



Health Fact Sheet

Detoxification

What Part Does Toxicity Play

We live in a toxic world, and as a consequence we all carry some kind of toxic loading to some degree or other. If the body is unable to clear this toxicity adequately, it can become very threatening to our health and wellbeing.

Toxicity in the body builds up either from the body's own metabolic processes, from the body's inability to process waste residues or from outside sources.

The process of digestion and production of energy produces waste by-products. These need to be eliminated from the body in order to maintain health. Ordinarily this function is carried out via the bowels and kidneys. The lungs excrete carbon dioxide, and potentially toxins, through mucous, and sometimes the skin comes into play in the form of spots or a rash or skin disease in order to eliminate toxins when the bowels and kidneys are feeling overwhelmed.

Chronic constipation – when waste matter stays in the body for longer than 24 hours duration - can cause auto-intoxication. This is when the waste sits in the gut for a long period of time and waste matter and toxins from the fermenting mess is re-absorbed into the bloodstream. As you can imagine, this does not leave you feeling energetic and vital.

Constipation is a big problem in the Western World and is associated with serious bowel disorders and even cancer. We are very squeamish in talking about toilet habits, but do NOT think that just because you've always 'gone' once every three days that is normal. It is not! You should be passing a motion at least once a day – if you are having sufficient fibre in your diet this might even go up to two or three times a day. Anything less than once a day and you are constipated, and need to do something about it.

The major organs of detoxification – the liver and kidneys – need to be working effectively in order to filter out and neutralize toxins. When these are impaired for whatever reason – and this is increasingly common - the body's ability to detoxify naturally will come under serious pressure.

Where do the toxins come from?

Many of the xeno-toxins (environmental toxins) we are exposed to on a daily basis can have the effect of overwhelming our natural detoxification pathways. The following are just a few of the sources:

Chemicals – from insecticides and pesticides on our food, from our toiletries, make-up and personal care products, from household cleaners, drugs (legal and illegal!), chemicals in water, plastic bottles and storage containers, from hormones injected into meat, outgassing from soft furnishings, paint, solvents etc, artificial flavouring, sweeteners and colouring

Heavy metals – from pollution, from amalgam fillings, from water pipes, from water – even from lipstick!

Oestrogen – primarily in the form of xeno-oestrogen – things that have an oestrogenic effect coming from outside ourselves, this can contribute to hormonal imbalances and overwhelm some of the detox pathways in the liver, leading to poor detoxification and the kind of imbalances that contribute to weight gain. The Pill, HRT, plastic-bottled water and plastics in general all contribute to this as do pesticides on food.

Why Does This Matter?

The cumulative effect of all these toxins we are exposed to can alter our body metabolism causing:

- Enzyme dysfunction
- Hormonal imbalances
- Nutritional deficiencies
- Psychological and neurological symptoms
- Weight gain

So you can see, continual exposure to these toxins causes us problems so the body has to try and find some way to neutralize them. Often the detoxification systems become overwhelmed (you can see why!), and as the toxic load creeps up the body goes on a high state of alert and this starts to affect your quality of life and – at worst - has the potential to be life threatening. The body has a number of choices – it can try pushing toxins out through the skin (acne, eczema, psoriasis, rashes etc), the mucous membranes (colds, bronchitis etc), through periods if you are female (heavy bleeding) or it can lock the toxins up in adipose (fatty) tissue until it has a chance to get back on track and address these issues, once it is not quite so overwhelmed.

Of course, with our modern day lives, this opportunity rarely, if ever, comes unless we give the body a helping hand.

And THAT is why detoxing should be an essential part of any healthy living plan

A Brief Guide to the Detoxification Process

It is worth noting right at the beginning of this process that you are 70 – 75% water (your brain is 80%!) so none of your body systems can work at the optimum if you are dehydrated. A dehydrated cell, in order to protect its integrity, will produce a thick cholesterol coating around its outside to stop further water loss from within. This has the effect however of impairing the flow of electrolytes and nutrients in and out of the cell, with a consequent buildup of toxicity and acidity within the cell. By drinking plenty of water, you are starting to give your body the message that it can come off dehydration alert and the cell membrane can start to thin and release some of its contents.

So water is important to any detoxification programme!

As your cells start to release both the inherited deficiency picture and a lifetime's worth of toxicity from deep within the body you may well notice a number of things happening. If you understand these are just part of the process and work with them it can make it easier to cope with.

As you start to detox and toxins move out of the cells into the body fluids ie. lymph and blood, you may well have what is called an acute episode, or healing crisis. It may feel like things are worse, that headaches, blood sugar lows, aches and pains etc appear. It is a sign that what you are doing is working, that a shakeup is happening within the body. Toxins are coming out of the cells on the first step of their journey out of the body. This is into the blood and lymphatic system. From here there are two possible routes of elimination. One is through the skin ie spots, rashes, maybe a worsening or eczema-like symptoms, and the other, more usual route is through the liver, or kidneys, which cleanses the blood and carries the toxins out through bile into the colon – or in the kidneys case, urine - and then on out of the body.

If at any point one of these routes gets blocked or overworked, you get the effect of blocked plumbing, with things backing up. As you want to ensure that this movement out of the body continues there are various things you can do to support the body through the process – skin brushing, hot and cold showering and enemas to name a few (see Naturopathic Techniques fact sheet).

The liver is a major organ of detoxification. Our modern lifestyle gives it very little respite, so it can be supported by cutting back on saturated fats (the liver processes fats), doing castor oil packing to the liver (Naturopathic Technique fact sheet), which helps to open it up, and taking milk thistle and/or dandelion root either as tablets or a tincture, which helps to support and strengthen it.

