

Chapter 1

Figuring Out What Detox Is All About

In This Chapter

- ▶ Looking at the rationale behind detox
 - ▶ Peeking at the process
 - ▶ Detoxing for weight loss, health, and energy
 - ▶ Making sure that your detox is just right
 - ▶ Heeding warnings about not detoxing
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This chapter gives you an overview of detox: what it is and who can benefit from it. Importantly, it also covers who should *not* detox.

Everyone is different, and every detox plan is different in the sense that your personal choices have to be right for *you*. Above all, I encourage you to plan the detox that best suits you as an individual.

Examining Detox Basics

What exactly is detox? *Detox* is the process of ridding the body of *toxins* – harmful substances that accumulate in the organs and tissues.

Encountering toxins

Toxins are all around you, cropping up occasionally where you least expect them.



This book aims to help you understand that most damaging substances don't come with big DANGER signs attached (more on this in Chapter 2).

Some toxins, such as petrol fumes and insecticides, obviously have toxic properties, but not all the injurious substances targeted by a detox plan are toxic in the accepted sense of the word. Take tartrazine, for example. This yellow dye – found in biscuits, cakes, drinks, and other edibles – is not a poison, as such – it will not kill you, or even make you ill. However, many studies carried out since the 1980s link its consumption with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which impairs the concentration of children of all ages, and causes poor sleeping habits, unruly – even violent – behaviour, and the feeling of being in a state of perpetual motion.



Junk snacks and convenience foods contain artificial preservatives, colourings, and flavourings with no nutritional value and lots of toxic potential.

Living the vida toxic

A toxic lifestyle consists of one (and maybe all) of the following:

- ✓ A **poor diet**, high in fat and refined starches and sugars and low in fibre, vitamins, minerals, and *trace elements* (minerals required in tiny quantities).
- ✓ Exposure to **cigarette smoke**, which most people inhale whether they are smokers or not.
- ✓ **Heavy drinking** – this depends upon the individual, but basically it means drinking more than the Government-recommended amount (14 units per week for women, 21 units per week for men, with 1 unit being a 100 mls standard strength wine, half a pint of beer, a schooner of sherry, or a single measure of spirits). Heavy drinking is also taking more than 2–3 units per day, and drinking every day without an alcohol break.
- ✓ **Caffeine** from highly caffeinated coffee and fizzy drinks.
- ✓ **Stress** (which everyone is subject to – see Chapter 8) gives rise to toxic *free radicals* – hyperactive oxygen molecules that attack the immune system, hastening the development of degenerative disorders.
- ✓ **Environmental pollutants** such as chlorine in drinking water, traffic emissions, and so on.

All the above toxic exposures impair the immune defence system, and their combined effects have proven links to heart and arterial disease, cancer, diabetes, premature ageing, and other degenerative disorders.

Chronic toxin overload is the state you get into if you never bother to counteract these effects with detox.



Everyone is susceptible to toxin overload, which can harm you directly – for example, a high alcohol intake leading to liver cirrhosis – and indirectly by weakening the immune defence system (see Chapter 3).

Turning to the bright side

It may seem that everything you enjoy, or use to relieve stress, is full of toxins. The good news is that many substances with toxic potential when taken in large quantities, such as chocolate and alcohol, can be perfectly safe or even health-promoting when taken in moderation.

The even better news is that detoxing can cleanse, balance, and fortify your system (see the next section), eliminate many stored ‘nasties’ and decrease your chances of suffering at their hands.

Going through the Process

Although I describe the cleansing, balancing and restorative stages of detox (see Chapter 4) in sequence, each is more or less ongoing and merges seamlessly with the next. Cleansing does not screech to a halt, for example, when you start balancing, nor does balancing slam its brakes on when you start fortifying. The idea is to work with nature, not frighten it to death!

Cleansing

The cleansing stage encourages your excretory organs – your liver, kidneys, gut, lungs, and skin – to get rid of toxins, big time. Fibre-rich foods, for example, help your bowels to work, while the extra fluid washes out water-soluble toxins in your urine.

