5 tips for a successful detox

Maintaining your digestive health

Natasha Turner, ND

Watch late-night television and you’ll notice several commercial breaks featuring ads promising relief for digestive woes. Over 20 million Canadians are affected by digestive disorders; tummy troubles cost about $8 billion a year.
Should this really surprise us? We’re overstressed, overstuffed, and undernourished. No wonder our digestive systems are mounting a major protest, rebelling with symptoms that drive many of us to seek out digestive-cleansing products for help.

Others, however, may look to detox products to kick-start weight loss. Good choice, although digestive health and detoxification are commonly overlooked aspects of a safe fat-loss program.

**INS AND OUTS OF DIGESTION**

On a very basic level, the digestive system is responsible for food breakdown, nutrient absorption, and elimination of waste. When our bowels are not moving properly, waste builds up in our body, creating toxicity and hampering our overall health.

Liver function, bile secretion, bacterial balance, and regular bowel movements are essential to ridding the body of toxins, especially excess estrogen, which can increase cancer risks.

While few of us enjoy thinking about the end results of digestion, the frequency and quality of our bowel movements can provide insight into our digestive health and our detox needs. Take this quick quiz.

**DO YOU HAVE**

- less than one bowel movement a day?
- mucus in or on your stool?
- narrow stools?
- a tendency toward loose stools or diarrhea?
- stinky stools?
- excessive gas?
- abdominal bloating?
- heartburn, indigestion, or reflux?
- recurring nausea?
- abdominal pain or cramping?
- undigested food in your stools (besides corn)?

If you selected yes to just one of these symptoms, your digestive system most likely needs some work.

**Herbs that detoxify**

**Dandelion Leaf**

Dandelion leaf is a diuretic that gently stimulates kidney function without depleting the body of potassium. It is effective as a tea or tincture and can be safely consumed in frequent doses.

**Burdock**

The leaf, root, and seeds of burdock can increase lymphatic, kidney, and liver function. Its bitter action stimulates bile secretion to aid digestion.

**Stinging Nettle**

Stinging nettle is often used as a spring tonic and general detoxifier to strengthen and support all organ systems. The leaves are high in chlorophyll, calcium, magnesium, and dietary fibre.

**Milk Thistle**

Many herbal cleansing and detoxification formulas contain milk thistle. The seed extract is used for a wide range of liver and gallbladder conditions, including increasing bile flow to help remove toxins from the body.

**THE 5 Rs OF DETOX RELIEF**

1. **Reduce**
   Food intolerances can arise when we consume the same foods day after day with little variety. Heartburn, headaches, looking tired even after sufficient sleep, an inability to lose weight, bloating,
and water retention can all be related to the inflammation caused by an underlying food sensitivity or intolerance.

An estimated 60 percent of people suffer from food sensitivities, and though food intolerances may occur with any food, the most common are dairy products, soy, eggs, citrus fruits, nuts, wheat, and gluten. Remove these foods from the diet and slowly reintroduce them after a detox, so you can connect symptoms with food choices.

2. Replace
Sufficient stomach acid, enzymes, and bile secretion are essential to prevent bloating and to aid digestion and absorption of food. If you typically wake with a flat stomach but look or feel like you are five months pregnant by the end of the day, taking digestive enzymes with your meals may reduce these uncomfortable symptoms.

3. Restore
We now know that live microorganisms in the gut are cancer-protective, immune-enhancing, and anti-inflammatory. Most digestive symptoms, including diarrhea, constipation, irritable bowel, and even food poisoning, can be improved by taking probiotics.

Recent research discovered increased fat storage capability in rats that lacked probiotics. Intestinal flora seems to limit fat storage by repressing the expression of a protein called fasting-induced adipose factor.

4. Repair
A prolonged imbalance of any one of the first three Rs may result in irritation of the digestive tract wall. This can cause tiny holes that can allow partially digested material, toxins, or bacteria to pass through.

This problem, also known as leaky gut syndrome, can cause symptoms of digestive upset, gas, bloating, pain, toxic weight gain, weakened immunity, and allergic symptoms. Several supplements can help repair a damaged digestive tract wall, including glutamine, deglycyrrhized licorice (DGL), aloe vera, plantain, and marshmallow.

5. Relieve
Ongoing stress sensitizes our gut and contributes to inflammation, leading to more food allergies. So be kind to yourself during your detox: have a massage, practise deep belly breathing, and consider adding supplements of 5-hydroxytryptophan (5-HTP) if stress or anxiety are particularly troublesome.

Together these critical steps will ensure gentle body cleansing through ideal bowel function, maximal nutrient absorption, and inflammation protection. Many other positive benefits can be expected from your detox efforts, such as more energy, glowing skin, stronger mental focus, less joint pain and stiffness, and safe weight loss.

Ultimately, you can take comfort in knowing that these simple detox suggestions can help to solve just about any digestive debacle for good.

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