

Chapter 1

Understanding Detoxification and Detox Dieting

In This Chapter

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Your amazing body is the most complicated machine on earth. But keeping that complex machine operating at an extremely high level can be surprisingly simple. You can enjoy maximum health for decades if you follow just a few rules, the most important of which are:

- ✓ Keep your body fueled with the right kinds of food.
- ✓ Avoid anything that can cause your body harm.

These rules may be simple, but I didn't say they were easy.

The world around us is filled with toxins. In fact, our planet is more toxic now than it has ever been in human history. To be honest, it can be a real challenge to get healthful, toxin-free food and to dodge all the toxins that exist in our environment, just waiting to creep and seep into your body to do you harm. That's the bad news: So many toxins exist at such high levels that you simply cannot escape their reach.

The good news is that you can fight back against the situation. You can make adjustments to your lifestyle — starting with your diet but reaching far beyond — to limit the amount of toxins you're exposed to. And you can make a concerted effort to detoxify the harmful substances that already exist in your body.

Throughout this book I discuss ways that you can give your body the healthful, wholesome fuel it needs, while at the same time avoiding toxic materials and working to remove the toxins that have already built up in your body's

systems. If you can stick to the plans that I lay out for you in the pages that follow, you'll enjoy a level of health that many people may hardly believe is possible.

Figuring Out Why Everyone Should Detox

Anyone living in the developed world, and particularly in the United States, is exposed to chemicals and other toxic substances on a daily basis. These toxins are more varied and exist in much higher quantities than ever before. It's scary to think about, but we really don't know what the long-term health effects of all these toxins could be for the human race as a whole. What we *can* see are the health effects of the toxicity that people suffer from now, and the picture certainly isn't pretty. Small doses of toxins usually don't have an immediate effect, but the long-term accumulation can eventually cause entire organ systems to fail with no obvious cause. Thousands of people currently face chronic diseases that weren't even on the books a century ago, and the average child born today comes into the world with more than 200 different toxins already present in her body.

I'd like to believe that people across the globe will stop adding more and more toxins into our surroundings, but we all know that's wishful thinking. Things are likely going to get quite a bit more toxic before they start getting cleaned up, so it's best to start planning now for a toxin-filled future.

I don't want you to panic about the toxins that surround you, but you should at least realize what you're up against. You must also realize that you can take steps to avoid toxins and detoxify your body to counter the toxic trend. And always remember that you're not alone — we're all fighting against the health threats posed by toxins, and the important work of detoxification should be embraced by everyone (or at least everyone interested in living a long, healthy, enjoyable life!).

Defining detoxification

So what is detoxification, anyway? It's any process that removes a substance that is injurious to your body or that changes a toxic substance so it's no longer injurious. Dozens of different detoxification methods exist, and I cover the most useful and important ones — including diet, which is the most critical of all — throughout this book. Broadly speaking, though, you can split detoxification up into two categories: internal and external.

Internal

Our bodies have an extraordinarily complex array of systems that change, break down, attack and destroy, or eliminate threats to our internal environment

and health. For thousands of years these systems have helped humans to enjoy relatively good basic health, but for most of those years the exposure to toxins was very low and rarely caused a problem. That's not so today.

The primary internal systems for detoxification are the stomach, intestines, liver, immune system, kidneys, and lungs. Each one works in a different way to keep us as clean as possible, and you can enhance the detox power of each system by taking the steps I describe in this book's chapters.

External

When it comes to external detoxification, your skin is second to none. Your skin serves as an important barrier that keeps many toxins from entering your body. Your sweat glands, which are extremely important sites for detoxification, are also housed in your skin.

