

Detoxification: What's All the Buzz?

By Dr. Caleb Ng, ND

It seems that “detox diets” and “cleanses” are popular with everyone from your next door neighbour to celebrities like Beyoncé and Gwyneth Paltrow. The term “detoxification” implies different meanings for different people. I recently had a patient who said, “Detox? Like a treatment centre? I don't drink that much!” For others, detoxification may mean anything from cutting out a few dietary indulgences to an all-juice diet. Whatever your viewpoint, here are a few tips to help you out during your time of detox.

Exercise and Control Your Weight

Exercising to lose weight or prevent obesity is a proven lifestyle change that significantly reduces the risk of developing liver damage. Prolonged liver damage can result in a condition called “nonalcoholic fatty liver disease” (NAFLD), which is the most common liver disease in North America. Studies have shown there is a strong correlation between obesity and NAFLD: a higher degree of obesity in an individual often means an increase in liver damage.

Shop the Perimeter

When you shop the perimeter of the grocery store you'll find unprocessed foods that are vital for detoxifying. Common preservatives such as BHA and BHT—often found in processed foods—may increase the risk for certain cancers. At high concentrations, these preservatives have been shown to induce tumors in the stomach and liver of animals. Regarding food colouring, common additives such as FD&C Yellow#5 (tartrazine) and FD&C Blue#2 (indigo carmine) have been found to aggravate ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), asthma and inflammatory skin conditions such as urticaria and atopic dermatitis in children and sensitive individuals.

Consider Milk Thistle

The literature on Silymarin, a component of Milk Thistle, indicates several liver protective effects: increasing antioxidant activity, preventing toxic accumulation in liver cells, stimulating liver cell regeneration and inhibiting factors relating to cirrhosis. In one clinical trial, Milk Thistle was shown to protect the liver from the effects of Hepatitis A and damage related to alcohol, drugs and poisonous fungi.

Avoid Radical Diets

Although incidences related to “detox diets” and “cleanses” are rare, they do happen. Last year a woman in Britain suffered permanent brain damage after going on a water diet. After reducing her salt intake and increasing her water intake to 6 pints a day, she experienced a massive epileptic episode caused by severe sodium deficiency. She was left with cognitive deficits affecting memory, concentration, speech and mood regulation.

Before attempting any radical diet or cleanse, consult a licensed primary health care provider to determine if it is safe to do so and what type of cleanse will benefit you the most.

To learn more about detoxification and liver health, please attend our Spring Detoxification Workshop Series at Choices Markets South Surrey this month.

Dr. Ng is a Naturopathic Physician and co-founder of the Mountainview Wellness Centre. He specializes in detoxification, weight loss, thyroid conditions, gastro-intestinal disease and men's health. For more information on Dr. Ng or the Mountainview Wellness Centre visit www.mountainview-wellness.ca.