Liver & kidney cleansing

A simple approach

Zoltan P. Rona, MD, MSc

People talk about liver and kidney cleansing in ways that conjure up pictures of driving to something like a carwash, attaching the liver and kidneys to a washing machine, and happily picking them up “cleansed” after a quick and powerful scrub. Unfortunately, liver and kidney cleansing isn’t that easy.

Dozens of different liver cleansing programs are available. Despite the range of options, they all boil down to basic diet changes and some health-enhancing supplements. More radical cleanses, such as coffee enemas; master cleanses using cayenne pepper, lemon juice, and maple syrup; and liver flushes using olive oil and Epsom salts are definitely not recommended, because they could land people in hospital emergency rooms. Instead of these extreme cleanses, take a simple approach.

LIVER CLEANSING

Let’s start with the liver. From a medical standpoint, a liver that requires cleansing might reveal itself through a collection of blood tests collectively called “liver function tests.” An ultrasound of the liver could show one of two largely asymptomatic liver problems: benign tumours, afflicting one in 10 Canadians; or a condition called nonalcoholic fatty-liver disease (NAFLD), afflicting three out of every eight Canadians. More general indicators may also suggest a liver cleanse would be beneficial (see sidebar).

To flush the liver, avoid animal products and eat mainly high-fibre fruits, vegetables, seeds, nuts, and legumes (see sidebar). Drink 6 to 12 cups (1.5 to 3 L) of filtered or healthy spring water daily because it helps flush out toxins. Avoid saturated fats, refined sugar, and alcohol. Enjoy vegetable juices such as beets, celery, and carrots, but do not focus the diet solely on these juices, as not everyone will find a juice-based cleanse to be convenient. If possible, make use of the far infrared sauna every two or three days to safely remove stored toxins from the body.

KIDNEY CLEANSING

When indicators suggest a kidney cleanse is in order, the most important thing to do is to drink adequate amounts of water (8 cups or 2 L of filtered or healthy spring water daily) to flush out unwanted waste and improve circulation to the organ.
RAW FOODS TO SUPPORT LIVER CLEANSING
- apples
- beets
- broccoli
- brown rice
- Brussels sprouts
- cabbage
- caraway seeds
- carrots
- dandelion
- oat bran
- onions
- spinach
- tomatoes
- walnuts
- herbs and spices such as turmeric, cinnamon, and licorice

SIGNS A LIVER CLEANSE IS NEEDED
- overweight or suffering from obesity
- chronic fatigue or just feeling out of sorts
- diabetes or hypoglycemia (low blood sugar)
- nausea or other chronic digestive symptoms
- gallstones
- hepatitis
- thyroid condition

Follow a low-protein diet as much as possible, especially avoiding animal protein of any kind, including milk, dairy products, eggs, poultry, fish, and seafood, as these foods are high in phosphorus and encourage calcium deposition. Also avoid rhubarb, chocolate, and all caffeinated products, as these foods increase calcium oxalate or uric acid in the kidneys and could elicit a kidney stone attack in susceptible people.

Also enjoy cranberry, pomegranate, and blueberry juices, which enhance kidney function, and supplement with essential nutrients (see sidebar).

GUIDELINES FOR ANY CLEANSE
Most healthy people can follow these cleansing guidelines for a period of two or three weeks. Those with more serious health issues, such as cancer, diabetes, or congestive heart failure, should check with their natural health care practitioner before beginning a cleanse, as the herbs and diet involved could negate prescribed medications.
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### SUPPLEMENTS

Supplementation to support any detoxification program

One or more of the following nutrients can also be used in any detoxification program:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEGEND</th>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Dosage</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>silymarin (milk thistle extract)</td>
<td>500 mg daily</td>
<td>relieves congestion of the liver, spleen, and kidneys</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B-complex (must contain folic acid and vitamin B₁₂)</td>
<td>50 mg, three times daily</td>
<td>helps to metabolize proteins, fats, and carbohydrates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>vitamin C</td>
<td>1,000 mg, three times daily</td>
<td>helps to metabolize fats; those who have kidney problems should check with a health care practitioner before taking vitamin C supplements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>alpha-lipoic acid</td>
<td>300 mg, three times daily</td>
<td>attacks free radicals (waste products created when the body turns food into energy) and relieves stress on the liver</td>
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<td>coenzyme Q₁₀</td>
<td>100 mg, three times daily or more</td>
<td>neutralizes free radicals and helps to reduce cholesterol</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>curcumin</td>
<td>500 mg, three times daily</td>
<td>stimulates production of bile and facilitates emptying of the gallbladder</td>
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<td>L-taurine</td>
<td>500 mg, three times daily</td>
<td>prevents or breaks down gallstones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>dandelion tea</td>
<td>2 cups [500 mL] or more daily</td>
<td>increases bile flow</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>burdock tea</td>
<td>2 cups [500 mL] or more daily</td>
<td>removes accumulated waste products via the kidneys, skin, and mucous membranes</td>
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<td>schisandra tea</td>
<td>2 cups [500 mL] daily</td>
<td>relieves symptoms of hepatitis and protects the liver</td>
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FOODS TO SUPPORT ANY CLEANSING PROGRAM

SIGNS A KIDNEY CLEANSE IS NEEDED

- kidney stones
- water retention or edema
- recurrent bladder or kidney infections
- frequent use of prescription or over-the-counter analgesics, especially acetaminophen
- type 2 diabetes
- algae products such as spirulina, chlorella, and blue green algae
- bananas
- celery
- cucumbers
- legumes and seeds

FOODS TO OPTIMIZE KIDNEY HEALTH

- papaya
- parsley
- potatoes
- pumpkin
- sprouts
- watercress
- watermelon

“Three out of every eight Canadians have nonalcoholic fatty-liver disease.”

There are really no good tests to see if a liver or kidney flush is complete, but most people can tell it’s time to stop by the way they feel. Symptoms such as fatigue, headaches, abdominal discomforts, and skin problems should all be improved. Headaches and weakness may be early signs of detoxification and are not a reason to stop any cleanse. A cleanse should be stopped if more serious symptoms occur, such as vomiting, fever, or severe abdominal pain.

Both liver and kidney cleanses can be optimized by avoiding food allergens. Ask your natural health care practitioner about conducting food allergy testing before starting any specific dietary regime.

Zoltan P. Rona, MD, MSc, is the author of several books, including Return to the Joy of Health (alive Books, 1995) and Natural Alternatives to Vaccinations (alive Books, 2000). mydoctor.ca/drzoltanrona

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