

# Detoxification: Modern Knowledge and Ancient Wisdom

By Dr. Danny Jui, ND

**Detoxification** is any process that decreases the negative impact of chemicals or molecules on the body, involving bio-transformation of these toxic substances into excretable forms. Although this process has been a focus of recent scientific research, the idea of detoxification parallels the idea of proper flow or *xin chen dai xie* in Traditional Chinese Medicine.

**The Five Elements** constitute the basis of Chinese medical theory on the idea of proper flow or biotransformation among all collaborative organs to ensure optimal health. The five elements are Metal, Water, Wood, Fire, and Earth.

**Metal** represents the lungs in Chinese Medicine. Having optimal exchanges and flow of fresh air with deep breathing exercises is an important part of any detoxification program. Ancient texts suggest that upon rising is the best time for breathing exercises such as Tai-Chi, meditation, yoga, or any form of light exercise.

**Water** corresponds to our kidneys. Hydration is extremely important in detoxification. In fact, our kidneys are designed to handle roughly 180 liters of fluids a day, filter the blood about 60 times daily, and remove wastes through urination. In addition to drinking more purified water, naturopathic traditions offer simple home-based hydrotherapies such as sitz baths and contrast showers to gently enhance the flow through our kidneys.

**Wood** is related to the liver - our biggest internal organ of detoxification. The biotransformation in the liver is mediated by two closely related steps identified by researchers as Phase I and Phase II. Phase I converts toxic substances into more reactive forms before Phase II neutralizes and makes them more sol-

uble for excretion. Proper functioning of both phases is essential because the metabolites produced during Phase I may actually be more toxic than the original substance; therefore, the two phases must be in balance to ensure complete detoxification without serious side effects or potential interactions with your medications or supplements. Specific nutrients and phytochemicals may be recommended by your naturopathic physician to appropriately support either or both phases of this delicate system, depending on your health situation.

**Fire** symbolizes the heart. In Chinese Medicine, the heart not only circulates the blood, but also anchors the Mind or Shen and - interestingly - controls sweating, too. Regular exercise induces optimal blood flow, robust mental health, and of course sweating. Our skin is actually the biggest organ of elimination that we have! In addition to exercise, some form of mental or emotional reflection is encouraged during detoxification to facilitate the well-documented Mind/Body connection.

**Earth** represents the digestive tract. In addition to maintaining regular daily bowel movements and balanced nutrition, your naturopathic doctor may prescribe specific dietary recommendations during the detoxification program relevant to your specific health situation.



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