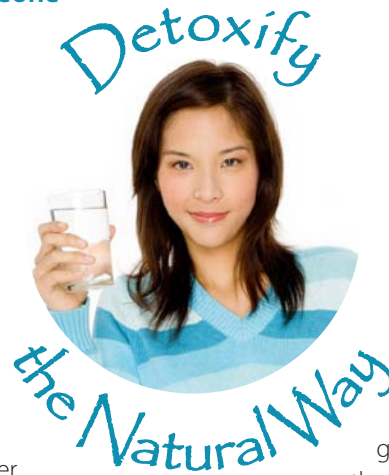


Q. I see ads for “cleansing diets,” shakes, and recipes that are suppose to detoxify your system. Is there such a thing as a “cleansing” diet? And what foods or regimen would you recommend if someone wanted to “detoxify” after a holiday of poor eating habits?

A. It’s not uncommon to see articles on cleansing and “detox” diets on the Internet, usually in conjunction with ads promoting some particular diet or supplement. It’s a term that is carried over from health ideas of 100 years ago or more and really has little correlation with reality as physiology is understood today. The ads claim that the colon is loaded with all kinds of toxins that have accumulated over weeks and years and needs “flushing” and cleansing to be healthy. It might sound logical if you don’t have a good understanding of gastrointestinal (bowel) physiology but in reality there is simply no evidence that any of this actually occurs.

Do people need to change their diets and improve eating habits? Yes, especially if they have been overindulging – as is common during holidays and vacations. If you feel the need to make changes, here is a healthy approach to giving the digestive system a break and feeling better after indulging.

- **Start by cutting way back on how much you eat.** For a week, eat sparingly and very simply.
- **Eliminate rich foods,** especially those high in fat, sugar, and calories. This includes red meats, processed meats, desserts, cheeses, and refined foods such as white breads, pastry, snack foods, and white rice.
- **Eat fresh fruits, vegetables, legumes (including soy milk), and whole grains.** Salads and soups are high in liquids and easy to digest.
- **Choose foods that are low in calories and high in dietary fiber.** A high-fiber diet is the best way to improve bowel function and “clean up your colon.” Think of fiber as a natural broom that sweeps out your colon



and keeps it healthy. These foods are also known as “probiotic.” That is, they promote the growth of healthy bacteria in the intestine which is necessary for a healthy functioning gut.

- **In place of typical beverages (soft drinks, alcohol, and coffee) drink only water, herbal teas, or pure fruit juices** (e.g., 100% cranberry, grape, orange, grapefruit, pomegranate, carrot, tomato, and other brightly colored juices). Drinking more fluids is a natural way to purify the body and improve hydration.
- **During this week, be more physically active than usual.** Go on long walks, ride your bike, and swim vigorously enough to work up a little sweat. As you exercise, you not only work off some of the excess calories that may have accumulated around your waist, but you also stimulate the gastrointestinal system and encourage a healthier bowel function, resulting in faster elimination of body wastes. Exercise stimulates a healthy gut and improves circulation, which also improves the body’s ability to stay clean and heal itself.
- **If you have the opportunity, spend time in a sauna.** Sweating is a natural way to cleanse the body and stimulate the immune system. If you don’t have access to a sauna, hot baths can have a similar effect.

These are all natural, physiological ways to improve your body’s ability to cleanse itself, restore calorie balance, give the digestive organs a needed rest, and assist the body in restoring good health. Balance this with plenty of good rest (at least 8 hours a day) and you should feel renewed in energy, physically and mentally by the end of the week.

In fact, you may feel so good you would like to live this way all the time. Welcome to healthy living the natural way.

