



To Cleanse Or Not To Cleanse?

Juice fasts have emerged as the trendiest way to sweep the body of toxins, “get back on track”—and, let’s face it, drop a few pounds. Two experts with differing opinions come clean.
By EMILIE DINGFELD

Juice cleanses have become the new diets. Frothy, moss-green concoctions are the beverages du jour, and tweeting about how hungry you are on Day 3 of your detox makes you a part of the club. Said to flush a toxin-filled system of rich meals, daily lattes and cocktail-hour indulgences, the advertised benefits are attractive: clear skin, clear eyes, boosted energy, lost pounds. Enterprising juice-delivery companies—typically dropping three to seven days’ worth of it on your doorstep—are popping up all over to make the process of swapping food for nutrient-rich juices that much more convenient.

Supporters claim that taking your meals in liquid form gives your digestive system a rest. When your body can skip the step of breaking down food, more energy can be directed toward reparative tasks, such as replenishing intestinal flora (leading to smoother digestion and improved mood), while the nutrient-rich fruit and vegetable juices offer an abundance of antioxidants (see Gwyneth’s glow).

Skeptics warn that this is a quick-fix approach that gives a false sense of security throughout the rest of the year, when you’re likely to re-engage in poor habits such as regular drinking and unhealthy eating. They say diminished caloric intake can cause weakness and inability to continue exercising, and that your body is perfectly capable of detoxing on its own.

What is clear is the fact that cleanses are not one-size-fits-all. For people with diabetes or heart disease, this type of diet could prove extremely dangerous. And when it comes to cleansing the liver of alcohol, new research suggests that taking a few days off drinking each week for a year is more effective than abstaining for a month—a sustained approach to cutting back.

We asked two respected experts with strong opinions on cleanses why we should/shouldn’t do them. Some of their points differ; others share common ground. Read between the lines. »

For Cleansing

Dr. Alejandro Junger is a New York cardiologist, author of *Clean* and the creator of the Clean Program, whose fans include Gwyneth Paltrow, Donna Karan and Demi Moore. While his program replaces two meals per day with juices, smoothies and clear soups, it allows one solid meal and snacks.

• ON CLEANSE DETRACTORS:

“Cleansing and detoxification programs are things that you do eat and drink, and things that you don’t eat and drink, to support the body’s existing cleansing and detoxification organs and systems. So somebody saying that they’re against cleansing and detoxification programs is like saying that they’re against exercising and nutrition programs to make the body stronger and faster. It’s kind of ridiculous. Cleansing programs have been used for thousands of years.”

• ON DIGESTION:

“If you eat a lot, your digestive system is working like crazy, and the body has to use up energy—it’s not like you plug yourself into a wall to digest. If you eat a big meal, you don’t feel like working or thinking. You feel like lying on the sofa and falling asleep.”

• ON LIQUID MEALS:

“Why do I give people—and why do most programs put people on—just liquids? Because there is very little digestion necessary. Nutrients are easily absorbed. When digestion is resting, the detoxification systems accelerate.”

• ON SOLID FOODS:

“Why do I recommend solid meals for lunch? Because if you’re living in the city, working and taking your kids to school, you

can’t really be in full detox mode—it’s too intense. If you go to a spa and you’re just lounging in the sun and taking a swim and getting a massage, that’s fine.”

• ON HOW LONG TO DO THE CLEAN PROGRAM FOR:

“Twenty-one days is what is needed to do something truly significant for your health.”

• ON HOW YOU’LL FEEL:

“The first couple of days are difficult because habits are changing, and then people are surging with energy. It’s not like you feel exhausted, like with juicing alone. With Clean, you feel exhilarated—people start cleaning their closets, their houses, and they can’t sleep sometimes with so much energy, which is great because they usually sleep more deeply.”

• ON TOXINS AND WEIGHT LOSS:

“Toxins cause irritation. Most are lipophilic—they dissolve in fat—so the body can only surround them with fat cells to buffer them, to bring down the irritation. That’s why toxicity is an important reason for the epidemic of obesity.”

• ON LIFESTYLE:

“We’re eating so much more than we were, evolutionarily, in the past. We used to spend a lot of time fasting, looking for food. Now it’s everywhere: your fridge, the deli, the movie theatre. Everywhere, you’re stuffing food in your face.”

• ON WHO SHOULD CLEANSE:

“If you eat pretty well and you’re sweating and peeing and you’re not constipated, cleansing is usually great. If you have diseases and other problems, then maybe it’s not enough. If you’re a monk, doing yoga every day, maybe you don’t need to cleanse at all. Maybe you need to toxify a bit!”

Against Cleansing

Jennifer Sygo is a registered dietitian and the director of nutrition at the Cleveland Clinic Canada; among her specialties are sports nutrition and weight management. She is also a nutrition columnist at the *National Post*.

• **ON THE MISUSE OF CLEANSSES:**

“It’s an area fraught with potential for more harm than good. I don’t want to exclude the possibility that someone could do a cleanse in a way that might work for them, but the vast majority of the time we tend to see it as the means to get to an end, usually a weight-loss target. It encourages things to be done in a rapid and not always safe way.”

• **ON BIG CLAIMS:**

“A large percentage of the time, the claims that are being made [about cleansing] are unfounded. Saying that you have to take X to get result Y, or this certain herb or extract or supplements...very often it’s a lot of smoke and mirrors.”

• **ON JUICING:**

“I don’t love juicing because people miss out on the benefits of the whole fruit or vegetable. Most evidence shows we’re better off eating a whole carrot than drinking carrot juice.”

• **ON MUSCLES AND METABOLISM:**

“This type of weight loss tends to be disproportionately from muscle as opposed to fat. So you end up with less muscle mass and a slower metabolism, because muscle burns quite a bit of energy, even at rest. Cutting protein out of your diet on a cleanse is another recipe for a slower metabolism.”

• **ON CELEBRITY CLEANSING:**

“I think juice cleanses are so popular in the celebrity world

because sometimes they have to lose weight for a part, a concert or an awards show. If they gain the weight [back], they can hire trainers or a chef to get back into shape.”

• **ON WHAT’S ACTUALLY HAPPENING:**

“There’s often a conception that there’s some type of magic. People think that a certain combination of foods or components of the cleanse—Beyoncé’s Master Cleanse is known for cayenne pepper and lemon juice—is some special formula that’s going to do something incredible. What you’re doing is not eating for a few days, so you lose weight.”

• **ON TOXINS AND WEIGHT LOSS:**

“We store some environmental toxins in our fat tissue. When you lose weight, especially a significant amount of weight, those toxins go from our fat cells into our bloodstream. The irony is, we’re seeing evidence that this can trigger events that can lead us to gain weight. The theory is that they slow thyroid function. It causes subtle changes that can impact your weight over the long run, or your ability to keep the weight off.”

• **ON LOSING WEIGHT:**

“Losing weight is not the problem, it’s keeping the weight off. I can starve anyone any number of different ways. So, great, you lose weight, but what happens six months from now, when you’re the same as before, plus five pounds?”

• **ON THE CLEANSE ALTERNATIVE:**

“Very often it’s just a matter of cleaning up your habits. I prefer to frame it that way. You might say, ‘I’m really going to focus on whole foods, or lean protein and lots of vegetables, for a period of time,’ and use that to build a healthier lifestyle. I can live with that.” □

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