

## WELLNESS

## HEALTH COMMENTARY

## Diet detox: Something to chew on, or maybe not

\*DIET DETOX, FROM 1E

time opportunity for people to experience a fresh start... greater mental clarity, memory, and focus," it said, and I exhaled. I so need this, I thought. Not this program specifically, but something.

I'm 41, and I've never fasted, never established a regular eating regimen, never even been on a diet. But I'm hungry. And it's about much more than food.

For years I've career-climbed, but lately I've had to strip-mine my creativity to put words on the page. My three children routinely take more time, wisdom and energy than I have. A woman who was like my second mother died last year. Newspapers are letting go of fellow journalists nationwide, gas is almost \$4 a gallon and I need reading glasses.

I crave energy and balance. I don't struggle with weight, but I struggle almost daily with bouts of hypoglycemia, and my blood sugar often drops precipitously low, leaving me addled and spent. For years I exercised regularly, but that was years ago. My modern American woman's life is making me sick, but I don't have time for wellness. I feel toxic. I need an intervention.

But 21 days to get control of my health? And not just for me, but also for my niece Ryan, chunky from discovering wine during a semester in France, and my husband, Ralph, who was just laid off and is fighting his own battles with weight and focus? That sounded about right.

The authors' testimony felt compelling, the book had gotten good press and I liked the pictures of fresh vegetables on the cover. That was perhaps not enough research about the detox for some, and maybe I was not focused enough on the science. But for me, it was a leap of faith. I trusted my friend, the smart vegetarian mom, and even more than that, I trusted the urgent voice in my head telling me that something had to give.

NIGHT BEFORE  
DETOX DAY

My dining room table is covered with products from the book's website (mvdiet-detox.com). EssentialGreens and Zesty Tomato Vege-Splash powders, NuStevia herbal sugar substitute and digestive enzyme capsules. A three-week, three-person supply, with each kit costing a little more than \$200.

I am chomping on a BLT, mindful that this may be the last time I chew for weeks. There are no solids in this diet detox, only soups, juices and supplements. There's no chewing at all, to "give your digestive system a rest," according to co-author Roni DeLuz, a naturopathic doctor and founder of the Martha's Vineyard Holistic Retreat.

This will be intense: eating every two hours, juicing my vegetables, keeping to a regimen of herbal teas and distilled water. What if I can't stick with it? I call co-author James Hester, who soothes me with talk of slowing down and taking care.

In the kitchen, my niece and sister are doing a trial run with the juicer. Tomorrow we go liquid. I take two more bites of my BLT, then I think I'll have a quick bowl of ice cream.

## D DAY 1

We're going to weigh in every morning.

Ralph, 6-foot-2, 257 pounds.

Ryan, 5-foot-7, 188 pounds.

Me, 5-foot-4, 116 pounds.

8:30 a.m.: "1, 2, 3, DETOX!"

we yell.

My first cup of water and I'm already tired of water.

Last night's pizza is on the

stove. I pick it up and smell.

9:30 a.m.: More tea and water. I want a sausage McMuffin with cheese.

10 a.m.: I feel sluggish and tired. "Can we add apples?" Ryan whines. An hour and a half into our detox, the bigness of what we are trying to do is dawning on us.

## D DAY 2

6:44 p.m.: We get through the day, but biscuits, toast and garlic bread are heavy on my mind. Ryan wants popcorn. I have to cook dinner for the kids, and handling food is hard.

My head hurts. The book calls it a "healing crisis": a reaction "as the body flushes toxins out of your cells so you can" get rid of them. It often comes after a few days. I'm early with mine.

## D DAY 3

I wake up weak and dizzy. I didn't finish my soup last night. I drink my morning BerrySplash and feel instantly better. The book promises that if I follow the regimen, I won't be hungry, and I'm not. But I mourn the habits of eating.

Ralph has bad knees and wants to see if he can get some weight off them before considering surgery. He also wants to be healthier, to look better and to share this together.

But now he's fussing at me because I missed my 10:30 "feeding." He chides, "You can't fuss at me again for missing anything." I'd been mad when he got off schedule, because that makes you hungry and increases your odds of breaking detox.

"You're the one more likely to snap," I yell back. "You'll be talkin' about 'I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today.'"

I collapse in giggles and my husband regards me coolly.

"You're punchy," he says, full of disdain.

1 p.m.: We're at the Car-Max and I'm crashing. My head hurts. I'm nauseous and tired. The book says get plenty of rest, but my life isn't conducive to plenty of rest.

