



How to
DETOX
With Real Foods

EXPERIENCE LIFE





Lemon-juice flushes. Coffee enemas. Fruit-only diets.

It's no wonder many people dismiss detoxing as a perennial fad.

But don't be too quick to reject the idea of detoxification altogether. Eating to promote your body's natural detox functions can help you look and feel better every day — without extreme interventions.

Many of your organs are equipped with detoxification superpowers, and with just a little nutritional support, their powers get stronger. Your liver, for example, neutralizes environmental pollutants that could trigger a range of health conditions. Your kidneys filter waste from your blood. Your skin releases toxic elements via sweat. And the digestive system shuttles waste out of your body with each bowel movement.

One of the best ways to reduce your toxic load is to eat in ways that optimize your body's natural detoxification systems and processes. Read on to discover the most detoxifying whole foods — and how they work their magic!



The Liver Supporters

Detox Superstars: Watercress, Brussels sprouts, kale, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, bok choy, onions, leeks, garlic

One of the liver's most important roles is to filter waste products and remove harmful substances from the blood after it passes through the stomach and intestines, and before it moves to the rest of the body.

When the liver finds something toxic, it first separates the dangerous substances from the blood (this is referred to as phase 1 detoxification). The liver's second step, or phase 2, is to rid your body of these harmful compounds by carrying them away in bile.

Your job is to eat foods that help keep both parts of this two-phase process running efficiently. Compounds found in the above list of foods help to increase the cellular response or sensitivity of enzymes in the liver and remove undesirable elements from your body.



The Hydrators

Detox Superstars: Water, herbal teas, fluid-rich produce (cucumbers, watermelon, iceberg lettuce, celery, etc.)

The human body is largely made up of water, so it makes sense that consuming water and water-rich produce helps maintain balance and protects against dehydration. It also helps you detoxify. Fluids allow the kidneys to remove waste products from your blood, sending important minerals back into the bloodstream and flushing the leftover compounds out in your urine.

Keep in mind that our municipal and rural water supplies are contaminated with a wide range of toxins, including pharmaceuticals and pesticides, says Robert Rountree, MD, family-medicine doctor and faculty member at the Institute for Functional Medicine. “Water-treatment plants are designed to get rid of the organisms that will kill you, not the things that will make you sick in the long run,” he says. To minimize your exposure, drink purified or filtered water.



The Metal Detectors

Detox Superstars: Turmeric, seaweed, cilantro, onions, garlic

Heavy metals like lead, mercury, and arsenic are ubiquitous in our environment and are known to cause organ damage and increase cancer risk. Fortunately, some common foods and spices can help prevent their accumulation.

For example, alginates — carbohydrates found in seaweed — are able to stick to heavy metals like lead and mercury and direct them out of the body through normal excretory processes.

Purchase seaweed from a reputable source that monitors the waters it's grown in to be sure it's not contaminated with heavy metals itself, says Rountree.



The Colon Cleansers

Detox Superstars: Lentils, raspberries, brown rice, oatmeal, artichokes, apples

Constipation is one sign that your body isn't detoxing the way it should. Getting plenty of fiber and water (which is drawn to the soluble fiber in foods like beans and oats, forming a gut-scrubbing gel) supports healthy, regular bowel movements — helping to remove waste products and other undesirable compounds from your body.

“If you're not moving things through your bowels, then you can't get rid of that total toxic load,” says Rountree.



The pH Balancers

Detox Superstars: Vegetables, citrus fruit

The pH balance in the body varies greatly by body part and region. The stomach, for example, is highly acidic, while the layer just outside the stomach lining is quite alkaline to prevent damage to the mucosa. And while the body is generally good at keeping itself balanced, research has shown that a diet heavy in animal proteins but low in nonstarchy vegetables and fruits can shift the pH of urine (which may reflect other imbalances in the body) to a more acidic makeup.

“Many enzymes that play a role in detoxification are pH-dependent,” says Deanna Minich, PhD, FACN, CNS, author of *Whole Detox*, which is why you want to maintain balance with a focus on green, leafy, and fresh foods. A diet that focuses on vegetables, fruits, and plant proteins is likely to have an alkalizing effect. When you eat loads of acid-forming foods — like meat, dairy, sugar, and processed carbohydrates — the body neutralizes pH with alkalizing minerals. And if there aren’t enough minerals in your diet, your body pulls them from your bones.



The Cultured Club

Detox Superstars: Yogurt, kefir, tempeh, sauerkraut, kimchi

Keeping the gut healthy is central to overall health, and the probiotic bacteria found in fermented foods aids in digestion and metabolism and normalizes bowel movements. Good bacteria may also have the ability to bind to toxins in food and water, such as those from heavy metals. When pregnant women in pollution-fraught Tanzania regularly ate probiotic yogurt during their second and/or third trimesters, they reduced their absorption of mercury by up to 36 percent and arsenic by as much as 78 percent, according to 2014 research from Canada's Lawson Health Research Institute.

The refrigerated section of the supermarket is your best source for probiotic-rich foods — not just yogurt and kefir, but also sauerkraut and pickled vegetables. “Products that are shelf stable have undergone pasteurization and canning processes that will heat the product and kill the beneficial bacteria,” says nutritionist Riana Giusti, MS, CN.



The Inflammation Fighters

Detox Superstars: Salmon, sardines, halibut, hemp oil, walnuts, flaxseeds

Foods high in omega-3 fatty acids support your body's detox efforts by helping keep systemic inflammation in check. Chronic inflammation kicks off reactions that create oxidative stress in the body. This leads to the production of free radicals, unstable compounds that can start a chain reaction and cause cellular damage that contributes to disease.

“When we have oxidative stress in the body, we have more free radicals,” says Minich. “That’s one more thing to detoxify, and that adds stress to the detoxification process.”

The form of omega-3 found in fish is the most effective; plant-based omega-3s found in walnuts and flaxseeds get converted in our bodies to the more powerful form, albeit in smaller amounts and at a relatively slow rate.



The Sweat Starters

Detox Superstars: Habanero peppers, serrano peppers, jalapeño peppers, organic green tea, organic black tea, organic coffee

The skin is your body's largest organ, providing a barrier that keeps most foreign substances out. It's also a surface through which some toxins can be excreted via your sweat. Certain foods can encourage perspiration and nudge your sweat glands to cleanse away.

"The capsaicin in hot peppers creates a heated, metabolically revved response," says Minich. Caffeine, she says, is also warming to the body — it stimulates certain liver enzymes.

Taking saunas and working up a sweat at the gym are good ways to support a detox-promoting lifestyle.

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