The bowel needs to be kept moving regularly so that toxins dumped there for elimination do not stagnate and ferment and – worst possible case – get re-absorbed. You need to go to the loo at least once a day. If you suffer from constipation, drinking a minimum of 4 pints of water a day can help ease this. If you suffer from lazy bowel, adding more bulk to your food (as well as the water!) can help – psyllium husks and linseeds are helpful and available from health food stores. Enemas help to cleanse the colon and stimulate movement and at least initially can be a great help to keep this route open and prevent a toxic backlog.

Remember, the whole process is about introducing a sense of movement and flow into what has been a stagnant picture.

Emotions

Another effect you may notice is that your emotions may feel rather unstable for a while. Again, this is nothing to worry about but part of the process of releasing a deep and congested picture of stuck toxicity and energy.

Mood swings, fear, anger, irritability etc are all normal responses to the changes happening within your body. As deeply buried toxins are being released it is as if there is a corresponding release of deeply buried emotions, things we have suppressed, not acknowledged or expressed. This can be best supported by the use of flower essences or even just talking things through and understanding where the feelings are coming from, so they can be released. You will find that as you release these you will

release energy which has been trapped and used to suppress these emotions, and your energy levels will rise.

It can be uncomfortable but this is all a part of the change that is happening to you, not just at a physical level, but wholistically. As you release old patterns and habits not just of eating, but how you relate to the world, you are releasing things that no longer serve you and lightening your load as you move forward into a brighter, lighter, cleaner future.

So what does a good detox regime look like?

Well, the hard way is to fast for several days, drinking only water or vegetable juices, then to re-introduce light foods for several days before gradually getting back to normal. This does work – giving the gut a break from the process of digestion frees up energy for the body to deal with other issues, and vegetable juices are alkalizing and will also help to push out toxins. But – and there's always a but isn't there! – ideally you need to take time away from normal life to do this, and it does take some planning and preparing for. If you are interested, there is handout on the Master Cleanse, one of the more popular ways of fasting.

A much easier way I have found, which leaves you feeling as well is to follow a herbal/nutritional based cleanse that aims to support the major organs of detoxification ie. liver and kidneys, whilst also cleansing the blood and gut. Taken as capsules two to three times a day, with plenty of water to flush things out it is as easy as that. On the diet side, you obviously either avoid or cut down on alcohol, caffeine, red meat and sugary foods, and just eat a normal, healthy diet. This means you are still able to function perfectly well, but still gain benefit. There are a variety of products on the market that do this so explore what is available.

Depending on your body state, some people may get what are called 'detox symptoms' for a few days – headaches, not feeling too good etc – but make sure the cleanse you are using supports the liver and kidneys in order to keep these to a minimum, and you will quickly start to garner the benefits.

Other tips to help you make the most of a cleanse:

Drink a minimum of 8 glasses of water daily – add Liquid Chlorophyll to about half of these as it helps to balance body pH, cleanse the blood and deodorize the body. It tastes minty so gives water a refreshing taste.

Consider also taking Milk Thistle if you are getting some detox symptoms as this gives a boost to the liver, improving its efficiency.

Taking a magnesium supplement can really help to alkalise the body and therefore help to rid the body of acid wastes and build up and give a boost to your cleanse.

Drinking hot water and lemon juice (with some honey if required!) is also very cleansing and supportive to the liver.

Dandelion tea is good for the liver, and is dandelion and burdock. Fennel helps the kidneys. Licorice can also be beneficial, especially if you are prone to water retention.

At the end of the cleanse, take a course of a good quality probiotic – this is to ensure that your gut gets repopulated with lots of good, friendly bacteria and there is no room for bad guys to move in. This is an **IMPORTANT** way to finish any cleanse.

If you like baths, add Epsom Salts to your bath. These can help to pull acid wastes out through the skin and can be cleansing and relaxing. Skin brushing can also be helpful to get a sluggish system moving – but don't do this if you are struggling to detox.

Add in extra fibre to your diet – either through fibre-rich foods (see FIBRE fact sheet), or by taking a fibre supplement, as this helps to absorb toxins and carry them out of the body quickly and easily.

A Cleansing Diet

A diet which is high in alkaline foods is generally considered to be both cleansing and healthy. You can make this one of your new good habits, or just undertake an alkaline diet several times a year. See the fact sheets on Acid or Alkaline for more information.

Detoxing and Cleansing Herbs

Nature's pharmacy has given a quite a range of herbs which help with cleansing and detoxing the body. The following herbs are all useful working at different levels in the body:

Function	Herbs
Blood Cleaners	Garlic, Red clover blossom, Dandelion root, Chaparral, Cayenne pepper, Yellow dock root, burdock root, sarsaparilla root, goldenseal root
Liver Cleaners	Dandelion root, Yellow dock root, Milk thistle, Goldenseal root
Lymph	Echinacea, Sarsaparilla root
Circulation	Ginger root
Skin	Yellow dock root, Burdock root, Oregon grape root, Goldenseal, Boneset, Elder flowers, Peppermint, Cayenne pepper, Ginger root
Nerves	Prickly ash bark, Biota & Schizandra (adrenals), Chamomile
Colon	Oregon grape root, Cascara Sagrada, Buckthorn, Dandelion, Yellow dock, Rhubarb root, Senna leaf, Licorice
Diuretics	Parsley, Yarrow, Cleavers, Horsetail, Corn silk, Uva Ursi, Juniper Berries, Goldenseal
All round detoxifier	Licorice

How Often Should You Do A Cleanse?

Ideally at least twice a year. The best times are always in the spring and autumn, around the equinoxes as you are then working with the natural energies in your environment to get the best out of the cleanse. But if this is not convenient, any time of the year is possible – it is best to suit it to your lifestyle and be less stressed about it, than try to make it for a certain time when it really doesn't suit and get stressed!