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A hand holding a green apple in a white lab coat. The background is a white lab coat with a stethoscope and a blue pen visible. The apple is the central focus, held gently in the palm of a hand. The overall image conveys a sense of health and natural medicine.

Cleaning House

By Melissa Brazier

Feeling Better From the Inside Out

Green definitely is the new black. And I don't mean just in terms of fashion. Alternative health therapy has become a large industry based on promises of renewing the body's health, vitality and energy. In light of recent naturopathic and organic trends, one topic of debate has been body detoxification and cleansing. However, with so many products on the market for detoxing at home, it's difficult to know what exactly is safe and effective.

I spoke with two certified naturopathic doctors, Dr. Valerie Franc and Dr. Melina Roberts, to get to the bottom of this hot topic.

What is it?

It all begins with 'toxins.' Dr. Melina says, "All man-made materials that the body cannot recognize are collectively called toxins and can interfere with the function of the body. 'Detox' refers to removing these toxins from the body to allow it to function at its optimal capacity." Dr. Valerie uses the very colourful example of the liver as a bath tub. Imagine you take baths in your tub for X amount of years, depending on your age, without cleaning it. She points out that, "Even though you're putting in clean water, clean food, healthy lifestyle, inside of the bath tub the ring gets so grimy that you're just not getting clean." Gross, eh? That was my reaction too.

What to do first

The varieties of detoxing at home are vast and can be daunting. Both doctors agree it's important to ensure that you a) consult a healthcare professional beforehand, and b) make sure the detox is the right one for your goals and body.

1. **Dry skin brushing** using a loofah at night. Moving in light circular motions from the extremities towards the heart can stimulate the lymphatic system. Dr. Melina says this is beneficial because, "At night when changing acid/base balance in the tissues, acids move from the tissues to the blood stream to be eliminated in the morning via the lymphatic system."

2. **Castor oil packs.** This helps with lymphatic and immune systems. One way of doing this is to place a piece of cotton flannel with castor oil over your abs, cover it with a towel and place a hot water bottle on top.

3. **Fresh squeezed lemon** with warm water in the morning. This can help kick the liver into action.

4. **Epsom or sea salt bath** to draw toxins out of the body via skin.

5. **Sauna Detox.** Dr. Val says, "What's really important if you're going to use a sauna is that you make sure you are replenishing your electrolytes. When you sweat, you're losing a lot of the good minerals such as calcium, magnesium, potassium, sodium etc. You don't want to throw off those balances." Now, this doesn't mean chugging Gatorade. She suggests using a natural electrolyte drink that is pre-made.

6. **Clean and healthy diet.** Dr. Melina suggests, "Decrease exposure to toxins by eating natural, unprocessed, chemical-free foods that are organically grown whenever possible. Eliminating simple sugars, alcohol, caffeine, additives and preservatives in your diet will automatically lessen the burden on the liver. Drink clean water. Water filled with chlorine and fluoride slows a person's metabolism and blocks the absorption of nutrients. Water is instrumental in flushing and nourishing the body as well as keeping it hydrated and pH balanced. Water also helps to support kidney function."

7. **Having apple cider vinegar** (before meals) and probiotics on a regular basis can aid in proper digestion.

8. **Various exercises** such as yoga, deep breathing and even rebounding (jumping on a mini tramp) can help cleanse certain organ systems.

9. **Juice or water fast.** Dr. Val warns this is not for the beginner. When you fast, be sure you are nutritionally supported, keeping up your proteins and other essential vitamins.

**And the list goes on...
Find a naturopath near
you at www.cand.ca**

Cautions and Warnings

If you are pregnant/nursing or have chronic disease, a detox is not for you. Also, children should not be partaking in intense detoxifications. If you have low blood pressure, are on any medications, or are generally not feeling up to snuff, be sure to consult with a health professional before embarking on an at home detox.

Dr. Val also says that around day two or three, you will most likely experience what's called a 'healing crisis' that will last for a couple of days if you are healthy or up to a week if you're extremely toxic. It's basically feeling worse before better, and can include headaches, muscle aches and pains, joint pain, fatigue and irritability.

You should also maintain regular bowel movements. It's not actually a detox unless you're having a minimum of one bowel movement per day. Dr. Melina says this is because "all of the toxins that have been mobilized from the tissues to be eliminated through the digestive tract, simply get reabsorbed again, instead of effectively eliminated. This can be dangerous to an individual."

Why Detox?

Detoxing should be done between 2-4 times annually and has many benefits. Other than better overall health, it can also help with things such as allergies, asthma, ADD/ADHD, memory, concentration, focus, chronic fatigue and menstrual problems such as cramps, PMS and menopause. Dr. Val says that, post detox, "You will get this feeling of energy, clarity and only what I can describe as a lightness." ☺