

# Natural Ways to Cleanse Body & Mind

## Take Toxins Out of Your Life

by Meredith Montgomery

**T**he term “detox” has been gaining traction in health circles, but cleansing practices have existed for millennia, ranging from Egyptian hydrotherapy to Medieval Lenten practices and Native American fasting, smudging and sweat lodges. The truth is that we need cleansing now more than ever—to rid our bodies of chemical overload and our minds of negative thinking.

The Environmental Defense Fund has counted more than 100 chemicals produced in the U.S. that are present in everyday products and hazardous to humans and the environment. “Our body is a natural detoxifier, ridding itself of toxins through pooping, peeing, sweating and shedding skin. But in our current toxic overload situation, it’s not always an efficient process,” observes Deanna Minich, Ph.D., an author and functional nutritionist in Washington state.

Some experts believe many commercial detoxification programs are unsafe, extreme and ineffective.

“Psychologically, a short-term cleanse can act as a stepping stone if you’re eating fast food and donuts every day,” says Dr. Michael Greger, a Washington, D.C., physician specializing in clinical nutrition and author of *How Not to Die*. “What matters more is long-term—what you’re eating a decade from now. No quick fix is going to do it, it’s a lifestyle change.”

### Feed Your Microbiome

When the microbiome becomes depleted, overall health is affected. Dr. Robynne Chutkan, a gastroenterologist at Georgetown University Hospital, founder of the Digestive Center for Wellness, in Washington, D.C., and author of *Gutbliss* and *The Microbiome Solution*, explains, “The GI tract is the body’s engine, and microbes are the worker bees that operate the machinery so that digestion and toxin removal can happen.”

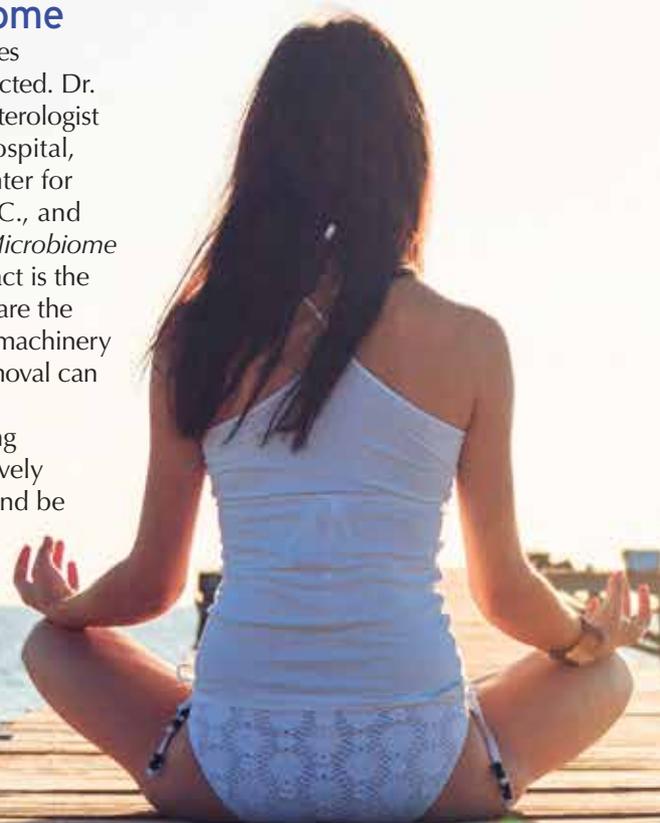
She recommends switching to a plant-filled diet to effectively repopulate the microbiome and be

aware of how food is grown. “Much store-bought produce, even organic options, is grown in depleted soil. Seek out biodynamic farmers that prioritize nutrient-rich soil to foster microbes,” Chutkan says. Even planting a couple of herbs or microgreens on the kitchen windowsill can make a difference. “Just picking those herbs and getting your hands in healthy dirt increases your exposure to health-promoting microbes.”

