

Detox Diets: Do they Work?

Detox diets may be good at cleansing our wallets of money, but do they actually do anything for our health? Detox diets or cleanses are widely available online, in health shops, advertised in magazines and gyms and by a number of celebrities. They can involve drinking clear juices, teabags, shakes or pills, all with the promise of cleansing your body of 'toxins'.

This idea that our bodies require cleansing to eliminate a build-up of toxins due to bad habits or exposure to hazardous substances in our environment isn't new. Today, the interest in detoxification reflects concerns about a number of different things such as new pathogens, mercury in fish, synthetic chemicals, lead in toys, smog in the air, pollutants in rivers... the list goes on! But do detox diets or cleanses really offer the benefits they claim?



What is a detox?

Before detox diets were the latest fitness/health craze, they were actually a medical procedure that rid the body of dangerous, life threatening, levels of alcohol, drugs or poisons. Such toxins are usually very fast acting and therefore specific, swift medical treatment in a hospital is usually required.

Today, the term "detox" has taken on a brand-new meaning. This latest health craze isn't referring to a medical procedure, but rather a diet claiming to rid the body of toxins. They are often promoted as a quick way to get healthy and 'jumpstart' your metabolism – whatever that means!

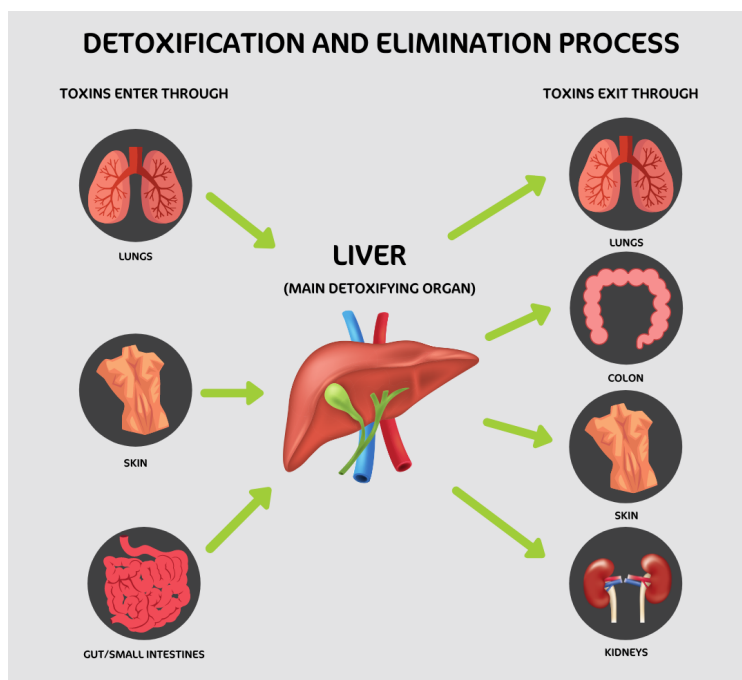
Such diets are often very restrictive, usually involve eating only select foods from certain food groups and can last anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. The idea is to get all your nutrients from juices, smoothies or supplements, or fast all together, to give your insides a break while 'flushing' them of toxins. But what exactly are we detoxing?

Why you shouldn't bother

When it comes to detoxing, the science just doesn't add up! To date, there has been very little research on the various detox diets and therefore, there really isn't any scientific evidence to support their various health claims. Instead, these diets can cause headaches, GI upset, dehydration, fatigue and hunger! This is because most detox diets don't provide enough energy for the body to perform its usual functions. They may result in some initial weight loss, due to the limited energy intake, however it's important to note that this weight loss isn't fat, but in fact loss of fluid or weight from frequent bowel movements. This means that as soon as you get back to your regular eating pattern, all this weight lost will quickly be found! Further, such diets can actually cause harm to your body through nutrient deficiency, starvation and other health issues, particularly for those with underlying health conditions.

The good news is your body already has multiple different systems and organs in place to detoxify itself – all done for free! The liver, kidneys, gastrointestinal system, skin and lungs are all designed to 'detox' the body from various unwanted substances. Your skin provides a barrier against outside substances. Your lungs and airways trap particles and toxins from the air and expel them by triggering a sneeze or cough. Your intestines absorb nutrients while screening out harmful organisms. The kidneys do an amazing job of filtering out waste substances and removing them from the body. And most importantly your liver filters out and eliminates harmful toxins, drugs and alcohol. Basically, everything expensive detox diets and cleanses claim to do, your body already does for free!

Detox Diets: Do they Work? continued...



The bottom line

Small changes every day are the key to living a sustainable, healthy lifestyle. To support your body to do its own detoxification, all you need to do is eat the right amounts of the right foods, keep active and get enough sleep every day. Not as glamorous or quick as a detox diet, but remember, if a diet sounds too good to be true, it probably is...

So, what should you do? The Australian Dietary Guidelines say to enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from the five food groups every day. This includes plenty of vegetables, fruit, whole grains cereals, lean meats and their alternatives like eggs, nuts and seeds as well as dairy and dairy alternatives. It is also important to include plenty of water and to limit your intake of discretionary foods which are high in saturated fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol.