

Detoxification to Promote Health: A 7-Day Program

What is detoxification and why do it?

Detoxification described in this handout includes the ways our bodies identify, neutralize, and eliminate things that are unhealthy for us. These include physical substances such as toxins (poisons) from our environment or by-products from the chemical processes that keep us alive. It also includes emotions or behaviors that are unhealthy. *Alcohol and other narcotic withdrawal therapies are serious medical conditions requiring close supervision and are **not** discussed here.*

We live in a polluted and stressful world. A person's body can become overburdened and strained by contaminants. This contamination can lead to health problems.¹ There are several types of toxins.²

- **Anti-nutrients** such as high fructose corn syrup, trans-fats, caffeine, alcohol, and processed foods
- **By-products from the chemical processes that keep us alive** such as nitrogen, carbon dioxide, bile, urea, and stool
- **Medications** used improperly, inappropriately, or too often
- **Heavy metals** such as mercury, arsenic, lead, cadmium, tin, and aluminum
- **Chemicals** such as pesticides, herbicides, cleaning products, solvents, and glues
- **Allergens** such as food, mold, dust, pollen, and chemicals
- **Causes of infections** such as bacteria, viruses, yeast, and parasites

Further, there are social, emotional, and spiritual challenges that affect health and well-being:^{3,4}

- **Stress** such as lack of personal time, too much work, excessive worry, too little rest, and financial strain
- **Unhealthy mental states** such as addictions, overeating, and destructive mental patterns
- **Distractions** that surround us such as constant noises, smells, lights, and images
- **Over-stimulation** from advertisements, radio, computers, TV, phones, and pagers
- **Lack of spiritual connection**, a loss of meaning and purpose
- **Isolation**, the lack of social support and community
- **Nature deprivation**, being disconnected from natural environments
- **Negative emotions** and persistent self-defeating thoughts such as anger, fear, guilt, hopelessness

Our bodies and minds already have the ability to handle these challenges. This process of maintaining physical and emotional balance is called homeostasis. The major body systems that work together to maintain health and balance include our:

- Liver and gallbladder
- Kidneys
- Gut
- Skin
- Lungs
- Lymphatics/Circulation
- Mind/Brain



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There are no exact symptoms to suggest that your body's natural detoxification system is not working well. Your body may have a problem with detoxification if 1) you have a number of the following symptoms and 2) a clinician has seen you to determine that they are not caused by other medical conditions:^{1,5,6}

- Fatigue with sleep disruption and brain fog
- Mood disturbance, especially depression, anxiety, fear, and anger
- Muscle aches and joint pain
- Sinus congestion, dark circles under the eyes, and post-nasal drip
- Headaches with neck and shoulder pain
- Bloating and gas
- Irritable bowel, foul-smelling stools, and dark urine
- Weight changes and loss of muscle tone
- Heartburn, recurrent colds, and persistent infections
- Infertility and low interest in sex
- Premature aging and weakness
- Fluid retention and excess weight
- Rashes and canker sores
- Bad breath and body odor

We currently have very little research that proves that detoxification therapies are helpful. However, if you are a patient experiencing these symptoms, you may be quite frustrated, wondering, "*What can I do to find relief?*" Detoxification therapy is one option to try. Unfortunately there are many gimmicky, expensive, unnecessary, and potentially harmful products, programs, and practitioners who exaggerate the helpfulness of their detoxification plans. In general, we recommend that you avoid any approach that sounds dramatic or extreme. If you are going to try one, follow guidelines that seem reasonable and safe, and that promote a healthy lifestyle. Choose one that helps you feel in control and that does not promise results that seem unrealistic.

The five basic components of any detoxification program should include:

- Exercise: every day such as yoga and walking (especially in nature)
- Regular sweating: a sauna, steam room, or hot room yoga class
- Healthy nutrition: rich in organic fruits and vegetables and filtered water
- Self-reflection: such as meditation and breathing-focused relaxation
- Body-work: such as massage and acupuncture.



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General guidelines for selecting complementary or alternative healing therapies

If you are considering a complementary or alternative therapy such as detoxification, first seek the answers to the following questions.

- Is this treatment safe and what are the risks?
- Is there evidence to support this therapy?
- Does this therapy appropriately address my condition, concerns, and expectations?
- What are the qualifications and intentions of the practitioner offering the therapy?
- Am I open and receptive to this approach, and do I believe in it?
- How expensive is the treatment? Is the cost in line with the possible benefits and risks?

If all answers are reassuring, then it is likely you will benefit from this treatment.

A Suggested 7-Day Detoxification Program

There are many detox approaches, and there is very little evidence to suggest that one is better than the next. However, a 7-day commitment to healthy activities can be helpful for many symptoms. It can help your body find balance. It is important to be creative and adapt a program to your needs. The following plan offers general guidelines for self-guided detoxification.

Getting Started

- This regimen is not intended to be all things to all people. Nor is it a test of will and endurance. It is designed to be a safe, useful, empowering, health guide. You can change it as necessary to meet your own needs. However, *this process does require planning and preparation, so read through it and make preparations ahead of time.*
- In addition to physical approaches, this plan equally emphasizes mind-body approaches. These can help you relax and unravel negative and unconscious mental patterns that often result in pain and discomfort. (See our handout [Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises](#)).
- The most important part of going through a detox program is to first ask why you are doing it. Being clear about your intentions helps avoid disappointment and expectations that are too high. Write down your reasons for going through a detox program using language that is meaningful to you.
- The five basic ingredients of this detox regimen are self-reflection, exercise, sauna, nutrition, and manual-therapy. The program offered here is designed to support and enhance your own ability to heal and experience well-being. It is intended for most people, and you can do it on your own. However, first check with your primary care clinician to make certain this is a healthy option for you.
- We encourage you to use organic, sustainable, local, responsible, gentle, natural, whole, balanced, and easeful products and methods. These honor the global and spiritual aspect of health.



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Precautions and Expectations

- **Healing crises** commonly occur during a detoxification regimen. Common and temporary symptoms of detoxification include feeling lousy, headache, lightheadedness, diarrhea, cramps, bloating, body aches, fatigue, mood changes, and weakness. These symptoms are due to a combination of factors including the how toxins in the body are affected, low blood sugar, low fluids, electrolyte imbalance, withdrawal from various substances (such as alcohol, caffeine, sugar, nicotine), and even changes in your daily routine.
- If you develop any of these symptoms, usually the best approach is to **continue with the detox**. However, you may need to stop or alter the detox if you experience ongoing distressing symptoms.
- **Dehydration** is common during a detox. Make sure that you drink a lot of fluids.
- **Address your particular needs** as you go along, such as more frequent snacks, larger meals, increasing protein and healthy fats, working less, resting more, and less striving for goals.
- In general, continued use of **prescribed daily medications** is recommended. Use other medications sparingly (for example pain medication taken as needed for headaches or other problems).
- **Communicate with your health care provider**, therapist, or other healing practitioners for any concerns that arise during the detox as needed.

In the end, you will likely find that you feel better, have more energy, and may require less medication.

Quick Summary of the 7 Day Detox

Simplified Version #1

- **Days 1 and 2:** Eliminate meat, eggs, dairy, wheat, alcohol, caffeine, chocolate, and sugar. Eat only organic vegan foods in any arrangement, preparation, and amount using cooking oils (extra virgin olive, canola, sesame, and coconut oils) and seasonings.
- **Day 3:** In addition, eliminate grains, nuts, beans, and legumes. Eat only fruits and vegetables in any combination, amount, and preparation using oils and spices as needed.
- **Day 4:** Avoid eating any solid food. Drink plenty of water, broth, juice and tea.
- **Day 5:** (Same as Day 3)
- **Days 6 and 7:** (same as Days 1 and 2)

Simplified Version #2

For 7 or more days:

- Eat only fruits and vegetables in any combination, amount, and preparation using oils and spices as needed
- Drink plenty of filtered water, juice, tea, and broth
- Move and exercise the body in any variety, intensity, and duration
- Keep a journal and practice any variety of self-reflection

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Entire Detox Week

For the entire detox week, eliminate flesh foods/meat (e.g. fish, beef, pork, lamb, poultry, etc.), refined sugars (white/brown sugar and especially high-fructose corn syrup), and artificial sweeteners such as *saccharine*, *aspartame*, and *Splenda* (limited use of natural sweeteners such as honey, maple syrup, and molasses are okay to use in small amounts). Also avoid alcohol, tobacco, caffeine, cigarettes, chocolate, and recreational drugs for the entire week. It is advised to avoid dairy, wheat, and eggs during the detox week as well (instead try soy/almond/rice milk, soy cheese, soy yogurt, stanol/sterol spreads). The recipes you use will guide your cooking methods, e.g. simmering vegetables into soups, steaming, sautéing, etc.

