

# Detox your life

Did winter see you eating too much comfort food and doing too little exercise? If you're feeling sluggish, it's time to embark on a spring detox says **Tania Flack**.

**W**e are exposed to a staggering array of toxins every day which accumulate in the body and cause weight gain, constipation, dull skin, bloating, poor immunity and hormone imbalance, plus a slew of other problems. Unhealthy food and inadequate exercise further compromise your body's ability to eliminate toxins. Clearing toxins from your system promotes a healthy metabolism and balanced hormone function.

The concept of detoxification has been around for centuries and is based on the core principles of natural medicine: nourishing whole food, gentle exercise, and clean water. It remains one of the most important natural treatment strategies and is often the starting point on the journey to healing. Doing a detox once a year has many health benefits, but there are also several changes that can be easily incorporated into your everyday lifestyle to support elimination and boost vitality throughout the year.

## Chemical cocktail

While our level of toxin exposure has risen dramatically, the body's capacity to eliminate these toxins has not. For example, in the 1930s chemical production was estimated at one million tonnes per year; today, it is around 400 million tonnes. And not just the quantity, but the type of chemicals have changed.

According to the Public Health Association of Australia, over 80,000 chemicals are now registered for use in food, food packaging, clothing, building materials, water, and cleaning and personal care products. A key concern is a group of chemicals called persistent organic pollutants (POPs), which stay in the environment. Some POPs have been banned, but many have already made their way into the food chain and can have detrimental effects on endocrine, reproductive, and immune system function.

To add insult to injury, we also make our own toxins in our bodies as by-products of

digestion, such as those released from gut bacteria (particularly if there is an overgrowth of 'bad' bacteria), and energy metabolism, such as lactic acid and urea. Hormones need to be detoxified from the body, along with chemicals like bisphenol-A (found in plastics) which mimic the activity of hormones and put further pressure on our elimination pathways.

## Detox your way

Everyone can benefit from a detox, but some people even more than others. For example, if you're planning to start a family, a detox will support healthy hormone balance and allow eggs and sperm to develop in a clean environment. As eggs and sperm take around three months to develop, you'll have to detox for a little longer.

Toxins are stored in fat cells, so people trying to shed weight can especially benefit from a detox. Being toxic can block fat loss because the body resists changes to what is essentially its stable toxin storage facility. People who hit a weight loss plateau, despite their best efforts with diet, may need to detox to boost their metabolism. And anyone with hormone problems can have fantastic results from a detox, because a healthy liver and bowels are critical for healthy hormone balance.

People with dysbiosis (an overgrowth of bad bacteria in the bowel) may be actually recycling their hormones instead of eliminating them. A detox improves liver and gut function and supports hormone balance and the immune system, so is ideal for anyone who continually struggles with repeated colds and flu.

The time needed to effectively detox varies from person to person. Some people only need an annual spring cleanse, others may require more intense detoxification. Genetic variations also mean that some people are more sensitive to toxins than others. Naturopaths have testing technology which can identify DNA variations using a simple saliva test to identify detoxification pathways that may need more support.





## 1 Eat clean and green

It's easy to shift the balance of your diet to include more detoxifying foods (see "The diet cleanse"). The best rule of thumb is to avoid anything processed or pre-prepared; stick to wholefoods and do most of your food shopping at the greengrocer, fishmonger and butcher, not at the supermarket. Organic food may be a little more expensive, but the benefits far outweigh the cost. By switching to organic, you drastically decrease your exposure to chemicals and pesticides.

## 2 Inside-out cleanse

Colon cleansing is used at the start of a detox to reduce toxins produced in the digestive tract and support healthy elimination via the bowel. This is especially important for anyone with a history of constipation or sluggish bowels. Lymphatic massage is a gentle

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therapy that mobilises lymphatic fluid, drains the lymphatic system, and promotes elimination via the lymphatic system and kidneys. Movement is vital in a detox: in particular, there are several yoga twist poses that support healthy bowel function and elimination. Deep breathing exercises regulate the body's delicate pH balance, which is vital for detoxification.

## Your 7-day meal plan

|                  | BREAKFAST  | SNACK   | LUNCH   | SNACK   | DINNER  |
|------------------|--|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Monday</b>    | Quinoa porridge with almond milk and berries                                       | Herbal tea, handful of Brazil nuts                      | Tuna salad with rocket, walnuts, tomato, lightly steamed broccoli and avocado | Detox juice – celery, beetroot, spinach, parsley, apple | Stuffed capsicums with brown rice, tofu and tamari                        |
| <b>Tuesday</b>   | Scrambled eggs with asparagus and wilted spinach                                   | Detox juice – celery, beetroot, spinach, parsley, apple | Cauliflower and leek soup   | Apple and a handful of almonds                          | Barramundi with Asian greens  |
| <b>Wednesday</b> | Pea protein breakfast smoothie with avocado, berries and chia seeds                | Homemade kale chips with balsamic vinegar and sea salt  | Chicken salad with cherry tomatoes, avocado, red onion and mixed greens       | Detox juice – celery, beetroot, spinach, parsley, apple | Globe artichokes stuffed with quinoa, parsley and egg                     |
| <b>Thursday</b>  | Quinoa porridge with almond milk and berries                                       | Detox juice – celery, beetroot, spinach, parsley, apple | Broccoli soup   | Herbal tea, handful of Brazil nuts                      | Seared spicy chicken breast with mashed sweet potato and Brussels sprouts |
| <b>Friday</b>    | Bubble and squeak - cabbage, leftover sweet potato and Brussels sprouts with 1 egg | Apple and a handful of almonds                          | Chicken, vegetable and Jerusalem artichoke soup                               | Detox juice – celery, beetroot, spinach, parsley, apple | Fish cakes with mixed salad   |
| <b>Saturday</b>  | 2 poached eggs, spinach, roast tomato, mushrooms                                   | Detox juice – celery, beetroot, spinach, parsley, apple | Sardines and fresh tomato on gluten-free toast                                | Daikon radish and celery sticks with homemade hummus    | Kangaroo steak with homemade spicy beetroot salsa and rocket salad        |
| <b>Sunday</b>    | Gluten-free toast with almond butter and banana                                    | Pear and a handful of almonds and walnuts               | Cauliflower and leek soup   | Detox juice – celery, beetroot, spinach, parsley, apple | Salmon pan-fried, lime dressing, guacamole and wilted spinach             |



