

Do You
Detox?

Overindulged this holiday season? Here, the PROS AND CONS of the new CLEANSING DIETS. By Caitlin Gaffey

When Beyoncé Knowles dropped 20 pounds in 2006 for her role in *Dreamgirls* by way of the Master Cleanse, a liquid detox diet, fasting on fluids became fashionable. These days, detoxers are taking handfuls of herbal remedies, surviving for weeks on liquid diets, and even hiring holistic healers, all in the name of bodily purification. Detox retreats and over-the-counter cleansing products promise to purge your liver of toxins, make excess pounds melt away, and cure an upset stomach. But does your digestive tract need the Roto-Rooter treatment, or is this just the latest fad diet? And can detoxing be hazardous to your health? We asked top doctors, nutritionists, and holistic experts to weigh in. Read on to find out what works and what to avoid.

Who NEEDS to Detox?

The typical American diet is chock-full of processed foods laden with additives and preservatives, which put a strain on the digestive system and can add to the accumulation of toxins in the body. But how do you know if your body is polluted? If you're on your third Diet Coke at noon and you often eat out of a vending machine, your system could probably use a break. "A juice cleanse of up to three days removes the toxic influences, giving your liver and your entire digestive system a rest. Beyond three days, you need the advice of a physician," says Woodson Merrell, an internist in New York. "This kind of cleanse can also jump-start your diet and get you back on track." Anyone who's pregnant, nursing, or has a preexisting condition like heart disease or diabetes should not detox. "And always check with a health-care provider before starting any detox plan," says Merrell.

LIQUIDS vs. Real Food

Most detox diets—iZO Cleanze (izocleanze.com) and the Martha's Vineyard Diet Detox (mvdietdetox.com), for example—involve a regimen of fruit and vegetable juices. Others, such as the Master Cleanse, are more stringent. But one thing stays consistent: You won't be doing much chewing, since the leading detoxes don't allow solid food. Why? "The average person cannot eat a pound of carrots, but they can drink the equivalent in juice and consume more nutrition than they could with a knife and fork," according to naturopathic doctor Roni DeLuz, founder of the Martha's Vineyard detox. But don't just run out and buy a gallon of OJ. DeLuz recommends having

two berry juices (try blueberries, pomegranates, and açai berries), two vegetable juices (try broccoli, spinach, and carrots), and a pureed-veggie soup each day. There's another reason liquid diets work. "If people have no options, they can't be tempted," says Lauren Slayton, a nutritionist in New York. But when the real food returns, you're more likely to binge. So Slayton advocates a food-based detox of fruits, veggies, nuts, whole grains, and fish, which has some carry-over into everyday life. A liquid fast, on the other hand, won't teach you anything about eating in moderation.

Must You FLUSH?

DeLuz thinks colonics and enemas are also an integral part of the equation. But most medical doctors warn against such procedures. "Bowel bacteria are very important, so you don't want to fiddle around with their environment," says Virginia-based gastroenterologist Patricia Raymond. Many over-the-counter detox remedies also claim to cleanse your colon, but they contain herbal ingredients the FDA hasn't evaluated for safety, including natural laxatives like cascara sagrada, which doctors warn can be habit-forming. Because it's hard to know how much of these herbal ingredients you're ingesting, these products can have you running to the bathroom. Drew Pasquella, CEO of SoCal Cleanse (socalcleanse.com), a 30-day herbal detox supplement with a low dose of cascara sagrada, is wary of products that promise to work fast. "Detoxing quickly is like stirring up the muck at the bottom of the lake," he says. "All of the toxins will be released at once, so you feel awful."

What About WEIGHT LOSS?

While experts advocate detoxing for health reasons, many people do it to drop a few pounds fast, since a "side effect" is rapid weight loss. But is this a dangerous way to squeeze into a tight dress by the weekend? A short detox probably won't hurt, but "I don't like to see people detox and then go back to their slovenly ways," notes Raymond. Adds Merrell, "Detoxing to lose weight doesn't work unless your lifestyle changes. It's like taking a vacation and then going back to a stressful job. You'll be fried again a month later." When it comes to weight loss that lasts, there really are no shortcuts. "Exercise, eating right, and getting lots of sleep is the way to lose weight," says Raymond. "Just like Mom told you." ■