You may decide to kick off with a ‘liquids only’ day, taking only water and freshly-squeezed juices. (Chapter 4 talks about whether to start your detox plan in this way or go straight on with the recommended foods – such as organic fruit, vegetables, grains, pulses – that nourish and support the cleansing process.)

Going with organic foods

Chapter 5 has more about the benefits of choosing organic produce, and I’ll just say at this point that organically grown veg and fruit contain on average twice the vitamins, minerals, trace elements, essential fatty acids, and plant nutrients of non-organic produce – and in their natural ratios.

Fresh or frozen vegetables and fruit have their full complement of fibre, a great, natural-bulking agent which helps your bowels to work fully and regularly. Soluble and insoluble fibre also absorbs many of the toxins on their way out of your intestinal system, buffering the bowel lining against any irritation these toxins may cause.

Your liver, kidneys, skin, gut, and lungs need all the nutritional support you can give them when they are working hard to eject long-stored toxins.

Keying in on chelating foods

A natural bodily process called *chelation* (*key'lation*) neutralises and takes out toxic metals such as lead and mercury.

A number of nutrients encourage chelation, of which vitamin C is probably the most important. Vitamin C cannot be stored by the body because this vitamin is water-soluble and, as readily as your gut absorbs it from fresh fruit and vegetables, it is excreted in the urine.

This is one reason why a constant supply of vitamin C-rich fruit and veg and certain other foods play such an important role in detox plans.

Chapter 5 talks about your food choices to aid detox cleansing, and you can find recipes utilising them in Chapters 13 to 18. Chapter 6 tells you about the foods to avoid when detoxing, and the reasons why.

Balancing

The object of the balancing stage of detox is to re-balance your body nutritionally after establishing the cleansing stage. You eat the same foods, but with a wider choice and generally more protein.

Central to the re-balancing process is the addition of herbal and nutritional supplements (apart from antioxidant minerals and vitamins, and acidophilus sources). Favourite balancing herbs (detailed in Chapter 11) include the adaptogens such as ginseng which help your body to 'adapt to' and benefit fully from the detox process. They also give you the strength to cope with stress and illnesses in the future.

Re-balancing nutritional supplements include omega-6 essential fatty acids found in evening primrose oil, and the omega-3 group supplied by fish oils.

Fortifying

Once cleansing and balancing are underway, and you're countering stress with simple exercise and relaxation, detox fortifying helps to strengthen you against further toxins.

The choice of foods and recipes are widened, and you are eased gradually back into a healthy eating plan which improves your energy and stamina forthwith.

Supplements can help you with detox fortifying, and I discuss them in Chapter 11.

Offering Reasons to Detox

People detox for a variety of reasons, especially those in the following sections.

Detoxing for weight loss

You are likely to lose weight when detoxing, partly because healthy, natural foods contain far less saturated fat and sugar and provide fewer calories. Another reason may be more regular bowel movements. If you're not usually 'regular', but have to take laxatives to open your bowels once or twice a week (for instance), your colon may be clogged with a hefty waste overload. Until you shift this and spring-clean your gut, satisfactory weight loss won't happen. You can help the process along, and benefit from longer-lasting weight loss, with the use of certain supplements (such as psyllium husks – an excellent inner gut 'broom'), which help gut balancing and activity by providing helpful bacteria, which every large bowel needs! These supplements are discussed in Chapter 11.



If you do not suffer from constipation but can't shed weight, ask your doctor to check your general health and look beyond detox (to cutting your calorie intake or becoming more active, for instance) for a realistic loss.

Detoxing for health

You may be considering a detox to boost your general health, though you feel in pretty good shape and have no specific symptoms to relieve.

Detoxing boosts your immune defence system, strengthening it to deal with the free radicals that are generated in the tissues through stress and other toxins. Catching fewer colds and similar infections (or getting over them more quickly), the more rapid healing of minor injuries (such as scratches, cuts and bruises), more restful sleep, a fresher complexion, and improved vitality, are just a few additional benefits.

On the other hand, you may turn to detox to relieve minor conditions. Degenerative problems such as premature ageing (masses of wrinkles and lines), arthritis or poor circulation, small skin cancers, and 'borderline' diabetes all spring to mind.

