

A Healthful New Year: Internal Cleansing and Detox Diets

By Woodland Publishing, Inc.

After a series of holiday buffets and cocktail parties, many people vow to remedy their December eating follies in the New Year. Some people try to compensate for past indulgences by joining a gym and starting an exercise program. That's not a bad idea, but some naturopathic doctors say there's even more you can do to improve your health. Experts suggest that a "cleansing" or "detoxification" program might be something to consider.

What is "detoxification?" The term is often used to explain how alcoholics and drug addicts kick the habit. According to *WholeHealthMD*, however, "detoxification therapy [also] includes a variety of techniques designed to assist the body in removing the buildup of potentially harmful chemicals and toxins."

According to Suzannah Olivier, author of *The Detox Manual*, detoxification is a two-step process: 1. First, reduce the exposure to toxins found in food, drink and the environment to a minimum, and 2. Second, help the body eliminate stored toxins and repair cells and organs by following a detox program and working on erasing the negative stresses of life.

In daily life, everyone is exposed to thousands of chemicals—from the air we breathe to the food we eat. Dr. Frank Lipman, M.D., author of *Total Renewal: 7 Key Steps to Resilience, Vitality, and Long-Term Health*, said, "We are the first generation to be exposed to so many toxins; they overload our natural detoxification system." Lipman, a doctor trained in Western and Chinese medicine, recommends detox programs at least once or twice a year for most patients. Detoxification involves dietary and lifestyle changes that reduce the intake of toxins and improves elimination from the body.

Conventional Western medicine seldom offers detoxification remedies, but naturopathic and holistic physicians have been recommending such programs for many years. In general, the liver works nonstop to neutralize potentially harmful compounds. Some indicators that the body's natural detox system may be overloaded include: fatigue, headaches, depression, poor digestion, unhealthy looking skin, joint and muscle aches, and a compromised immune system.

To begin a program, experts suggest seeking out a naturopath or clinical nutritionist who is familiar with the concept of detoxification and check their credentials before undergoing treatment. In general, detoxification programs include the following:

1. *Decrease or avoid the intake of toxins* such as alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, sugar, refined foods, processed foods (particularly those with hydrogenated or partially-hydrogenated fats), and foods that may cause allergies such as wheat and dairy.
2. *Replace the above foods with fiber-rich whole foods* such as pears, oat bran, apples, legumes, and cruciferous vegetables (members of the cabbage family, such as bok choy, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and kale) which support the liver. Try to eat only organic produce.
3. *Drink 8 glasses of filtered water daily.*
4. *Consider taking supplements* that support the liver, kidney, and colon such as dandelion root, fenugreek, goldenseal, licorice root, or milk thistle.
5. *Exercise or use a sauna daily.* Sweating helps the elimination of toxins through the skin.
6. *Consider "detoxing" your mind.* Try to get at least eight hours of sleep each night and avoid watching television. Instead, practice relaxation exercises such as yoga or meditation.

Doctors suggest that detoxification is not for everyone—children under age 12 and pregnant women are particularly advised against detox diets. But Dr. David Edelberg, *WholeHealthMD's* chief medical consultant said, "Virtually everyone feels better after a detoxification. A person who drinks too much, or eats too much sugar and junk food, or smokes too much will definitely feel better after a detox simply because it clears all that crud out of the system."