



No need to 'detox' with special diet

Every once in a while I hear someone mention that they have either fasted or gone on a restricted diet to "detox" — and, of course, to lose a lot of weight relatively quickly. Is this a good practice? Is it safe?

You're right to be skeptical. Any diet that promises a quick fix, encourages a severe restriction of calories, advises you to eat only certain foods or requires that foods be eaten only in specific combinations screams "fad diet."

Detox diets claim to "detoxify" the body, allowing toxins and contaminants that have accumulated over time to flush out. You can find many versions of the detox diet, but they usually start with a very low calorie fast followed by drinking juice and eating small amounts of fresh produce. Many detox diets recommend an enema or some other type of physical cleansing of the colon.

Here's the thing: The body already has some perfectly good systems in place to detoxify the body. They're called the liver, the kidneys and the colon. Although supporters of detox diets disagree, there's no evidence to support the idea that those systems need a substantial restriction of food and calories to help them remove harmful substances from the body.

Some people claim the detox diet helps them feel healthier and

more energetic, but there could be several explanations for this. For example, their normal diet might be heavy in saturated fats, refined grains and heavily processed foods. Taking a break from those foods would certainly make your body feel different. Eating fruits and vegetables after severely restricting food intake for an extended period might also make someone feel better.

But putting yourself on any very low calorie diet has its downsides. One is that you may lose muscle, which would cause your metabolism to dip and make it easier to gain weight. The only way to build that muscle back would be to start a regimen of weight-bearing exercise — not a bad thing in and of itself, but probably not the result you were hoping for.

Instead of detox or other fad diets, nutritionists recommend eating a balanced diet centered on lean proteins, vegetables and whole fruits, whole grains, and a modest amount of healthy (unsaturated) fats. Also, don't skip meals, especially breakfast, and limit portions to a sensible size. Finally, if you are thinking of making drastic changes to your diet, it's always a good idea to talk with your doctor first.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University's College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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