

The Easy Spring Detox Anyone Can Do

by Dr. Stacie J. Stephenson


Detoxes and cleanses are everywhere these days. It seems like every time I go online, I see some kind of juice fast or smoothie cleanse or detox supplement advertised. One of the questions people often ask me is: "Do I need to detox?" Now that it's spring-cleaning season and people are clearing out and cleansing their homes after a long winter, let's talk about whether you should also be doing this for your body.

The fact is that the body already has a complex and very effective detoxification system inside of it, and it's working all the time to get rid of the garbage—medications, chemicals, alcohol, hormones, and anything else that goes into your body that isn't food. Your body has to figure out what to do with these things. If it didn't, people wouldn't be able to drink alcohol or take medications. Your body's detoxification process is an intricate, multi-stage event involving your digestive tract, blood, liver, kidneys, lymphatic system, and even your lungs. It's actually quite impressive. But if we've always had bodies that do all this work, why are we suddenly (in the scope of human history) so concerned with detoxification?

The reason is that we are all under an ever-increasing toxic load. Even 20 or 30 years ago, the exposures we all experienced were far less than they are today. There is lot more garbage coming into our bodies than ever before—food processing ingredients, agricultural chemicals in food and water, pollutants in the air, residue from plastics, off-gassing from artificial materials in our homes and workplaces, over-the-counter and prescription drugs (not to mention illegal drugs), and more. No matter where you live, no matter what you do, you can't avoid all toxic exposure. Even babies are born with pollutants in their cord blood.

But all is not lost. While you can't eliminate all toxic exposures, and while your body does a pretty good job of getting a lot of this detritus out of your system, at this level of toxic exposure, your body can use some help. You can intervene in ways that support what your body does naturally.

That's not to say I recommend water fasting or even juice fasting, or extreme cleanses. I do *not*. I believe the best way to support your body's natural detoxification system is through food, not the lack of it. In fact, starving yourself can actually concentrate toxins, making them more dangerous for you. When you want to cleanse, don't *not eat*. Instead, here are five simple things you can do this spring to support your health, reduce your toxic load, and feel more energetic, lighter, and cleaner.



1. Reduce your exposure. Look around your home, your office—wherever you spend most of your time—and see what chemical exposures you can control. You can replace chemical cleaning products, like cleaning sprays, floor cleaners, air fresheners, and laundry detergent, with natural cleaning products. Use natural materials for furniture, floors, and fabrics, and low VOC paint. Swap out your personal hygiene products, from soap to shampoo to hand lotion to face cream, with those that contain plant ingredients rather than chemicals (just read the label).

2. Get a green thumb. To further improve your indoor air quality, bring indoor plants into your home and workplace. While there is some controversy about how well plants themselves actually purify the air, the microbes in the roots and the soil seem to do a lot of the work, so be sure your ferns, flowers, ivies, palms, and other greenery are growing in actual dirt (as opposed to cut flowers, although these do have a mood-brightening effect, which should not be underestimated, in my professional opinion!).

3. Clean out your fridge. Now let's turn to the obvious: What you're eating. Fresh, organic, whole foods are the best foods for supporting your body's detoxification processes, so focus on lots of veggies, fruit, nuts and seeds, fresh spices, wild-caught fish, and if you eat grain, stick to whole, intact, ancient grains like brown rice and quinoa. (I don't generally recommend grains for most people, but that's the subject of another article.) Yes, organic does matter, and is getting more affordable. Also, cruciferous vegetables in particular (like broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and kale) contain detoxifying phytochemicals, so be sure to get some cruciferous veggies into your diet every day this spring.

4. Get or stay regular. To be frank, the primary way toxins leave your body is in the bathroom. Being regular means having at least one bowel movement per day. If you aren't doing that, then it's especially important not to try any cleanse or detox programs. You don't want to be ferreting out toxins, then letting them just sit in your colon, where they can be reabsorbed back into your bloodstream. That's bad news! To repeat: ***Don't do any detox or cleanse programs if you are constipated.*** This is job one. Note that if you are eating more whole foods containing fiber, this can help with regularity, but if things still aren't moving, try taking a magnesium citrate supplement at night.

5. Try yoga. Many yoga poses, especially forward bends and twists, can help with regularity as well as organ function. You are literally squeezing those organs, which can stimulate them to work better. Yoga has many other benefits, including a clearer mind and calmer mood, so you could say it detoxifies your brain as well as giving your digestive system a nudge.

The bottom line, when it comes to detoxification, is that you are only supporting what your body does naturally, but there are plenty of things you can do to help your body along. Now that spring is here, it's the perfect time to refresh your outer and inner environments.