

# TO DETOX, OR

*Is there any scientifically beneficial basis whatsoever behind detox regimes?*



**R**ecently, 'detox' seems to have become a byword for atonement for excess eating and drinking. I prefer to do without any excess, but all complementary health systems advocate some sort of detox – from giving up certain foods to fasting – so the health obsessive part of me wanted to find out whether a beneficial form really exists.

My research, however, turned my ambivalence to confusion. The pro-detox lobby talk of 'tuning up' the body's functions, ideally twice a year, and helping the body rid itself of 'accumulated toxins' with

special supplements and products, and rigorous regimes. I just didn't see how that would help people who drink and eat, or drink and diet too much – surely the excess can't be undone?

Every medical professional I spoke to reiterated that our bodies have a perfectly effective system that gets rid of anything we don't need. This intricate system consists of the liver, kidneys and intestines, as well as the skin, lungs and lymph nodes. We excrete what our body doesn't need or can't metabolise.

But what if we sense that what's going in and coming out doesn't feel quite right? And if our

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# NOT TO DETOX?

*Lorna V sets out to discover the truth at one of Europe's prime detox destinations*



bodies have a perfectly designed system, then why are so many diseases (such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and cancer) on the increase? Surely the system, like any other, can get a bit cranky or break down? Given all the studies showing the positive links between nutrition and health, might there not be some basis for sometimes cutting out certain foods?

### *Work with the body*

Henri Chenot's book *Pure Health: The Secrets of Well-being and Harmony* (Metro Books) is about

putting the body in an optimum state for a healthy way of living that maximises our energy and well-being, and prevents health problems and disease in the long term. Instead of thinking of detox as giving up all toxins once a year, Chenot's premise is much more sensible: reduce toxins all year round, while eating in a way that works with and aids the body's natural daily way of operating.

In practice, this amounts to a very light breakfast, carbs at lunchtime, protein in the evening, fruit before – rather than after – other foods, and lots of vegetables with every meal. For those of us who don't >>>

## BEAT THE TOXINS ALL YEAR ROUND

Forget faddy detox products and follow these easy tips

**1 Chew, chew, chew.** Chewing food prompts the brain to find the necessary enzymes needed to process it. The more you chew, the easier it is for the body to do its job naturally, namely to digest and get rid of toxins.

**2 Vary what you eat on a daily basis so your body receives maximum nutrients.** Eating the same 'healthy' food every day isn't healthy. 'Our chemical system needs all sorts of food,' says Chinese medicine practitioner Marie Pierre.

**3 Ditch the cappuccino.** That daily cappuccino or latte loads your digestive system with untold toxins. 'The combination of frothed up milk and coffee sits in the intestines and is hard to digest,' says Dr Maximilian Mayrhofer.

**4 Consider complex carbs at lunchtime (wholegrains and pulses), and protein for dinner.** 'Carbohydrates need alkalinity and protein needs acidity to be processed,' explains Pierre. Separating the two makes it easier for the digestive process.

**5 Don't binge: a week of no alcohol followed by a binge is damaging.** 'It's like putting your body through a tsunami,' says Pierre.

**6 If you're waking up thirsty, assess what you're eating.** 'When you need water during the night, that's your liver struggling to do its job,' Pierre says.

**7 Go for carpaccio!** Raw (good quality, of course) meat takes two hours to digest, compared with well-done steak, which takes five hours. 'Fried potatoes and meat take a minimum of six hours,' says Pierre. 'Add alcohol, sugar or coffee and it's several hours more.'

**8 Switch to rye bread.** 'In the past 10 years, the gluten content of bread has increased, making bread lighter and tastier, but also more difficult to digest,' says Mayrhofer.

**9 Don't ditch the carbs.** 'The protein myth is damaging women's health,' Mayrhofer stresses. 'We need carbohydrates for fuel.'

>>> eat healthily all the time, he advocates a detox every now and again, but his detox might as well be called something else, as it's got nothing to do with the kind of gimmicky diets we're used to hearing about.

The small spa town of Merano, near the Italian-Austrian border, is rather surreal, like a bilingual Grimm fairytale setting. Palace Merano is a five-star hotel that also has a surreal element: all guests experience the unique spa Espace Henri Chenot, where the 'bar' is a tea bar, and there are no mini-bars in the elegant rooms.