Seeing what detoxification can do for you

When you think about toxins, you can consider them poisons. You don't want poisons floating around in your body, do you? Toxins can affect virtually every system and part of your body, causing a massive decrease in efficiency and function. Toxins also cause disease. Removing toxins — and avoiding them in the first place — can have some truly startling positive effects on your health, which I detail throughout Part III of this book. Here are just a few examples:



- ✔ **Increasing energy:** Many toxins directly affect the production of energy in your body, and when your toxic levels are high you have far less energy than you would enjoy if your systems were toxin free (or close to it). The more toxins you can remove and keep out, the more energy you'll have.
- ✔ **Boosting immune function:** Your immune system plays a major part in detoxification. The more it has to work toward getting rid of toxins, the less work it can do on its normal tasks (such as preventing infections and killing cancer cells). Getting rid of toxins makes life easier for your immune system, which allows it to do its job effectively.
- ✔ **Managing stress:** We usually think of stress as an emotional response to an unwanted situation. That's definitely one cause of stress, but toxins can put even more stress on your body, which reacts the same to emotional stress and toxic stress. Stress harms your body in many different ways, including (but not limited to) organ damage and brain problems. Managing toxic and emotional stress can be a major contributor to good health.

✔ **Decreasing fat:** Everyone needs a little stored energy, and fat is one of the ways you fulfill that need. Unfortunately, many of us are storing enough energy (in the form of fat) for several people. That's a medical problem — a very serious one. In addition to the strain obesity puts on your cardiovascular system, there's a toxic element of obesity that many people don't understand. Fat-soluble toxins are stored in your fat cells, and these cells release toxins into your bloodstream on a regular basis. You have to get the toxins out of the fat cells before you can reduce the fat. Then, with less fat, the toxins have fewer places to hide.

Taking a Look at Toxins

If you start looking around for toxins, you don't have to go very far. Start by looking under your kitchen sink. See those disinfectants and cleaners? They're almost certainly loaded with chemical toxins. Open your pantry. Do you have any processed foods in there? Be honest. If so, check the ingredients lists. If you see any words that you can't pronounce, those are probably toxins. Head into the bathroom next. Chances are your hair spray, deodorant, and other personal hygiene products contain toxic substances. Don't even go into your garage — you could spend all day in there discovering toxins.

If you don't feel like walking around the house, just take a deep breath. The fumes from your carpet or from a freshly painted wall in the next room will add to the toxic list. And toxic influences from outside your house, down the street, or across town — influences generated by places like factories and power plants — are contained in the air you're breathing, too.

To be fair, in many of these cases the amount of toxins you're exposed to at one time is usually small. But toxins are very stubborn; they accumulate in your body and can add up pretty fast. It's kind of like putting a bucket under a slow leak in a faucet. Even though the leak is very slow, before long the bucket is running over.

Knowing what qualifies as a toxin

A *toxin* is any substance that your body can't use in a purposeful way or that requires energy to be removed. Even substances that your body has to have to survive can be toxic if you get too much of them. It's truly a miracle that we can expose our bodies to the vast numbers of toxins in our environment and we don't just drop over and die. But even though your body is resilient, if you push it too hard, something is bound to break. If you have a good grasp of what's out there in terms of toxins, you can more easily identify and avoid them.

Natural chemicals

People often think of toxins as manmade chemicals, but Mother Nature provides plenty of toxins, too. If you've ever brushed up against some poison ivy or been bitten by a spider, you know what I mean. The key to limiting the amount of damage that natural toxins do to your body is avoidance.

Living toxins

In addition to the natural chemicals that act as toxins, plenty of living things can have toxic effects on your health. Bacteria, for example, are all around us. Some types of bacteria are helpful, like the kinds that live in your intestines and help to digest your food, but many other types are extremely toxic and harmful. Yeasts, parasites, and viruses are other common living toxins.

Manmade chemicals

In the past 100 years, man has been really busy creating new things that are supposed to make our lives easier and better. Unfortunately, many of these things contain toxic chemicals and/or are made using some sort of toxic process. The chemical creations include pesticides, petrochemicals, and food additives, to name just a few.



In the United States today, more than 80,000 chemicals are being released into our environment, and less than 3,000 have been tested for toxic effects on humans. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) allows any chemical to be released unless scientific proof exists that it causes cancer or is toxic in some other way. We have the cart ahead of the horse when it comes to man-made chemical toxins.

