

## Detox: Meaning, Myths, & Methods

“Detoxing” is not a new idea. Since the dawn of recorded history, humans have been contemplating what it means to be [contaminated](#) and devising ways of once again becoming clean.

Our current culture is no different. What we consider to be potentially poisonous may have changed, but many of the remedies remain the same. What has evolved though is our understanding of how our bodies work and what’s needed to keep them functioning well.



water) are returned back to your body, and unneeded or toxic materials (excess water, acid, and other wastes) are turned into urine and sent to the bladder.

**Liver** - Your liver has more than 500 essential jobs, and some of the most important have to do with detoxification. Like the kidneys, the liver functions as a filter, removing toxins (drugs, alcohol, and caffeine) and the waste products that your cells normally produce. After your liver has filtered out and broken

down these harmful substances, the [by-products](#) are either routed to the intestines and leave the body in the stool or get sent to the kidneys to be excreted in the urine.

**Large Intestine (Colon)** - The colon’s primary job is to transport food particles through the body and then expel the indigestible parts, but it also plays a role in detoxing by clearing bilirubin (waste from the breakdown of old or abnormal red blood cells).

**Lungs** - With each breath we take, we’re bringing in the oxygen that our cells need to survive and clearing our bodies of gaseous wastes, primarily carbon dioxide. If we didn’t get rid of the carbon dioxide, it would take up the “carrying capacity” of our blood. Then our blood wouldn’t be able to the oxygen to our cells. Every exhale is a “detox!”

### Three Meanings of “Detox”

#### Medical Detoxification

“Detox” has become such a common term that we forget it can also mean the process of [Medical Detoxification](#). The goal of medical detoxification is to manage intoxication by, and withdrawal from, drugs or alcohol. In this process, medical staff, in a clinical setting, use interventions that remove toxins from someone’s body:

- If they are acutely intoxicated.
- If they are dependent on substances of abuse.
- If they have ingested poison.

This type of detoxing helps to minimize the physical harm that these dangerous substances can cause.

#### Internal Detoxification

Our bodies have their own detoxification systems built right in! Our kidneys, liver, intestines, and lungs do an amazing job at detoxing our bodies every day.

**Kidneys** - These two fist-sized organs are made up of a million individual filtering units. Blood continuously circulates through the kidneys - about 150 quarts of blood are filtered each day! After being filtered, needed substances (minerals, nutrients,

#### Wellness Detoxification

Today, this is probably the most commonly used meaning of the word “detox.” You’ll find this buzzword discussed on social media and blog posts, in lifestyle magazines, and in advertisements that are designed to look like any of those three. Why is this idea so attention-grabbing? It comes back to the idea of contamination and cleansing. People have legitimate concerns about pollution in the environment then polluting their bodies, they and often see “detoxing” as a way to cleanse and protect themselves. Keep reading to learn about wellness detox myths and methods!

**Taking care of ourselves can take a lot of support. We’re here to help!**  
*Ask a nurse or provider if you’d like to talk. 218-387-2330*



Also referred to as a “cleanse,” these regimens, therapies, and diets often not only claim remove toxins from our bodies, but also to help people maintain or regain health or lose weight.

They can include things like:

- Fasting or drinking only juices
- Limiting food intake to a few items or food groups
- Taking dietary or herbal supplements
- “Cleaning” the colon with enemas, laxatives, or irrigation
- Using a sauna

These programs can be especially dangerous for people with medical conditions or who take certain medications.

### Detox Myths

There are plenty of detox myths floating around. We’ve flipped them to discover the detox truths!

- **Sweating DOESN’T remove toxins** - Whether you’re exercising or in a sauna, it sure seems like working up a sweat should get rid of harmful substances, but sweat is made up of almost entirely water with a tiny bit of salt. Sweating is your body’s way of cooling itself - not cleansing itself. However, if that sweat comes from exercise, that’s doing your liver a real favor, because exercise helps your liver do it’s detoxing work!
- **You CAN’T remove toxins through your skin** - Some products that claim to be able to pull toxins out through the pores in your skin. In actuality, your skin is designed to protect you by keeping toxins from getting in - it doesn’t let toxins out.
- **Detoxing DOESN’T rid your intestines of accumulated rotten fecal matter.** That’s not how your intestines work. Fecal matter doesn’t stick to the intestinal wall, if it compacts, it does so in masses on the inside of the colon. Colon cleansing can lead to dehydration, electrolyte imbalance, impaired bowel function, and disruption of your intestinal microbiome.
- **Drinking large amounts of water DOES’T flush dangerous substances out of your body.** There’s no medical benefit to [over-hydration](#); in fact, it can be dangerous .
- **Your organs, and body as a whole, DON’T need help to detox.** Many products or regimens promise to help detox specific organs or purify and balance your body. Your kidneys, liver,

intestines, and lungs can’t be cleansed individually and do a great job without any additional herbal, juice, or other help.

- **Special diets or foods CAN’T help you to detox, and detoxing WON’T help you to lose weight.** While fasting, juice cleanses, and laxative teas can cause weight loss, it’s not in a healthy or long-term way. These diets are often dangerously low-calorie and/or nutritionally imbalanced. Dehydration and starvation are not routes to better health.

Here are [some tips](#) to help you tell at a glance whether a detox or cleansing diet should be avoided. **Diet danger signs include:**

- *Promises of rapid weight loss.* Losing weight quickly indicates loss of muscle, bone, and water. It doesn’t signal detoxification, cleansing, or health improvement.
- *Drastic limits on most foods, requiring excessive amounts of certain foods, or eliminating specific foods or groups of foods.* These are all red flags! Over-restricting or over-consuming foods or food groups can lead to dietary imbalances, and inflexible menus make life harder than it needs to be.
- *Requiring specific food combinations or timing.* There is no wrong timing or combination of foods that will cause them to turn to fat or produce toxins in your intestines.
- *Ignoring physical activity.* Moving your body is essential for good health, and any diet that ignores that key element can’t be balanced.

### **Safest Method for Detoxing**

The best and safest way to detox is to let your amazing body do what it does best. You don’t have to add anything extra to the process. You can, however, support that process by:

- ✓ **Lighten the “filtering” load for your liver, kidneys, and lungs.** Minimize or eliminate the amount of commercial tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs that you’re asking them to handle.
- ✓ **Eat plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, and lean protein.** It’s the very same diet that’s good for your heart, and your brain, and your muscles, and every other part of you!
- ✓ **Get active.** Movement helps all your organs to work better, and this includes your “detox” organs.
- ✓ **Stay hydrated** - but don’t drink until you slosh! If you pee every 2-3 hours and your urine is pale or clear, [you’re good!](#)

If you have questions about “cleanse” or “detox” programs, ask your doctor for more information.