I thought I'd be gracious and resurrect my school German when I arrived and wondered if I'd misunderstood that this was no ordinary spa hotel, but more *wie in der Schule*: like being at school. The timetable I was given before I even unpacked confirmed I'd understood correctly. And what a stupendous week of schooling it was.

### *Under the microscope*

The cornerstone of the Chenot method is to combine Western medicine with Chinese, bringing Western medicine in line with holistic principles to create wellness rather than just treat disease, and Chinese medicine into the 21st century with sophisticated technology and methodology. That means doctors and alternative practitioners figuring out together what's best for your all-round health.

A thorough medical assessment started with filling out several pages of medical details, including family medical history, followed by detailed body composition and bioenergetic scans that assess individual organs. I also had thorough blood and urine tests including a full hormonal profile. There's a folder filled with all this material that you carry around at all times.

The emphasis is not on where you're at during your week at Espace Henri Chenot, but where you'll be when you leave: how and what you will eat, what exercise is right for your body type, how you can avoid any health problems to which you may be prone, and what your body needs to be more energetic.

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*Medical professionals state that our bodies already have a perfectly effective system that gets rid of anything we don't need*

## VIEWPOINT: IS A DETOX WORTH IT?

Henri Chenot himself is the best ad for his treatments, looking far younger than his 69 years. When I put it to him that doctors and scientists insist detox doesn't work, he beams: 'I agree with them! It's true that detox has become fashionable lately. But here, we approach things differently. We have the labs, we do the tests before and after, and anyone can see the medical evidence. We have a research laboratory and we constantly produce reports.'

'For each individual, the [detox cure] process is different,' he explains. 'We look at their genetics and quality of life, and we study their nutritional and health profiles, the degree to which toxins have disturbed the body's equilibrium and how the body's system is functioning. We clean out the system – you wouldn't refurbish a home without cleaning it first. The week spent here is a starter week.'

### *Find your equilibrium*

The emphasis is on finding a healthy balance, and sticking to it. A January detox is the equivalent of working out obsessively for the month of January because you ate too much in December and then doing zero exercise for the next 11 months. Can you then run a marathon? Nope. Just as your body is likely to be traumatised by sudden excessive exercise, that's exactly what you're doing to your body when you detox in isolation – and without medical supervision. Conversely, if you exercise regularly, every now and again you might work more intensively with a personal trainer, or set yourself a challenge.

My healthy lifestyle was evident from the tests. But it came as no surprise to me when my blood tests revealed a dairy intolerance that was off the scale, and that this (along with egg intolerance) was the root of my recent digestive problems. It's probably the root, too, of the skin breakouts, stomach aches, queasiness and digestive problems I've had over the years – not hormones, stress, sugar, caffeine, too much fruit or any of the other reasons I've ever been given.

**1** *All you need to do is eat healthily every day.* 'Many people get into a pattern of overindulging and then detoxing,' says dietitian Ana-Kristina Skrapac, spokesperson for the British Dietetic Association. 'The commercial side of detoxing tries to promote the idea that with a detox, you are purifying the body from alcohol and other toxins, and getting rid of undigested sugars and fats. This is sensationalist; avoiding alcohol totally is not necessary. If we overindulge and eat a high-fat diet, a detox won't cure this.'

**2** *A detox regime doesn't change a thing.* 'The whole detox process is daft,' declares Sir Colin Berry, professor of pathology at Queen Mary, University of London. 'We're all

living longer and we're all fitter. Everything you need is converted by your body to give energy. Some compounds produced [during the conversion process] damage [the body's] tissues. During the body's detox process, these compounds get combined with another chemical that makes them safe. So a potentially dangerous compound is converted into a safe one by a metabolic step.'

**3** *People who drink a lot and then detox will gain nothing.* 'You don't change the body's metabolism or do anything helpful,' says Berry. 'The body will go on breaking down alcohol in the way it always has done. Also, bear in mind that if your body hasn't had to use the enzymes to metabolise a toxin for a while, it becomes harder to do so.'

It might have been some time before I would have thought to get an intolerance test, but a detox certainly alerted me. Detoxing, however, isn't the reason I'd recommend Espace Henri Chenot. You can't put a price on this level of total healthcare. Or rather, you can.

*A week's stay at Espace Henri Chenot, Palace Merano (palace.it), costs from €4,420 (about £3,500) including the Comprehensive Henri Chenot Health Programme, seven nights' accommodation in a classic double room, meals for the week and the compulsory medical visit.*