### Get Dirty

“Health and wealth have become associated with cleanliness, yet the opposite is probably true,” assesses Chutkan. “Kids come in from the playground to use hand sanitizers and eat processed snacks. Instead, discard the microbiome-disrupting sanitizer and provide fresh vegetables for them to eat outside. We don’t want kids exposed to any serious pathogens, but getting a little dirty is essential.”

Studies have found that children with pets are more likely to have fewer allergies and infections and take fewer antibiotics than those living in pet-free households (*Clinical & Experimental*



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**We're all exposed to toxins, but if our inner terrain is healthy, our body can flush them out, so we won't get sick.**

~ROBYNNE CHUTKAN

Allergy and Kuopio University Hospital, Finland). Pets that venture outdoors bring healthy microbes inside; so does fresh air, which purifies poorer quality indoor air.

Chutkan also warns of excessive bathing. "When we scrub ourselves, we rub off microbes and naturally occurring oils; unless we're filthy, we just need to gently rinse." Marketers convince consumers that products with toxic ingredients are necessities, but coconut oil, apple cider vinegar and honey can effectively replace many toiletries.

## Burn Fat Cells

According to ayurveda, burning fat fuels detoxification because toxins from preservatives, pollutants, pesticides and other damaging chemicals are stored in our fat cells. When fat is metabolized and used as an energy source, the toxins are released, ready to be flushed out.

"When we're not burning fat, toxins can accumulate, cause congestion in the lymphatic channels, overwhelm the liver and ultimately be deposited back into fat cells or stored in the arteries, heart and brain," comments Certified Ayurvedic Practitioner Dr. John Douillard, of Boulder, Colorado. He's the author of *Eat Wheat* and a former director of player development and nutrition advisor for the New Jersey Nets professional basketball team.

## Reboot with a Quick Cleanse

To stimulate the body's natural ability to burn fat, Douillard recommends a four-day, at-home detox cleanse. "The digestive system is responsible for delivering nutrients and escorting dangerous toxins out of your body; if you can't digest well, you can't detoxify well," he says.

Unlike drastic fasts and juice cleanses, which can deplete nutrients, he recommends stimulating fat metabolism with a cleanse that starts each morning with melted ghee followed by a simple nonfat diet throughout the day. According to research published in *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*, ghee, a clarified butter, has been proven to remove environmental toxins by attaching to toxic fats. Kitchari, the staple of the meal plan, is a nourishing and easy-to-digest, porridge-like blend of beans, rice and Indian spices.

"When you eat a mono diet of just kitchari, your body can transfer the energy that normally goes toward digestion into cleansing and healing other systems," says Douillard. For those not ready to maintain such a limited diet, he recommends a polydiet with the option to add seasonal steamed vegetables, oatmeal and other gluten-free grains.

## Few Snacks, More Water

Work toward eating three meals a day—a light breakfast, big lunch and light and early dinner—without snacking in-between, and fasting for 13 hours each night. Douillard notes, "This regimen should be maintained beyond the cleanse because it gives the body a chance to use up its carbohydrates—its normal, go-to fuel—and switch to its calmer, more stable, detoxifying fuel—body fat."

## 5 WAYS TO DETOX EVERY DAY

by Meredith Montgomery

"As soon as we start eating healthier diets, our body is able to detoxify more efficiently and diseases begin to be reversed," says Dr. Michael Greger, a physician and creator of *NutritionFacts.org*. Follow these tips to enhance the detoxification process at mealtimes.

**1 Eat broccoli and other cruciferous vegetables** raw or chop them at least 40 minutes before cooking to maximize intake of the phytonutrient sulforaphane, which boosts detoxifying enzymes in the liver. For the time-crunched, Greger suggests adding a small amount of any type of raw cruciferous vegetables to the cooked ones.

**2 Always choose colorful produce**, with the exception of white mushrooms and cauliflower. "White foods are stripped of nutrition," says Greger. Pigment indicates the richness of antioxidants that keep the body functioning efficiently. He likes adding shreds of economical and long-lasting red cabbage as an everyday garnish.