Finding toxins everywhere

By now you're probably getting the picture that we're really surrounded by toxins and things that can make us toxic. But how do these toxins end up in our bodies, where they can do us harm? Here are the common routes:

✓ **Ingesting toxins orally:** It may seem crazy to stick toxins into your mouth, but we do so every day. Food is the biggest source of toxins for most people.



Processed foods today contain more than 3,000 chemicals that aren't natural. These chemicals enhance flavor and can preserve food for months, if not years. Many food preservatives can have really harmful effects on the body. Some ding up your immune system, and others cause dangerous (even deadly) allergic reactions. Throughout this book I tell you about the toxins that can lurk in your food if you're not making smart, detox diet decisions about what goes in your pantry and on your plate.

And even if toxins aren't *in* your food and water, you may have toxins *on* your food. At the top of this list are pesticides and chemical fertilizers that are meant to help grow food but end up in our bodies, assaulting our organs and tissues.

- ✓ **Inhaling toxins:** When it comes to airborne toxins, remember this: Anything you smell is getting into your body. If something has a nasty chemical smell, parts of that chemical are entering your body through your mucous membranes and lungs. Even scarier is the fact that many chemicals have no smell, so you don't know that you're breathing them in.

As I note in the previous section, about 80,000 chemicals are released into your environment, many of them in gaseous form. Obviously, the potential for inhaling toxic substances is extremely high. That gentle summer breeze may contain heavy metals, bacteria, mold, viruses, and countless chemicals.

- ✓ **Taking toxins in through your skin:** Your skin does a very good job at keeping out toxins, but it isn't perfect. Your skin is capable of absorbing chemicals that come in contact with it, and toxins are no exception.

Getting Rid of Toxins

What's the best way to get rid of toxins? Avoid them in the first place. An ounce of toxin prevention is worth far more than a pound of detoxification cure. But you can do only so much when it comes to dodging toxins. You could live in a bubble in the most pristine part of the world, and you'd still end up toxic. Lucky for you, you have a whole host of systems and natural mechanisms that will help you eliminate the toxic substances that course through your veins (and your arteries, and your tissues, and your organs . . .).

Watching your body fight toxins

Your body gets rid of toxins in a couple of key ways that I introduce in this section. The first is the elimination of toxins; you have systems in place that simply flush the bad stuff out. The second is chemical detoxification, which occurs when various parts of your body — the liver is a top example — break down toxins into simpler, less harmful materials that are usually shuttled out of the body in your waste products.



Toxin elimination

When you talk about the natural elimination of toxins from your body, your kidneys deserve center stage. Sure, some organs have a higher profile — your brain and heart come to mind — but when it comes to sorting out toxins and putting them on the first fast train out (usually into the toilet), nothing beats the kidneys. They're especially adept at clearing out water-soluble toxins.

Many fat-soluble toxins that can't be whisked away by your kidneys or broken down by your liver (more on that organ in a moment) get sequestered in your fat cells, where they become a constant source of toxicity. How do you get rid of those toxins? You sweat the small stuff. And the big stuff. And everything in between. Sweating is a remarkable detoxification technique; several different kinds of toxins can be removed from your body only through sweating. (I come back to that topic later in the chapter.)

Chemical detoxification

Chemical detoxification takes place when one of your body's parts breaks down the chemical structure of a toxin so it's no longer harmful. The process starts in your nose and mouth, where immune cells begin busting up toxic substances. The tonsils do a lot of work on toxins before they continue toward your stomach, where some of the most potent acid in the natural world goes to work on a breadth of toxins.

That brings me to the liver. Your liver is a fantastic chemical processing plant, and it can break down toxins that range from ammonia to alcohol. You don't have to read very many pages in this book before coming to a spot where I sing the praises of the liver.

Taking an active role in detoxification

Your body can take care of quite a bit of detoxification on its own, but today's elevated toxin levels demand that you give your body a hand. If you want to enjoy long-term good health, you must work hard to enhance and augment your body's detox efforts by taking these steps:

- ✓ **Choose your food wisely:** You can drastically cut down on your toxicity by making good food choices. If you can eliminate processed foods from your diet, dodge most genetically modified foods, and embrace all things organic, you'll be doing your health an enormous favor. This is important stuff, and I devote many pages of this book (including all of Chapters 6 and 7) to food and detox dieting topics.

