

May 2011

Steeped!



Sunny daffodils, robins on the lawn, and joggers everywhere, it is clear that spring is

here! With the shedding of our winter coats we feel a little lighter, and many of us start itching for change. We clean our houses, try a new haircut, shop for a summer wardrobe (even if it is still too cold to wear our purchases!) and look for signs of love in the air. Springtime is a symbolic rebirth of many things, including our personal goals. Often people make a new commitment to their health in the spring as soon as they sense that bathing-suit season is approaching. New workouts, new diets and the best of intentions. In this newsletter we cover “detox”: what it means, why you may or may not need to do it and some strategies for doing it naturally. Happy spring!

All About “Detox”

In the last few years there has been a lot of talk about “detox-ing”— one only has to visit any health food store to hear about all of the “toxins” that we carry needing to be purged. Interesting, considering that our body is so miraculously suited to this very process.

Our digestive tract, skin, and respiratory system all serve as absorptive surfaces to take in what we are exposed to in the environment. Not all of what we absorb is bad, but it is a representation of what is in the environment. The cleaning products we use, the cosmetics we apply, our medications, where we work and what we do while we’re there, and very importantly, the food we eat, all play a role. Once absorbed into the body, these substances are broken down by enzymes throughout the body.

The liver is the primary organ of biotransformation where these same substances are broken down into metabolites that are then eliminated by the kidneys via urine, thus detoxifying the body. Many of these metabolites are inactivated by this process, while others become active (sometimes the case with medications) so that they can exert an effect on the body. This process consists of two phases:

Phase 1 involves altering the chemical form of these substances in preparation for Phase 2

Phase 2 involves inactivating these substances and so that they can be eliminated from the body.

Adverse drug reactions or interactions with other drugs and/or herbs often come as a result of the Cytochrome P450 groups of medications, which all get processed as a part of Phase 1. These include warfarin, many antidepressants, anaesthetics, anti-inflammatories, hormones, oral contraceptives, statins, beta-blockers etc. When several of these things are present in the body, the enzymes that metabolize these substances may get shut-off or turned on excessively so either a higher or a lower concentration of drug is present which can increase the chance for adverse reactions. Hence many of the cautions with combining certain medications or herbs (and smoking, alcohol and grapefruit juice).

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The idea that the liver can get “over-burdened” with “toxins” may be a result of metabolism by-products accumulating and acting on the body in an unhealthy way, as well the direct effects on the body from our environmental exposures. Thus many “detox” strategies involve supporting the liver so that it can get rid of these toxins. The kidneys work to eliminate these metabolites by filtering them into the urine, so many “detox” products also act as diuretics to increase the amount of urine produced. “Detox” diets are often centered around a basic whole-food diet and may also involve the elimination of alcohol, caffeine, sugars, gluten, dairy, eggs, red meats and certain other foods from the diet. The idea is to give the body a break from our regular diets, or “get back on track” with healthy foods. The result is often more energy, better digestion, improved mood or an amelioration of symptoms, provided that one is eating enough and getting adequate sleep. More extreme versions of “detox-ing” and “cleanses” exist, and some of these strategies may be helpful in some cases, although there is definitely a potential to cause harm if for example, there is an underlying medical condition.

Some Natural Detox Strategies:

- ◆ Start the day by drinking a glass of warm water with the juice of half a lemon
- ◆ Drink lots of water throughout the day
- ◆ Eliminate sugars (including artificial sweeteners, honey, syrup, molasses etc), all alcohol and caffeine
- ◆ Cut down on red meat, but be sure to consume enough protein (chicken and fish are great options)
- ◆ Poach, bake, boil or eat your foods raw rather than frying
- ◆ Moderate physical activity encourages sweating, which is an alternate route for eliminating “toxins”
- ◆ Practice some form of deep breathing, meditation, prayer or mindfulness. Simply being aware of and taking stock of one’s life can have profound effects on health.

Herbs to support Detox (All available at Distinctly Tea):

- ◆ **Dandelion Root:** as a diuretic and liver-nourishing herb, dandelion root has long been used in treating liver conditions. It stimulates digestion, urine production and supports the liver.
- ◆ **Milk Thistle:** considered a hepato-protective herb, milk thistle has traditionally been used in the treatment of liver diseases, including jaundice and cirrhosis.
- ◆ **Green Tea and Matcha:** although these do contain caffeine, there is a lot of good evidence to support the use of green tea and matcha in cancer cases, for mild weight loss and promoting good health.
- ◆ **Rooibos:** a very nourishing, tasty and caffeine-free alternative to other sugary drinks, rooibos has immune boosting properties, aids insomnia and can help to improve allergies.
- ◆ **Herbal Teas:** peppermint, chamomile, lavender, rose....these are all caffeine-free and are a very relaxing way to un-wind at the end of a long day. Different blends each have their own medicinal properties and tastes...experiment to find one that you like!

The bottom line when considering a “detox” is to remember that the body is specifically designed to do this on its own. A healthy diet and regular exercise should be a part of your lifestyle as these are the most important factors in maintain health, regardless of whether you are “detox-ing” or not. Some products, including herbs, can be helpful in supporting this process but it is very difficult to undo years of damage in a matter of a few weeks. That being said, the need to “detox” very much depends on your lifestyle: the healthier you are, the better your body is equipped to eliminate what you take in. However if there is a history of regular exposure to cigarette smoke, chemicals, alcohol, or medications etc. it may be possible that the body is less able to process everything adequately. Remember to consult your doctor, naturopathic doctor, herbalist, or midwife if you are pregnant, before undertaking any new health protocol if you suffer from any chronic illness, have severe allergies or on any medication.

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