**3 Follow the seasons**, because nature provides the ideal harvest for each season—heavier, denser foods in winter, like wheat, dairy, roots, nuts and seeds; and cooling, high-energy fruits and vegetables in summer. Dr. John Douillard, creator of the 3-Season Diet Challenge, remarks that research suggests that gut microbes are meant to change with local seasonal foods to optimize digestion, mood and immunity.

**4 Avoid plastics** by limiting intake of foods stored or cooked in plastic, especially cling wrap, which is made of polyvinyl chloride (PVC), a known carcinogen, according to the World Health Organization International Agency for Research on Cancer. Also avoid canned goods unless labeled bisphenol A (BPA)-free. "A lot of toxins enter our bodies through processed, overcooked and fried foods," observes Deanna Minich, Ph.D. "As we replace these foods with nourishing options, we need to also minimize plastic packaging."

**5 Filter water** because, "We are primarily made of water, so if we're drinking and bathing in contaminated water, it impacts health," says Minich who recommends using a national testing laboratory to assess home tap water. The results can then be coupled with the Environmental Working Group's buying guide ([Tinyurl.com/EWG-Buying-Guide](http://Tinyurl.com/EWG-Buying-Guide)) to determine the most appropriate water filter to deal with the contaminants that may be present.

Adapt the cleanse to avoid strain, because when under stress, the lymphatic system shuts down and the body stores fat and toxins. “If three meals a day with no snacks is not possible yet, have a nonfat high-protein snack and plan to eat more protein at your next meal,” suggests Douillard. “Or start with four meals, and work your way down to three.”

Aim to drink half your healthiest body weight in ounces of room-temperature water every day, while also sipping warm-to-hot water—believed to soften the intestinal tract, move the lymph and hydrate the cells more effectively than cold water—every 10 to 15 minutes for two weeks. Plain water has a hydrating effect that not even lemon water can replicate.

## Emotional Release

“Toxins are best understood less as poisons than as barriers—obstacles to the life and health we truly want,” says Minich. As a functional medicine nutritionist, she believes that food as medicine is only one aspect of full-spectrum health. Her approach revolves around clusters of nutritional, anatomical, psychological and spiritual life issues that can be jointly detoxified, supported and healed.

“Good eating alone will not necessarily solve our emotional woes or stop our limiting beliefs and toxic self-talk,” she explains in *Whole Detox*, a book based on a whole-life, whole-systems, whole-foods approach to detoxification. “We need to remove all the barriers that impede our growth. Limiting thoughts, as well as heavy metals and pesticides, are toxic barriers that weigh us down, sapping energy that might be used for better things.”

Her 21-day program is designed to establish long-term lifestyle changes with simple habits. She recommends monitoring

our emotions and tracking thoughts with daily writing exercises. “Look at yourself like you’re examining a food label to get to the root of limiting patterns,” she says, encouraging questions such as, “Is this thought healthy for me?” or, “Do I want this thought in my being?” Be mindful of speech as well; swearing, exaggerating and interrupting can have deleterious effects, while uplifting affirmations can inspire positive actions.

She attests that visualization can help prevent the creative self from shutting down, another aspect of toxicity. “Be intuitive and imaginative; allow creative expression to flow. Before you can manifest what you want in life, you have to envision it.” Minich wants patients to invite introspection by taking a few minutes each day to be in solitude and silence, allowing meaning and purpose to surface.

Daily stress relief practices such as meditation, yoga, self-massage and mindful breathing can foster stress reduction. “Life shouldn’t feel like an emergency. We need to navigate around stress so we’re not inundated by it,” counsels Douillard.

By extracting toxins through sweat and circulating nutrients, physical activity is equally important for detoxification, but it’s also a form of self-love. “It expands your sense of possibilities, freeing you to go where you will and to carry burdens lightly,” Minich says.

In this age of personalized medicine, Minich encourages patients to focus on the parts of a detox program that they need most, whether it’s diet, exercise, massage, emotional well-being or spirituality. She reminds us that the desire and need to cleanse is universal. “Detox is as old as humankind.”

*Meredith Montgomery publishes Natural Awakenings of Gulf Coast Alabama/Mississippi (HealthyLivingHealthyPlanet.com).*