4:52 p.m.: I fall into the couch, exhausted. Ralph and I have missed three feedings. He brings me a glass of Zesty Tomato VegeSplash, and almost comically I begin to revive. My husband has some room for error, but I do not have reserves of weight and nutrition. I am close to my margins. Wow, I really do have to eat on schedule if I don't want to make myself sick. I feel as if some profound revelation is starting to dawn on me.

I can go all day without eating, then I'm starving by family dinner or by the next morning, and I eat all the cookies and carbs in sight.

In my struggles with low blood sugar, I had long heard I should eat small meals throughout the day, but I never felt the truth of it until I lay on the couch sensing myself come back to life after a few sips of tomato drink. I don't know if I can change my eating habits, but now, at last, I think perhaps I should.

6 p.m.: The book recommends that detoxers have a weekly colonic. I don't even know what a colonic is, so I go on the Internet.

Oh. Not happening, say Ryan and Ralph. It will help your headache, Hester promises.

Another leap of faith. I schedule one. I thought it would be awful. But nothing about it was. I leave grateful, my headache gone.

8 p.m.: Ryan says she

wants to quit. "Your journey isn't just about you," I say. Ralph and I spend an hour talking her down from the ledge.

## D DAY 4

Ryan feels better. She makes a vegetable soup for dinner: greens, spinach, cucumbers, carrots, celery, broccoli, garlic and a sweet potato. She liquefies it; I spray it with Bragg Liquid Aminos for flavor. Best thing we've tasted in days.

## D DAY 5

Why have I never noticed how many food ads are on television? Two roast beef sandwiches for \$4 at Arby's, a pound of pizza at Pizza Hut, McDonald's, KFC. Image after image assaults me. My kids left a grape on the counter. I want to chew it up. It's unnatural not to chew.

## D DAY 6

At the mall, my girls want Sbarro. "How's your pizza?" I ask.

"It's good," says Sydney, 14. Short pause. "How's your zesty enzyme?" she asks.

I just look at her. Nice.

## D DAY 7

I make my first-ever shopping trip to Whole Foods. I'm just getting the eat-right gospel, and we are in a cathedral. I rejoice in picking organic beets and antibiotic-free chicken for my kids.

## D DAY 8

"Hooray!" It has been one of the longest weeks of my life. I take inordinate care dressing for book club (where the hostesses serve salmon in dill sauce and fresh asparagus as Ryan and I look on). Your skin looks great, a friend says to me. I am beaming.

It's still really difficult, but

we've turned a corner. We now know we can do the detox.

## D DAY 13

I lunch with a friend at an upscale restaurant. Actually, I have tea and watch her eat. My weight has fallen to 108 pounds. I look "Sudanish," she says.

DeLuz warned me that I need to drink protein shakes to stabilize my blood sugar and counter the weight loss. But I haven't done so. Again I feel a revelation. Allowing myself to get frail isn't taking care of myself. I start the shakes as soon as I get home.

## D DAY 15

Ryan stops. She has finished her internship and is heading back to her senior year in college. She has lost 15 pounds and decided to become a vegetarian.

## D DAY 18

With three days left, I break detox. We're on an impromptu two-day trip and I'm out of VegeSplash. There's no fridge in the hotel room, so we can't buy rice milk for protein shakes. The book cautions: Break your detox slowly. I snap, just as the authors predicted if I let myself get caught without my detox supplies.

At McCormick & Schmick's, I order a mixed green salad with glazed walnuts, crab soup, shrimp cocktail and a baguette. Heaven. Not so bad a detox break, I think. Then I get cheesecake.

Ralph goes hungry. The next day I wake up clear about my lessons and their broader implications. Know your limitations, plan well and, if you fall, do not dwell unduly on your imperfections. I restart my detox the next day. Just three more days.

## EPILOGUE

It has been less than a week since Ralph and I finished. I maintained 110 pounds; Ralph lost 31 pounds. His skin looks great, and he's working on three job prospects.

I realized something during the detox that I hadn't understood before. There is no magic pill for any of this stuff, just choices.

We can choose to be mindful, to set boundaries, educate ourselves about nutrition and the images coming at us, and be deliberate about the things we eat and feed our families.

I am not passive about anything else in my life, and I don't have to choose to be passively unwell. A detox might not be for everyone, but I walked on faith — not so much in any particular regimen, but faith in my own ability to switch up, change direction and stamp my will on my life.

Not that I'm completely there yet: Chips and cheesecake will always call me, and sometimes I'll answer. Like everything else, wellness is a journey.

It just took me 21 days to start.