Days 1 and 2

Recommended foods for Days 1 and 2 include fresh/frozen/dried vegetables, fruit, and mushrooms (maitake, shiitake, oyster, and/or enoki, etc). If you are following Version #1, healthy grains are also recommended for days 1 and 2 (brown/wild rice, quinoa, buckwheat, oatmeal, millet, seeds, nuts, legumes, and flax seed).

Other recommendations include:

- Use cold pressed organic extra-virgin olive oil as guided by your recipes and meals
- Add spices and healthy seasonings as guided by your recipes
- Drink 8-10 glasses of filtered water, including vitalizing-beverage, detox-broth, smoothies, and diluted juices
- Drink tea throughout the day, such as peppermint, decaf green, chamomile, licorice, ginger, rooibos, and digestive tea
- For snacks eat mixed nuts, dried and fresh fruit, vegetables and detox-broth
- Consider using herbs and supplements. A list of these including recommended doses is on pages 7-8 of this handout. This recommendation is optional.
- Consider 15-30 minutes of sauna or steam room therapy
- Consider 30-60 minutes of light exercise such as walking, running, biking, skiing, jumping rope, stretching, yoga, pilates, etc
- Practice any variety of self-reflection, including meditation and breathing. (See our handout [Meditation for Health and Happiness](#) and our [Mindfulness in Medicine website](#).)
- Journaling is encouraged (See our handout [Mind/Body Awareness Writing Exercises](#))



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Day 3

On Day 3 also eliminate grains, nuts, seeds, legumes, beans, and mushrooms. *Eat only fruits and vegetables.* You can include fresh, frozen, or dried vegetables and fruit. You can eat as much of these as you want, prepared in any healthy way. Just like Days 1 and 2, recommendations include:

- Olive oil
- Spices and seasonings
- Filtered water, tea, vitalizing-beverage, detox-broth, smoothies, and diluted juice
- Optional herbs and supplements at recommended dosages
- Sauna or steam room heat therapy
- Light exercise
- Journaling, self-reflection, or meditation

A new suggestion to add on Day 3 is massage therapy. This can help eliminate the toxins in your body. It can also assist the body's lymphatic system, which helps balance the fluids in the body.

Day 4 (MODIFIED FASTING)

Eliminate all solid food (i.e., drink only water, tea, juices, and broth with modifications as needed). Most importantly, **PAY ATTENTION TO THE NEEDS OF YOUR BODY!** *Sensitive, ill, weak, and thin people should avoid or modify this day of fasting if needed. For example, you can drink more juice and broth as needed.*

Other suggestions include:

- Enjoy rest and relaxation; avoid exercise and sauna use today
- Do minimal or no work today and avoid being overly active
- Stop all supplements just for today.** (There's one exception. If you do the bowel cleansing described below, use the three products listed).
- Drink plenty of fluids (tea with honey, vitalizing beverage, diluted fruit/vegetable juice, and detox-broth) to replace those lost through toileting.
- Practice journaling, self-reflection, or meditation

Optional bowel cleansing regimen:

- Take 500-1000 mg of Bentonite Clay or Activated Charcoal capsules by mouth three times per day with water, **only for this day of fasting** (*It binds toxins in the gut.*)
- Drink 300 mL of **Magnesium Citrate** (one bottle) in the morning for bowel elimination
- Use 1-2 saline **Fleet Enemas** in the afternoon or evening for bowel elimination



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Day 5 (Same as Day 3 except for Energy-Work)

For day 5, add back *fruit and vegetables*. You can eat them in any amount or combination. Prepare them using healthy recipes. Again, recommended foods include fresh, frozen, or dried vegetables and fruit (*but **no** mushrooms, grains, seeds, beans, legumes, or nuts*). Just like days 1-3, other recommendations include:

- Olive oil
- Spices and seasonings
- Filtered water, tea, vitalizing-beverage, detox-broth, smoothies, and diluted juice
- Restart the optional herbs and supplements at recommended dosages
- Sauna or steam room heat therapy
- Light exercise
- Journaling, and self-reflection, or meditation

A new suggestion to add on Day 5 is an Energy-Work session such as Acupuncture or Reiki to help balance your system.