- ✔ **Fill in the gaps with supplements:** The quality of our food has dropped dramatically in the last few decades. As if that weren't enough, your body needs even more essential nutrients than ever before if you expect it to fight off the ever-increasing amount of toxic threats that surround us all. Because of these factors, the vast majority of people — particularly people living in the United States — need to take supplements to ensure the best possible intake of vitamins, minerals, essential fatty acids, and other key nutrients. I discuss supplements throughout this book, particularly in Chapter 17.
- ✔ **Cleanse through chelation:** Heavy metals are some of the most common toxins, and they're everywhere. Lead may have been banned from paint and gasoline several years ago, but the lead that used to be added to those products is still around. Mercury is extremely prevalent as well and can be found in everything from dental fillings to fish to fluorescent light bulbs.

If you think you may be suffering from dangerously high levels of heavy metals, chelation could be a good choice for you. *Chelation* is a medical treatment that uses a medication to trap and remove heavy metals from your body's tissues. Several variations on chelation exist, which I describe in Chapter 18.
- ✔ **Use a sauna:** Sweating is an outstanding way to use your body's natural systems to flush out toxins, particularly the fat-soluble ones that contribute to obesity and continually poison us. You should be sweating every chance you get! Exercise is a great way to work up a sweat, but if you really want to sweat it out, nothing beats a sauna. I explain your sauna options and how to use them in Chapter 18.

Dieting the Detoxification Way

If you're not enjoying optimal health, or if you're struggling with obesity, you need to take a good, hard look at the many benefits of a detox diet. Changing what you eat (and how you eat it) so that you're focusing on wholesome, healthy foods and cutting out toxic ingredients is the first and most important step toward ensuring good health and maintaining a healthy weight. The principles for detox dieting are relatively simple, but the changes they require can be pretty tough. (They're not as tough, however, as living an unhealthy and obese life.)

Losing those extra, harmful pounds

Not many people make the connection between toxins and obesity, but clear, proven relationships exist that you need to understand if you want to stay at a healthy weight. Getting on (and sticking with) a detox diet will go a long

way toward minimizing your toxicity. And if you can make detox dieting a part of your life *for life*, you'll lose the extra, harmful pounds that weigh you down and damage your health.

Body fat is toxic!

You don't run into many people who are fond of fat, and for good reason. In addition to being unattractive in the eyes of many people, fat is also a storehouse for toxins in your body. Fat-soluble toxins are tucked away in fat cells to prevent them from harming your organs and other vital tissues, and when the toxins are more concentrated, the fat cells get bigger in an effort to keep them diluted. If you can avoid toxins and detoxify the toxins you're already carrying around with you, shedding fat becomes much easier.

Body fat stresses your body's systems

For every pound of fat your body makes, it has to make about 4 miles of blood vessels. Carrying 25 extra pounds of fat means your heart has to pump blood through another 100 miles of vessels. As you can imagine, that's not good news for the most important muscle in your body, and it's just the beginning. Fat wreaks havoc on your joints, contributes to diabetes, and causes too many other conditions to list here. Lose the toxins, lose the unhealthy foods from your diet, and you'll lose the fat. And then your health will flourish. See Chapter 9 for all the details on making detox dieting part of your daily life.

Tackling unhealthy habits

Choosing the right toxin-free foods and ensuring that your eating habits are as healthy as possible will do more than just help you to eliminate excess fat. Giving your body the healthy fuel that it needs can also be a critical factor in helping to kick unhealthy habits like drinking and smoking. What's more, if you really embrace detox dieting, you can greatly enhance the recovery and healing process that takes place after you've put down the bottle and snuffed out your last cigarette. Pair those dietary choices with some more detoxification efforts — saunas, for instance — and you can go from an unhealthy smoker or drinker to a healthy, detoxified person in a fraction of the time.

If you're a smoker (or former smoker), be sure to check out Chapter 14. For information about using detox methods to fight alcohol abuse, see Chapter 15.

