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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
National Institutes of Health



# "Detoxes" and "Cleanses": What You Need To Know

## What are "detoxes" and "cleanses"?

A variety of "detoxification" diets, regimens, and therapies—sometimes called "detoxes" or "cleanses"—have been suggested as ways to remove toxins from your body, lose weight, or promote health.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends [chelation therapy](#), a type of chemical detoxification procedure, for removing toxic metals from the body in some specific serious cases. This fact sheet does not address that type of detoxification.

"Detoxification" programs may involve a variety of approaches. These include:

- Fasting
- Drinking only juices or similar beverages
- Eating only certain foods
- Using dietary supplements or other commercial products
- Using herbs
- Cleansing the colon (lower intestinal tract) with enemas, laxatives, or colon hydrotherapy (also called "colonic irrigation" or "colonics")
- Reducing environmental exposures
- Using a sauna

These programs may be advertised commercially, offered at health centers, or part of naturopathic treatment.

**Some "detoxification" or "cleansing" programs can be unsafe and falsely advertised. For more information on safety, see the "What about safety?" section below.**



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## What does the research say about “detoxes” and “cleanses”?

There have been only a small number of studies on “detoxification” programs in people. While some have had positive results on weight and fat loss, insulin resistance, and blood pressure, the studies themselves have been of low quality—with study design problems, few participants, or lack of peer review (evaluation by other experts to ensure quality).

A 2015 review concluded that there was no compelling research to support the use of “detox” diets for weight management or eliminating toxins from the body. A 2017 review said that juicing and “detox” diets can cause initial weight loss because of low intake of calories, but they tend to lead to weight gain once a person resumes a normal diet.

There have been no studies on long-term effects of “detoxification” programs.

## What about safety?

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration ([FDA](#)) and Federal Trade Commission ([FTC](#)) have taken action against several companies selling detox/cleansing products because they (1) contained hidden ingredients and may pose a significant health risk; (2) were marketed using false claims that they could treat serious diseases; or (3) in the case of medical devices used for colon cleansing, were marketed for unapproved uses.
- There is limited clinical evidence validating colonic irrigation and insufficient evidence for its prescribed uses. Colon cleansing procedures may have side effects, some of which can be serious. Harmful effects are more likely in people with a history of gastrointestinal disease, colon surgery, severe hemorrhoids, kidney disease, or heart disease.
- Some juices used in “detoxes” and “cleanses” that haven’t been pasteurized or treated in other ways to kill harmful bacteria can make people sick. The illnesses can be serious in children, elderly people, and those with weakened immune systems.
- Some juices are made from foods that are high in oxalate, a naturally occurring substance. Examples of high-oxalate foods include leafy green vegetables and beets. Persons susceptible to kidney stone formation should limit their consumption of high-oxalate foods as these foods can present a health threat.

- People with diabetes should follow the eating plan recommended by their health care team. If you have diabetes, consult your health care providers before making major changes in your eating habits.
- Diets that severely restrict calories or the types of food you eat usually don't lead to lasting weight loss and may not provide all the nutrients you need.
- "Detoxification" programs may include laxatives, which can cause diarrhea. Acute diarrhea can lead to dehydration and malabsorption.
- Drinking large quantities of water and herbal tea and not eating any food for days in a row could lead to dangerous electrolyte imbalances.

Take charge of your health—talk with your health care providers about any [complementary health approaches](#) you use, including any "detoxes" or "cleanses." Together, you and your health care providers can make shared, well-informed decisions.

## Are all fasting programs considered "detoxes" and "cleanses"?

Although some fasting programs are advertised with "detoxification" claims, other fasting programs—including intermittent fasting and periodic fasting—are being researched for health promotion, disease prevention, improved aging, and in some cases weight loss. But there are no firm conclusions about their effects on human health. Also, fasting can cause headaches, fainting, weakness, and dehydration.

## For More Information

### NCCIH Clearinghouse

The NCCIH Clearinghouse provides information on NCCIH and complementary and integrative health approaches, including publications and searches of Federal databases of scientific and medical literature. The Clearinghouse does not provide medical advice, treatment recommendations, or referrals to practitioners.

**Toll-free in the U.S.:** 1-888-644-6226

**Telecommunications relay service (TRS):** 7-1-1

**Website:** <https://www.nccih.nih.gov>

**Email:** [info@nccih.nih.gov](mailto:info@nccih.nih.gov)

### Know the Science

NCCIH and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) provide tools to help you understand the basics and terminology of scientific research so you can make well-informed decisions about your health. [Know the Science](#) features a variety of materials, including interactive modules, quizzes, and videos, as well as links to informative content from Federal resources designed to help consumers make sense of health information.

[Explaining How Research Works](#) (NIH)

[Know the Science: How To Make Sense of a Scientific Journal Article](#)

[Understanding Clinical Studies](#) (NIH)

### PubMed®

A service of the National Library of Medicine, PubMed® contains publication information and (in most cases) brief summaries of articles from scientific and medical journals. For guidance from NCCIH on using PubMed, see [How To Find Information About Complementary Health Practices on PubMed](#).

**Website:** <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

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