## 3 Clear your mind

The body reacts to emotional stress much as it does to physical stress, by triggering a cascade of chemical messengers in the body that increase toxicity and put pressure on the elimination pathways. A detox should be supported by a period of rest and withdrawal to address negative influences in our lives and reflect on what is helping – and blocking – achievement of our health goals. A diary or journal can help you identify areas of stress. Working through personal issues and developing positive strategies to address problems clears the way forward. Meditation allows the

body to deeply relax, supporting its regulatory and metabolic processes, and promoting restoration and healing. Negative relationships can be a source of huge stress, so devoting time to addressing or distancing yourself from toxic people will play a powerful cleansing role on your path to health and happiness.

## 4 Streamline your space

One of the easiest ways to reduce your exposure to household toxins is to buy a water filter. Among the best are the reverse osmosis filters, which also remove fluoride. Research the area and purchase the best one you can afford. Check your plastic containers: are they bisphenol-A (BPA) free? If not, replace them with non-BPA plastic or glass containers. BPA disrupts hormonal health and acts as a xenoestrogen in your body. Do a stocktake on the most toxic cupboard in your home – the cleaning cupboard – and cut back on your chemical exposure by using natural, non-toxic brands. And, to reduce your exposure to electromagnetic radiation, turn off computers at night and never sleep with a mobile phone plugged in on the bedside table.

## 5 Call in the heavy hitters

Milk thistle, globe artichoke, barberry, turmeric and Oregon grape all support liver detoxification, while dandelion root, licorice, yellow dock and rhubarb support elimination via the bowel. The lymphatic system and skin are also important for elimination and calendula, blue flag, echinacea and cleavers are all deeply cleansing. These herbs are available from healthfood shops, but for best results see your naturopath or a herbalist. Nutrients which support a detox program include amino acids, B-group vitamins, folic acid, glutamine, zinc, quercetin, bioflavonoids and the

## The diet cleanse

| EAT MORE   | EAT LESS – OR AVOID ALTOGETHER   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foods to support liver detoxification, e.g. artichoke, garlic, onions, turmeric, bitter greens like rocket and radicchio</li> <li>Cruciferous vegetables, e.g. broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale, bok choy, and cress</li> <li>Legumes, e.g. lentils, kidney beans, navy beans, black-eyed peas, all support bowel function and provide prebiotic fibre that encourages the growth of healthy gut bacteria</li> <li>Good quality protein, e.g. smaller varieties of fish, organic eggs, chicken, turkey and kangaroo</li> <li>Good quality carbohydrates from starchy vegetables, e.g. beetroot and sweet potato, and low glycaemic index (GI) carbohydrates, like quinoa, amaranth and brown rice</li> <li>Nuts and seeds, e.g. almonds, Brazil nuts, walnuts, pine nuts, chia seeds, sesame seeds, flax seeds, nut butters</li> <li>Foods high in antioxidants, e.g. berries, green tea, turmeric, colourful fruits and vegetables</li> <li>Alkaline foods, e.g. green leafy vegetables and vegetable juices</li> <li>Herbal teas, freshly squeezed vegetable juices and lots of filtered water</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gluten in all its forms, including wheat, barley, oats and rye; no bread, biscuits, pastries, cakes, baked goods, pasta</li> <li>Dairy, e.g. milk, butter, ice cream, cream, custard. Make your own almond milk at home – it's easy and delicious!</li> <li>Sugar, e.g. refined sugar, honey, treacle, lollies, chocolate, and all artificial sweeteners (Tip: stevia drops are a better option)</li> <li>Alcohol</li> <li>Caffeine, e.g. coffee, tea, energy drinks</li> <li>Trans fats, e.g. margarine and foods containing heated vegetable oils</li> <li>Fried foods, e.g. crisps, chips, battered and deep-fried foods</li> <li>Processed foods, e.g. commercial cereals, pre-packaged foods and all fast foods</li> <li>Soft drinks, pre-packaged juices, cordials and pre-packaged fruit juices</li> </ul> |

Are you in a toxic relationship? When we take on other people's wants and needs and put our own to one side, resentment can fester.

antioxidants – vitamins A, C, E and selenium – while probiotics are particularly important for bowel health.

Embracing the 'detox lifestyle' leads to significant health benefits. Look around you and see what changes you can make to reduce the effect of toxins on your health, and you will see what an incredible difference it makes to your health, energy levels and happiness.

### Are you toxic?

The top 10 symptoms of an overload of toxins are:

- Fatigue
- Bloating
- Bowel disruption – too slow or too fast
- Headaches and migraines
- Sugar cravings
- Weight and/or fluid retention
- Hormone problems, e.g. PMT, infertility
- Difficulty concentrating, lowered mood
- Poor immunity, allergies
- Skin, hair and nail problems

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**75** The percentage of chemicals that have never been tested for toxicity on the human body or the environment.