

Fad Diets Exposed: Cleanse Diets

Most detox regimens urge dieters to strip down their diets to the basics of water and raw fruits or vegetables. Some diets also recommend laxatives, enemas, or colonic irrigation to speed up the detox process. Dozens of books and hundreds of web sites promote "detox" regimens. But many dietitians and medical experts say these diets are pointless at best and dangerous at worst.

Like other fad diets, detox regimens promise quick weight losses that are ultimately unsustainable, critics say. They're based on "junk science" rather than a true understanding of how the body works. Worst of all, extreme diets like the Master Cleanse can cause serious side effects in vulnerable groups.

Detox proponents say the body is under constant assault from toxins such as smog, pesticides, artificial sweeteners, sugar, and alcohol. Without a periodic cleansing, these poisons accumulate in the body and cause headaches, fatigue, and a variety of chronic diseases.

But the science behind the detox theory is deeply flawed, says Peter Pressman, MD, an internal medicine specialist at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. The body already has multiple systems in place -- including the liver, kidneys, and gastrointestinal tract -- that do a perfectly good job of eliminating toxins from the body within hours of consumption.

The problem is most detox diets are so restrictive that they're ineffective for long-term use. And any weight loss that occurs during the diet is likely to be temporary.

"When people think about losing weight, they think about losing fat," she says. "But this is water lost and water gained."