Days 6 and 7 (Same as Days 1 & 2)

In addition to fruits and vegetables, **add back** mushrooms, beans, legumes, seeds, nuts, and healthy grains. You are encouraged to continue the following:

- Olive oil
- Spices and seasonings
- Filtered water, tea, vitalizing-beverage, detox-broth, smoothies, and diluted juice
- Optional herbs and supplements at recommended dosages
- Sauna or steam room heat therapy
- Light exercise
- Journaling, self-reflection, or meditation

RECIPES

Vitalizing Beverage

This is an excellent aid for fasting on Day 4.

- 1-2 tablespoons fresh lemon and/or lime juice (about 1/2 crushed or squeezed lemon/lime)
- 1-2 tablespoons of real maple syrup
- 1/10 teaspoon Cayenne Pepper (a small pinch)
- Purified, spring, or mineral water (carbonated water can also be used)

In a tall glass combine the juice, syrup, and cayenne. Fill the glass with water and stir well. Add crushed ice as desired. Enjoy throughout the detox, especially during fasting on day 4. Diluted fruit juice of any variety (1/2 real juice and 1/2 water) is also recommended.



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Superfoods Detox Broth

Use fresh organic ingredients if possible. This is an excellent aid for fasting on Day 4. Ingredients can be varied according to taste and availability.

- 1 large soup pot or kettle
- 1 strainer
- 1 large bowl or container for straining the soup
- 3-4 quarts of filtered water (Fill the pot after all ingredients are in.)
- 1 large chopped onion (white or yellow)
- 3-5 small bunches of various chopped greens (kale, parsley, cilantro, chard, or dandelion)
- 2 stalks of sliced celery
- 1 cup of fresh or dried seaweed (nori, dulse, wakame, kelp, or kombu)
- 1/2 small-medium head of chopped cabbage (any variety)
- 2 peeled carrots
- 2 stalks of peeled burdock root
- 1 large peeled daikon root
- 1 cup of squash (any variety) chopped into cubes
- 3 chopped root vegetables (especially turnips, parsnips, or rutabagas)
- 2-3 cups fresh/dried mushrooms (maitake, shiitake, oyster, or enoki)

Add all ingredients to the large pot at once and bring to a low boil for 40-60 minutes (Add water to fill.) Strain the stock to remove the solid material (Keep the liquid broth and dispose the left over solid parts.) Add salt to taste. Store in the original soup pot or a tightly sealed container to eat all week. Keep the remaining broth cooled in the refrigerator, and reheat for use. Enjoy as a sipping broth throughout the detox week, especially while fasting on Day 4.

Smoothie

Use organic ingredients when possible. This recipe makes about 1 liter, which is 4 servings (2 days worth--a glass in the AM and PM).

- About 2 tablespoons (20 mL) of organic cold pressed extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 avocado
- 40g (about 3-4 tablespoons for most brands) of **Whey protein powder** (optional)
- 40g (about 3-4 tablespoons for most brands) of **Modified Citrus Pectin** (Pectasol, optional)
- 1/2 cup of orange juice (or 100% organic juice of choice)
- 1/2 cup of vanilla flavored soy milk, rice milk, or almond milk
- About 4 tablespoons (40g) of flax seed (or psyllium)
- 8-10 ice cubes (or 1/2 cup of filtered water)
- 1 organic banana (sliced)
- 1 organic apple or pear with peel (sliced)
- 1/2 cup organic frozen or fresh blueberries (and/or seasonal berries of choice)

Place ingredients in a blender and grind up until smooth, adding more water as needed. Store remaining mix in the refrigerator. *Be creative, this can be varied according to taste and availability of various fruit.* Enjoy 1 tall glass twice a day with or between meals.

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Digestive Tea

- 1/2 teaspoon whole fennel seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon whole coriander seeds
- 1/2 teaspoon whole cumin seeds

Add seeds to about one quart boiling water. Let the seeds steep for about ten minutes. Enjoy after meals throughout the detox week. Other recommended teas include ginger, licorice, peppermint, chamomile, rooibos, and decaf green teas.

Example of hardy vegetarian chili recipe, serves 8-10

Use organic ingredients when possible.

