

2 COULTER ROAD ▪ CLIFTON SPRINGS, NY 14432 ▪ 315.462.1350
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Our bodies naturally eliminate waste via exhalation, urine, sweat and feces. Our circulatory system, digestive tract, liver, kidneys and lungs all operate efficiently to rid our bodies of toxins that we are exposed to every day, and the waste products our bodies produce during normal functions, and works effectively in the right conditions. However, problems arise when we drink sodas, sugary drinks, coffee and alcohol in excess, breathe polluted air, eat processed foods full of additives and sugars, overeat, get insufficient sleep, are under large amounts of stress, party hard or often, and generally don't care for ourselves. These all exhaust our system and gradually our body's ability to eliminate wastes diminishes, and toxins build up.

'Detox diets' can be severe eating only raw foods or fasting, or taking purgatives and colonics. This can be OK if you are strong, or proceed with medical supervision, but it can drain and exhaust softer constitutions. Detoxing to invigorate and tonify is most effective when customized to the individual. It is much kinder and more natural to support our constitution by working in harmony with each individual's needs. A gradual detox will be as effective, and much gentler than any extreme changes in diet. Sudden withdrawal from toxins such as sugars, coffee and alcohol can cause great discomfort including headaches, mood swings and cravings.

Always proceed with caution, especially if you suffer from any medical conditions. Seek out advice from your Primary Care Physician, or otherwise qualified health professional before making any major changes.

Although a customized, personal approach is best, there are some basic steps that will help everybody reduce toxins:

- Eat organic, fresh food – especially green, leafy vegetables
- Go “meat-free” once a week.
- Drink water each morning. (Ayurveda advises warm lemon water is best)
- Open windows & refresh your home or office with fresh outdoor air.
- Reduce alcohol consumption.
- Reduce sugars and avoid junk foods and late night eating.
- Spend time outside every day.
- Exercise, meditate or take up a relaxing hobby.
- Reduce coffee and caffeinated tea, but add gentle herbal teas.
- Sleep better and for longer.
- Consider using natural cleaning products and cosmetics.
- Avoid chemical air fresheners – use essential oils instead
- Disconnect from technology.
- Laugh, cry, scream...releasing pent up emotions and “letting go” can be therapeutic

A gentle detox allows the organs to function effectively, eliminating waste products and conveying nourishment to every cell.

Approaches to Detoxification

A qualified health care practitioner can support your “detox” and give appropriate guidance for your constitutional type, whether you are seeking a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Ayurvedic perspective, or another form. There are also supportive treatments you can perform at home, or can receive from a qualified

practitioner to enhance your cleansing process. Always proceed with caution, especially if you suffer from any medical conditions. Seek out advice from your Primary Care Physician, or otherwise qualified health professional before making any major changes.

TCM: A course of treatment and dietary advice from a TCM practitioner will ensure that your detox is effective, yet appropriate for your constitutional type. Just as you bring your car in for regular oil changes, and tune ups, regular visits with your TCM practitioner or Acupuncturist will help you to stay on course and keep organs functioning well. From a TCM perspective, spring is the ideal, and ONLY recommended time of year when one should "detox" because of the seasonal association with the liver. Through a supportive approach, TCM encourages restoring balance to help us feel well. When we feel well and happy, cravings for toxic foods and lifestyle diminish. It is misguided to harshly detox and then return to old habits...it is far better to live well most of the time with the occasional indiscretion.

From a TCM perspective, when we speak about detoxification we focus on the Liver. TCM's unique understanding of the Liver's special connection to nature optimizes all its healing practices when it comes to detoxifying the body through TCM's Five Element Theory. The Five Elements are a Universal template that organizes all natural phenomena into five master groups or patterns in nature. Each of the five groups—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water—include categories such as a season, a climate, a stage of growth and development, an internal organ, body tissue, sense, sound, taste, color, and emotion. The Five Elements not only show us how the structures and systems in our bodies are connected to and interact with each other, but also how they interrelate and interact with the natural environment we live in. TCM practitioners apply the Five Elements to understand, diagnose and treat all health issues. So TCM is also a medicine of visible and invisible relationships which exist in an unlimited combination.

TCM uses time-tested modalities that can safely balance and build strong Liver function. Food and herbs are often discussed. Diet can be adjusted and maximized to help the Liver reach its greatest healing potential. TCM practitioners understand that certain foods support the Liver and can help heal it. Liver-supporting foods include bamboo shoots, broccoli rabe, dandelions greens, eggplant, fennel, and scallions. Also, garlic, ginger and lemon are very beneficial for Liver function and health. Ginger tea and sour foods including vinegar and sweet and sour recipes are also very good.

A great deal of TCM treatment focuses on educating the patient and create a life based on wellness. Prevention is therefore a key TCM feature. Just as you take your car to a mechanic for oil changes and tune ups, a visit to your Acupuncturist can help "tune up" your system and provide support and nourishment during a detox.

