Many of our modern illnesses derive from consuming high-calorie, non-nutritious food, sedentary lifestyle, environmental pollution – all contributing to congestion and accumulation of unnecessary wastes. We can avoid some of these problems by choices we make, but others such as the chemicals in our air, water and food, cannot always be avoided. Hence the need for detoxification – a cleansing of the internal environment, especially the gastrointestinal tract (GI tract).

Elson Haas, MD is a pioneer in the Western concept of “cleansing” and brings his many decades of experience to readers in The New Detox Diet, beginning with a lengthy discourse on Gastrointestinal Health. He makes the function and ecology of the GI tract easily understood, emphasizing adequate chewing and regular elimination, even a discussion of how the GI tract is especially sensitive to emotional turmoil.

The author lists the allopathic medical tests such as the barium enema, gastroscopy, colonoscopy and sigmoidoscopy, as well as the newer Functional GI tests: CDSA – Comprehensive Digestive Stool Analysis, Parasite Study, Intestinal Permeability. These latter tests give more specific information for a better diagnosis.

Common toxicity symptoms include headache, fatigue, congestion, backaches, aching or swollen joints, digestive problems, “allergy” symptoms, and sensitivity to environmental agents such as chemicals and synthetics. Over-the-counter and prescription drugs will make these problems worse – only by ridding the body of these toxic elements can we regain our health.

Detoxification and cleansing can contribute to the healing of many acute and chronic illnesses, and the many addictions in our society (smoking, alcohol, sugar, caffeine, etc.) It’s also important in treating obesity: “Many of the toxins we ingest or make are stored in the fatty tissues; hence obesity is almost always associated with toxicity.” Detoxification always requires dietary and lifestyle changes that reduce the intake of toxins while improving elimination. Dr. Haas offers a variety of detox diets, raw foods diet, liquid cleanses and fasts, with detailed guidelines for the uninitiated.

The basic Detox Diet is essentially an acid-alkaline balancer of the biological terrain. However, in The New Detox Diet, there are extensive chapters on the following special detox diets:
- Fasting and Juice Cleansing
- Transitional Diets
- Sugar Detoxification
- Nicotine Detoxification
- Alcohol Detoxification
- Caffeine Detoxification
- Drug Detoxification
- Supplements for Detoxification

The Detox Diet Recipes include Breakfast, Lunch and Dinners, and Soups and Salads. These recipes require cooking – whole grains and vegetables are main ingredients. This is the real stumbling block – who’s in the kitchen cooking these days? If one follows Dr. Haas’ detoxifying diets or juice cleansing or fast, it presents an opportunity to slowly begin with healthy foods after the cleanse. Smoothies, for instance, can be a transition to more solid food; Haas suggests adding Probiotics, avocados, Brewers Yeast, Chlorella, and protein powders.

Elson Haas, MD has been teaching people how to stay healthy for many years (Staying Healthy With the Seasons reviewed in April, 2004). He doesn’t just tell readers to eat better and get more exercise – he understands that many people need to be taken by the hand and led, one step at a time, towards a healthier lifestyle. He gives the details – what, when, and how – and explains the rationale in reader-friendly language.

Technology has led us away from common sense and wisdom (the latter being acquired over time from experience as opposed to knowledge which is fleeting and mutable). Dr. Haas reminds us that good health depends on our internal milieu, and that for the most part, we are responsible for our good or ill health. If we look at our national crisis of obesity through the eyes of this doctor, we can easily see how cleansing and detoxifying the body will bring good health along with weight loss.

Many diabetic and heart patients are also overweight – I wonder how they would fare if put on a detoxifying diet in lieu of the many pharmaceutical drugs with their own toxicity? We live in an increasingly toxic world. Detoxification may be the most important method of preventing illness in the 21st century.