

Body Myths

1 What is body detoxification? And how does it help the body?

Detoxification is the process by which the body breaks down certain “toxins” in the body and renders it suitable for excretion, usually through the urine, faeces or through the skin via sweating.

Majority of detoxification is carried out by the liver (95%). Detoxification is usually divided into two phases.

Phase I involves converting toxins (which are often fat-soluble) into a water soluble intermediate. It can then be bound to other molecules in the body via Phase II detoxification to make it suitable for excretion. This process of detoxification is important to allow our body to rid itself of potentially toxic substances.

Substances considered toxins by the body:

- Drugs
- Pesticides
- Hormones

For the body to effectively remove these toxins, it must have the right tools e.g. correct nutrition and regular bowel habits for toxins excreted into the gastrointestinal tract to be removed from the body.

Proper hydration is also important to remove toxins via the urine. Lack of proper nutrition during the detoxification process can lead to an imbalance in Phase I and Phase II of detoxification.

Phase I of detoxification often makes toxins more toxic than they were in the first place. Therefore if phase II detoxification is impaired because of poor nutrition, one can often be harmed by “detox”, rather than benefit from it.

2 What are the benefits of body detoxification?

Detoxification prevents the accumulation of substances that could potentially be harmful for your health. These include xenobiotics (like in plastics, pesticides) and heavy metals. These substances if accumulated over many years can result in increased likelihood of fatigue, hormone imbalances and therefore increase the likelihood of diseases such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, Parkinson’s disease, dementia and cancers.

However, immediate benefits of better detoxification would include better skin, more energy, sound sleep and reduced pain. Weight loss is also more likely to happen if detoxification improves.

3 How often can one detox the body? And when can one do it?

Detoxification is actually something that your body does all the time, whether you intend for it to do so or not. When people talk about “detox”, they are likely to mean a series of things you may possibly do to make your body more efficient at getting rid of its toxin.

If you have a healthy lifestyle, exercise regularly, eat moderately, eat foods that help your body with detoxification, you can be effectively detoxifying your body every day, all the time.

Many people decide to embark on a “detox” to combat potentially harmful habits that may have left them feeling less than healthful. These “detox” techniques may be helpful but sometimes may be harmful if not carried out well.

Going on a “detox” can be potentially toxic to the body if weight loss occurs too quickly, since many toxins in the body are actually stored in the fat. Fat loss liberates these toxins into the blood stream. If your liver does not have proper nutrients to carry out detoxification, then you could have caused more damage to your body than it would otherwise have been subject to if you left the toxins parked in your fat tissues.

During detox it is also important to ensure hydration and regular bowel movements to ensure that the toxins that your liver has worked so hard to remove, can truly leave your body and not be reabsorbed back into your bloodstream.



4 So what are some safe and healthy detox diets would you recommend? Are they expensive?

I personally do not recommend any particular “detox diet” on the market. I would recommend that if you want to carry out a “detox” on your body, that you work with a nutritionist/naturopath or doctor who has experience in the area of detoxification

5 Can one detox the body without exercising? Why?

Since sweating is one of the ways that your body can excrete toxins, exercise is one of the ways that may help detox.

If however, you are on a very low calorie detoxification plan, you may not be able to engage in exercise. Majority of toxins are actually removed through the urine and feces, so it is possible to carry out detoxification without exercise.

Some patients may consider a sauna to increase sweating, but adequate hydration is very important.

6 What exercises benefit body detoxification?

Any exercise that results in perspiration can potentially help with detoxification. However, in patients that have a lot of stress, have poor nutrition, smoke or drink alcohol excessively, intense exercise can generate free radicals that increase the oxidative stress in your body.

During the process of detoxification, your liver requires significant amounts of antioxidants, therefore engaging in habits that increase oxidative damage in your body, will actually result in reduced capacity for detoxification and potential for liver damage.

7 Besides food and exercise, are there any other supplements or lifestyle practices one can do for effective body detoxification?

Certain substances can result in an imbalance in phase I and phase II detoxification e.g. smoking, caffeine and alcohol. So limiting these harmful habits is useful.

Supporting your diet with lots of cruciferous vegetables e.g. broccoli, cauliflower, kale, kai lan, cabbage, bok choy also helps with balancing phase I and phase II detoxification.

Eating a small amount of protein with every meal is also vital to helping with phase II detoxification. Garlic and onions contain sulphur rich amino acids and are important in supporting phase II detoxification. Proteins can come from both animal foods and plant-based diets. Ensure adequate hydration, drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water every day, more if you engage in activities that increase perspiration.



Also, do ensure regular bowel habits. Toxins that are excreted into the intestines can be reabsorbed if bowel transit time is increased i.e. constipation. Therefore, ensure intake of adequate amounts of fibre and water in your diet.

If you have had exposure to multiple courses of antibiotics or have previously received chemotherapy or are under high stress, you may want to speak to your doctor and consider improving your gut microflora. Good gut bacteria is important for proper laxation (going to the toilet regularly).

Adequate antioxidants are also an important part of supporting the detoxification process. Taking lots of coloured fruit and vegetables of an antioxidant supplement may be important. Some patients may consider supplements such as milk thistle, glutathione or dandelion as part of their detoxification process.



This article is written by Dr Julinda Lee, Gynaecologist at Wellness & Gynaecology Centre by Dr Julinda Lee. With a keen interest in age management and wellness, Dr Lee believes in offering her patients with a holistic and comfortable experience with the highest quality of diagnostic and interventional care.

Dr Julinda Lee was on the Dean's list and graduated from the National University of Singapore in 1995 with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery. She was also awarded the Hoops Medal for Obstetrics and Gynaecology and the Singapore Medical Association Bronze Medal in that year.

She obtained her post-graduate qualifications in Obstetrics and Gynaecology from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (United Kingdom) and the National University of Singapore in 2000 and was awarded the Gold Medal in the Master of Medicine Examinations. (Obstetrics and Gynaecology). She was most recently admitted as a fellow into the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in 2014. Dr Lee has a keen interest in age management and has completed her training for independence in age management at Cenegenics Medical Institute in Las Vegas, which is approved by the American Medical Association. She is a board certified physician with the American Board of Anti-Aging Medicine.

Dr Lee believes in a holistic approach to her patient's health. Through nutrition, supplementation, lifestyle modification and if necessary bioidentical hormone therapy and medication to achieve vitality and prevent disease. She is currently pursuing a Masters of Science in Human Nutrition and Functional Medicine to ensure that she has the most current and evidenced-based approaches to help her patients achieve optimal health.