For more information about TCM & Acupuncture, visit:
AcupunctureToday.com

Ayurveda: Spring is when Ayurveda recommends undergoing any type of cleansing program. Panchakarma is a full Ayurvedic cleanse advisable only under the supervision of a qualified Ayurvedic practitioner and involves about 2 weeks of preparation, a month of intensive "detox" with supportive treatments, and a gentle reintroduction to your normal routine. Based on ancient wisdom originating in India, Ayurveda is becoming more popular in the West for its dietary and lifestyle recommendations. With an approach similar to TCM in that it considers the elemental nature of everything in existence, energetic nature of things, and a wholistic view of the body, Ayurveda also has a focus on prevention through an individualized plan based on your constitution. Integral to the Ayurvedic perspective is the inclusion of several types of bodywork which are restorative in nature.

According to Ayurveda, your digestive fire (Agni) has to digest everything that you're exposed to: all sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and products absorbed through the skin. It also has to digest all the emotions and thoughts that arise from everything that you encounter in your life. According to Ayurveda, most of us experience some toxic build-up that leads to blocked channels and imbalances.

Physical signs that these toxins have built up include decreased energy; a heavy coating on the tongue; foul body, breath, and stool odor; indigestion and excessive flatulence; body aches; foggy thinking; and sleepiness after eating. It is advisable that if you suffer from any number of symptoms to visit your doctor to make sure you do not have a diagnosable illness.

An Ayurvedic cleanse focuses on resetting your digestive fire. A gentle Ayurvedic cleanse allows the body's own natural mechanisms to remove built up toxins from the body. Ayurveda recommends eating foods that are easy to digest such as vegetarian foods that are light, warm, & cooked. Freshly-made flat breads, freshly-made light soups and *dhals*, organic vegetables cooked with spices, and freshly-made grains such as quinoa are ideal. Mung bean soup calms all three doshas and is nutritious. Likewise, foods to avoid include "dead" foods such as processed, packaged, canned and frozen foods, non-organic foods; genetically modified foods; foods grown with chemicals, pesticides and chemical fertilizers; and foods with chemical additives. Avoid heavy dairy products, deep-fried/oily foods, raw foods of any kind, and foods that contain refined sugar and honey, as these are harder to digest. Ayurveda also advises avoiding yeasted breads, dry breads such as crackers, and fermented foods.

Drink warm herbal teas throughout the day that include spices such as cinnamon, ginger, fennel, and mint. Use culinary herbs such as basil, rosemary, thyme, and oregano, and spices such as turmeric, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, mint, sage, and parsley in generous amounts, especially for flavoring cooked vegetables. Cleansing fruits include cooked prunes and figs, stewed apple or pear. In general, most sweet juicy fruits are excellent cleansers. Vegetables suitable for cleansing include cooked leafy greens cooked with spices. Grains such as quinoa, barley, amaranth and small helpings of rice are recommended. Other spices to include are ginger, turmeric, coriander, fennel and fenugreek which open up the channels of the body and support the flushing of toxins via the skin, urinary tract, colon and liver. Add spices to soups and dhals as they cook, or sauté the spices in a little ghee and add to dishes when the cooking process is completed.

After completing a cleanse, Ayurvedic practitioners recommend tailoring your diet year-round to your constitution (vata, pitta, or kapha) and your imbalances.

Other recommendations include daily dry skin brushing and self massage (Abhyanga) with herbal oil. Abhyanga can be done daily at home, or in an office setting to receive the nurturing effects of a professionally administered Abhyanga. This type of massage increases circulation, promotes lymphatic detoxification, and also acts restoratively to strengthen and invigorate the system. Whereas a Western massage focuses more on manipulating muscles and connective tissues, an Abhyanga focuses on administering herbally-infused oils to the body to encourage healing. The client is left feeling alert, yet balanced. Another Ayurvedic treatment useful before and after detoxification includes Shirodhara. After a sequence of bodywork techniques and marma point work, warmed sesame oil is poured over the forehead in the area of the third eye. This treatment calms the mind, balances the emotions, and clears any mental or emotional blockages. It is a deeply meditative-style treatment and advisable at both the beginning and the end of a cleansing regimen.

Conclusion

Regardless of whether you attempt a detoxification diet, attempt a full overhaul of your diet and lifestyle to reduce your toxic exposures, or whether you are just looking for some quick and easy guidelines to healthier choices, there are many resources to guide you. Be wary of any that offer a "quick fix", or are connected to a specific product sales pitch. Thoroughly research the methods you are considering, and speak to a qualified health professional before you undertake any major changes. The article above is a very basic introduction to detoxification and is by no means conclusive.

DISCLAIMER: The information provided through this article is not intended to replace a one-on-one relationship with a qualified health care professional and is not intended as medical advice. The information is educational in nature and is not a substitute for professional care and should not be used for diagnosing or treating a health problem and disease. You should consult your health care provider if you have or suspect you may have a health problem.
