



Detoxification (detox) diets are more popular than ever. These diets claim to clean your blood and eliminate harmful toxins from your body.

However, it is not entirely clear how they do this, what specific compounds they're supposed to eliminate, and if they even work.

WHAT IS A DETOX?

Detox diets are generally short-term dietary interventions designed to eliminate toxins from your body. A typical detox diet involves a period of fasting, followed by a strict diet of fruit, vegetables, fruit juices, and water. Sometimes a detox also includes herbs, teas, supplements, and colon cleanses or enemas. This is claimed to:

- Rest your organs by fasting.
- Stimulate your liver to get rid of toxins.
- Promote toxin elimination through faeces, urine, and sweat.
- Improve circulation.
- Provide your body with healthy nutrients.

Detox therapies are most recommended because of potential exposure to toxic chemicals in the environment or your diet.

These diets are also claimed to help with various health problems, including obesity, digestive issues, autoimmune diseases, inflammation, allergies, bloating, and chronic fatigue.

However, human research on detox diets is lacking, and the handful of studies that exist are significantly flawed.

THE MOST COMMON WAYS TO DETOX

There are many ways to do a detox diet — ranging from total starvation fasts to simpler food modifications.

Most detox diets involve at least one of the following:

- Fasting for 1–3 days.
- Drinking fresh fruit and vegetable juices, smoothies, water, and tea.
- Drinking only specific liquids, such as salted water or lemon juice.
- Eliminating foods high in heavy metals, contaminants, and allergens.
- Taking supplements or herbs.
- Avoiding all allergenic foods, then slowly reintroducing them.
- Using laxatives, colon cleanses, or enemas.
- Exercising regularly.
- Completely eliminating alcohol, coffee, cigarettes, and refined sugar.

Detox diets vary in intensity and duration.

WHICH TOXINS ARE ELIMINATED?

Detox diets rarely identify the specific toxins they aim to remove. The mechanisms by which they work are also unclear. In fact, there is little to no evidence that detox diets remove any toxins from your body.

What's more, your body is capable of cleansing itself through the liver, faeces, urine, and sweat. Your liver makes toxic substances harmless, then ensures that they're released from your body.

Despite this, there are a few chemicals that may not be as easily removed by these processes, including persistent organic pollutants (POPs), phthalates, bisphenol A (BPA), and heavy metals.

These tend to accumulate in fat tissue or blood and can take a very long time — even years — for your body to flush. However, these compounds generally are removed from or limited in commercial products today.

Overall, there is little evidence that detox diets help eliminate any of these compounds.

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THESE DIETS?

Some people report feeling more focused and energetic during and after detox diets. However, this improved well-being may simply be due to eliminating processed

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foods, alcohol, and other unhealthy substances from your diet. You may also be getting vitamins and minerals that were lacking before. That said, many people also report feeling very unwell during the detox period.

EFFECTS ON WEIGHT LOSS

Very few scientific studies have investigated how detox diets impact weight loss. While some people may lose a lot of weight quickly, this effect seems to be due to loss of fluid and carb stores rather than fat. This weight is usually regained quickly once you go off the cleanse.

One study in overweight Korean women examined the lemon detox diet, which limits you to a mixture of organic maple or palm syrups and lemon juice for seven days. This diet significantly reduced body weight, BMI, body fat percentage, waist-to-hip ratio, waist circumference, markers of inflammation, insulin resistance, and circulating leptin levels.

If a detox diet or any diet involves severe calorie restriction, it will most certainly cause weight loss and improvements in metabolic health — but it's unlikely to help you keep weight off in the long term.

DETOX DIETS, SHORT-TERM FASTING, AND STRESS

Several varieties of detox diets may have effects like those of short-term or intermittent fasting. Short-term fasting may improve various disease markers in some people, including improved leptin and insulin sensitivity.

However, these effects do not apply to everyone. Studies in women show that both a 48-hour fast and a 3-week period of reduced calorie intake may increase your stress hormone levels.

On top of that, crash diets can be a stressful experience, as they involve resisting temptations and feeling extreme hunger.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

A few aspects of detox diets may have health benefits, such as:

- ✓ Avoiding dietary sources of heavy metals and POPs.
- ✓ Losing excessive fat.
- ✓ Exercising and sweating regularly.
- ✓ Eating whole, nutritious, healthy foods.

- ✓ Avoiding processed foods.
- ✓ Drinking water and green tea.
- ✓ Limiting stress, relaxing, and getting good sleep.

Following these guidelines is generally linked to improved health — regardless of whether you're on a detox diet.

SAFETY AND SIDE EFFECTS

Before doing any sort of detox, it is important to consider possible side effects.

✗ SEVERE CALORIE RESTRICTION

Several detox diets recommend fasting or severe calorie restriction. Short-term fasting and limited calorie intake can result in fatigue, irritability, and bad breath. Long-term fasting can result in energy, vitamin, and mineral deficiencies, as well as electrolyte imbalance and even death.

Furthermore, colon cleansing methods, which are sometimes recommended during detoxes, can cause dehydration, cramping, bloating, nausea, and vomiting.

✗ OVERDOSING

Some detox diets may pose the risk of overdosing on supplements, laxatives, diuretics, and even water. There is a lack of regulation and monitoring in the detox industry, and many detox foods and supplements may not have any scientific basis.

In the worst cases, the ingredient labels of detox products may be inaccurate. This can increase your risk of overdosing, potentially resulting in serious — and even fatal — effects.

✗ AT-RISK POPULATIONS

Certain people should not start any detox or calorie-restricting regimens without consulting a doctor first.

At-risk populations include children, adolescents, older adults, those who are malnourished, pregnant, or lactating women, and people who have blood sugar issues, such as diabetes or an eating disorder.

YOUR BODY'S BUILT-IN DETOX

Many of these extreme dietary shifts can do more harm than good. One example is the turmeric cleanse. While turmeric is good in small doses, larger doses can cause symptoms such as increased anxiety or sleeping difficulties.



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The human body has many processes to eliminate so-called toxins from the body. These include sweating and urinating as the body's own means of ridding itself of things it doesn't need.

The best way to support the organs that detoxify the body, and their respected processes, experts say, is eating a healthy diet, getting an average of 30 minutes of exercise a day, getting plenty of rest at night, and drinking enough water to stay hydrated.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Your body is frequently exposed to toxic substances. However, most of the time, it can remove them without additional help.

While detox diets may seem tempting, their benefits likely have nothing to do with vanquishing toxins, but rather with eliminating various unhealthy foods.

A much smarter approach is to eat healthier and improve your lifestyle rather than go on a potentially dangerous detox cleanse.