- 1 very large soup pot or kettle
- 7 cups of filtered water
- 3 bouillon cubes
- 2 big yams, cubed (large)
- 1 large white onion, chopped
- 4 tablespoons of cold pressed extra virgin olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 tablespoons of chili powder (or more to taste)
- 2 cans stewed tomatoes, Italian style
- 1 can garbanzo beans (about 14 oz)
- 1 can black beans (about 14 oz)
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/2 cup of cilantro, minced
- 1 tablespoon of orange peel, minced
- salt and pepper to taste

Bring water to gentle boil and add bouillon. Add cubed yams into boiling water/bouillon. In a skillet or pan, add chopped onion and sauté in olive oil until light brown. Remove sauté from heat and add crushed garlic and chili powder and stir together for about three minutes. Add sautéed onions, garlic, and chili powder to soup pot and stir together. Add tomatoes, all beans, bay leaf, minced cilantro, and minced orange peel to soup pot and stir. Add salt and pepper to taste. Let chili cook at low medium heat (or very gentle simmer) for 15 minutes. Serve hot and when yams are tender. Allow remaining chili to cool and store in the refrigerator in a covered pot.

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Example of simple soup recipe, serves 4-6

Use organic ingredients when possible.

- 1 large soup pot or kettle
- 4 tablespoons of organic cold pressed extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup barley, rinsed and strained
- 3 organic carrots, cleaned and grated or peeled
- 2 organic leeks, cleaned and sliced
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ cup fresh minced organic parsley or chervil
- 1 cup chopped mushrooms (maitake, shiitake, oyster, &/or enoki)-not the common Button variety!
- 1 vegetable bouillon cube
- salt to taste
- 7-8 cups filtered water

Place soup pot on medium heat and allow the pot to heat up. Pour olive oil and barley into pot and stir continuously until warm (about 5-6 minutes). Add carrots, leeks, bay leaf, chervil/parsley, mushrooms, bouillon, salt, and water. Cook the soup over low-medium heat for 45-60 minutes. (Don't boil the soup, let it simmer). Add more water if necessary. Serve hot and when barley is tender. Allow remaining soup to cool and store in the refrigerator in covered soup pot.

Optional Herbs and Supplements for the Detox Week

- **Hydrolyzed Whey Protein powder** 10 grams of powder two times per day mixed in smoothies (See recipe on the previous page.) Whey protein helps the liver make more of a natural substance called glutathione, which helps get rid of toxins.
- **Pectasol powder** (*Modified Citrus Pectin-MCP, NOT pectin fiber*) 10 grams of powder two times per day mixed in smoothies (See recipe on previous page.). MCP is absorbed in the gut. It binds heavy metals in the body. They are then removed from the body by the kidneys and liver. Generally the easiest place to find MCP is on the internet.
- **Milk Thistle crude extract capsules** about 500-1000 mg three times per day with meals. This is a safe herb used to support the liver.
- **Dandelion Root capsules** about 500-1000 mg three times per day with meals. This is a safe herb used to support the kidneys and gallbladder.
- **Multivitamin tablet**, one daily with a meal to support general health
- **Turmeric capsules** about 500-1000 mg three times per day with meals. This is a safe herb used to reduce inflammation and support the gut.
- **Probiotics (any variety)** one capsule two times per day. This is a safe and supplement used to add healthy bacteria to the gut.

Continued on next page



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Optional Herbs and Supplements (con't.)

- **Fish Oil omega-3-essential-fatty-acids** 1000 mg total of EPA and DHA daily in liquid or capsule form. Vegetarian options include two tablespoons (T) daily of ground flax seed or flax oil mixed in smoothies. This supplement is used to reduce inflammation in the body.
- **Extra virgin, cold pressed, organic olive oil** two tablespoons in smoothies twice a day (and used in any amount in food for cooking). This healthy oil is rich in omega 3, 6, and 9 essential fatty acids. It helps the body to keep working right.
- **DAY OF FASTING ONLY: Activated Charcoal or Bentonite Clay capsules** about 500-1000 mg three times per day to bind gut toxins. Take only while fasting. Always take about one hour *before or after* eating or drinking anything else.

References:

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The information in this handout is for general education. It is not meant to be used by a patient alone. Please work with your health care practitioner to use the information in the best way possible to promote your health and happiness.

Contact:

Please contact Luke Fortney MD for questions and comments based on your experience: lfortney@meriter.com. Dr. Fortney offers this service as a courtesy and on behalf of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Integrative Medicine Program.

This handout was created by Luke Fortney, MD, former Asst. Professor, Integrative Medicine Program, Dept. of Family Medicine, School of Medicine and Public Health, University of Wisconsin-Madison and edited by Charlene Luchterhand MSSW of that program.

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NOTES

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