansing diet as possible. This includes steamed brown rice, steamed vegetables, fruit, legumes, tofu, nuts and seeds. Do not consume any processed foods, breads, sweets, dairy or caffeine.
- After one week of a healthful diet, begin to reintroduce these foods (processed, sugar, etc) one at a time, and on different days. Take note of food sensitivities you experience as you begin to reintroduce these foods. These sensitivities might include: headaches, fatigue, puffy hands or feet, among others.

I encourage people to gently reintroduce these foods slowly, being mindful of the body's reactions. This allows us to make the decision to avoid these foods on a daily basis, not out of guilt, but because they just don't make us feel good!

Plan to do a full 12 day cleanse at least two to three times per year. Each time you go through the process, pick one or two healthy habits to incorporate in your day to day life. Before you know it, the choices you make will be healthier and healthier and it will be second nature to you to choose water or herbal tea over coffee, and you will skip to the fruit and veggie tray at your company luncheon, rather than the dessert tray – just because it FEELS good!

Dr Julie Zepp ND offers regular detoxification classes. Her four week sessions are held at Nature's Best Market and run throughout the year. If you are interested in obtaining more information on these classes, please email her at info@drzepp.com. For more information on her practice, please visit www.drzepp.com.