Alternatively, you may wish to strengthen your immune system because you're prone to allergic disorders – eczema, asthma, and hayfever, for instance.



Seek medical advice from your doctor if you are receiving ongoing treatment. Otherwise, your symptoms are likely to improve, and you'll feel encouraged to, and I recommend that you do, detox several times a year.

Detoxing for energy

Has your get-up-and-go got up and gone? Prolonged stress, long working hours, anxiety over finances, relationships or family members, above all toxin overload, can sap your energy, leaving you exhausted and irritable. You're left with zilch interest in sex – or any other pleasures for that matter.

Though you may feel tempted to smoke or drink too much to ease your unpleasant state, listen to your body, and try detoxing instead.

The cleansing stage puts paid to accumulated toxins and gathered waste matter, the balancing process re-harmonises your over-stressed system (and immune defences), and you can then fortify yourself physically and mentally with highly nutritional foods.



Essential to your plan is gentle exercise and regular relaxation to help you get rid of negative emotions and fight depression. Besides boosting your mood, they also provide physical and mental repose.

Mood, anxiety levels, and sleep quality tend to improve fairly quickly. You need to continue your healthy diet (and stress-beating measures) to benefit in the long-term.

Planning Your Personal Detox

You have decided to detox – it's just a question of when and where. However enthusiastic you may feel, though, being in the right mood, in the right place, and at the right time is just as essential to your ultimate success as eating the recommended foods and drinking lots of water.

Getting in the mood

Your mood and your stress level are both important factors to consider before starting a detox. You need to feel in a positive, fairly upbeat mood to detox. The first day or so can be challenging, especially if you're a heavy-coffee drinking, party-going smoker who loves a tippie!

See your GP if you think you may be suffering from depression, and check out Chapter 8 to identify stress symptoms.

Finding the right time

New Year is a classic time to detox, following seasonal excesses – there's also the lure of your healthier self sashaying into spring. And springtime lends itself to detoxing, being a time of renewal and growth.

Your body, mind and emotions tell you when to detox, if you listen to them. A holiday is an ideal opportunity, as is a fairly slack week ahead when you've a long weekend with minimum stress and plenty of time to yourself.

You can start by reading Chapter 21 in which I supply ten top tips to keep you motivated.

Staking out the right place

In theory, you can detox anywhere, but your home is probably the best place, where you're in charge of the food and can throw out tempting snacks that definitely aren't on the menu! (See Chapter 6 on which foods to avoid, and why.)

You may feel a hotel or spa is preferable, if there are therapies on hand to keep you on track. But hotels have dishes that just *might* tempt you, and spas, while ostensibly places of tranquillity, may produce unforeseen aggravation beyond your control.

Being prepared

It's advisable to prepare yourself for detoxing, because this important event should ideally set the scene for a healthier future lifestyle. And if you habitually take in a lot of caffeine, sugar or refined, processed foods, you need to cut down on these before your detox starts.

The chapters in Part IV are all about personalising your detox, and making the best choices for *you*:

- ✓ Chapter 10 helps you every step of the way as you draw up your detox plan, both preparing to detox and actually doing it.
- ✓ Chapter 11 tells you all about dietary and herbal supplements you can select to optimise your detoxing experience.
- ✓ Chapter 12 points you in the direction of maintaining detox for life.

Looking at Who Shouldn't Detox

Take time out to listen to your body – it should be spelling out its needs regarding detox, loud and clear. Take a look at Chapter 2, if you are in any doubt about your need to detox.

There are circumstances, however, in which detoxing is a definite no-no, and others in which I would urge you to check with your doctor before planning a detox routine.



Don't detox if

- ✓ You are pregnant or breast-feeding
- ✓ You suffer from a serious illness
- ✓ You will shortly be having an operation
- ✓ You are grossly over- or underweight and/or suffer from an eating disorder. (This means clinically obese, with a Body Mass Index above 30. To check yours go to nhlbisupport.com/bmi/.)



Always check with your doctor if

- ✓ You are in any doubt about your fitness to detox (your doctor may not be sure what detoxing is, so take a copy of this book – or a photocopy of your chosen plan – with you!)
- ✓ You are being treated for any condition with prescription medicines.