



Detox and Cleanses

Amanda Thul, RD, LD

We have enjoyed our candies, cookies, and other holiday goodies and many feel the need for a “reset” for the new year. You may be tempted to reach for one of the many cleanse products and start a detoxification regimen but I urge you to please read this first!

There are a large variety of diet cleanses out there. The goals of these products and programs are to get rid of built-up toxins, improve energy, and drop weight fast. They usually involve a period of fasting or removing certain foods and following a regimen of supplements or cleansing juices/teas/drinks.

Are these products effective? There is not conclusive medical evidence showing the benefit of diet cleanses. You may see some immediate benefit but it's not long lasting. There usually is some weight loss however it's normally water, carbohydrate stores, and stool. Any weight loss is regained quickly. As far as removing toxins from your body-the programs are vague on what exact toxins they're aimed to remove and if this actually happens.

Potential benefits of a cleanse:

- Increasing fruit and vegetables with some programs.
- You may identify some foods that do cause GI discomfort and feel better when not eating them on a regular basis.

You do need to weigh those benefits against the significant amount of potential harmful effects:

- Supplements/pills part of a cleansing program are NOT regulated by the FDA and can contain hidden harmful or illegal ingredients. These may also interact with medications you're taking.
- 2 common ingredients in cleanse products are diuretics or laxatives that cause increased urination and bowel movements. This can lead to GI discomfort, nausea, dehydration and malabsorption of nutrients.
- Some smoothie and juicing cleanses have even been linked to kidney failure.
- Irritability and lack of energy when following a very low-calorie cleanse.
- Detoxes are usually very low in protein and healthy fats.
- Cost of these products need to be considered

Here's the upside. Our bodies are amazing and already do the detox work for us! Our liver, kidneys, and GI tract break down toxins and eliminate them through our stool and urine. There are some things you can do to help your body with the natural detox process.

1. Increase your fiber through fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Fiber slows digestion and helps to remove waste products through our stool.

2. Increase your water intake (especially if you're increasing your fiber!). One way to tell if you're drinking enough is to keep track of the color of your urine. Aim for "clear pee by 3." By mid-afternoon, your urine should be light lemonade color. That's a sign that you're drinking enough water to help your kidneys flush the waste out of your system.

Replacing other beverages during the day with water and grabbing more fruits/veggies/whole grains instead of ultra-processed foods will give your body the "fresh start" feeling you're craving. Whether you decide to start that cleanse or not, do what you think is best for your overall health and safest for you. Here's to a healthy 2021!