



Detox Diet

What is a Detox Diet?

Detox diets vary a huge amount in the different regimes they ask you to follow, what to eat, what not to eat and in some cases advising you to take various detoxifying agents. Detox Diets usually involve the avoidance of foods or food groups including wheat, dairy and alcohol as well as all processed foods in general.

They usually have one thing in common; they are restrictive and difficult to stick to for any length of time. They can be endurance tests of will power and self denial!

Promoters of detox diets tell us that as our bodies are being constantly bombarded by toxins such as cigarette smoke, pollution and pesticides to mention a few. They propose that these toxins can build up over time and cause symptoms such as weight gain, headaches, dull skin and bloating. However there is no evidence that our bodies are unable to get rid of the waste products our bodies produce and come in contact with.

Detox diets often recommend the use of what are known as “detoxification aids” such as herbal supplements such as milk thistle or pre- and probiotics. Milk thistle is thought to enhance liver regeneration and increase its detoxification function. The jury is still out as to whether this is the case; there is simply not enough evidence at this point. Pro- and or prebiotics are usually specifically aimed at improving gut and immune health. They also help to reduce the risk of colorectal cancer by protecting from damage by various toxins.

Do you need to follow a Detox Diet?

If you have a well balanced diet and include all food groups as recommended in the Food Pyramid there is no need for detox diets. In reality people often use them as a kick start to a new healthy lifestyle, maybe as a New Year’s resolution. If you want to use a detox diet as a means to healthier you, then short term use is fine, any longer may lead to nutritional deficiencies. Check out our food pyramid on the INDI homepage as well as the numerous fact sheets on improving the overall quality and balance of your diet.

But I feel better when following a Detox diet.....

The benefits seen can be explained easily. Fewer headaches? This is likely due to the fact that you are fully hydrated and have cut back on if not eliminated alcohol and caffeine intake. Does your skin look better? Well of course with all that water you’re drinking! It’s likely that eating more fruit and vegetables, which are full of healthy vitamins and antioxidants, is giving your skin a healthier glow. Feeling less bloated is often due to the fact that you have eaten far more fibre and so your bowel is working properly and often reduces bloating.

You are likely to lose weight as well as you will have cut back on calories and increased your activity level. The weight loss that you experience can often be very rapid but when you go back to a regular balanced diet you often gain back the weight you lost, and more as the rate at which your body burns off calories has slowed down.

Are there any advantages?



Detox diets encourage you to eat more fruit and vegetables, drink more water as well as cutting back on processed foods. It is also very empowering to feel like you are taking control of your diet which can boost your mood and motivate you to continue with positive changes

Are there disadvantages?

Detox diets can often have some nasty side effects. Following a strict detox diet for more than a few days may lead to nutritional deficiencies. Many detox diets recommend cutting out dairy foods which means you are missing out on calcium containing foods putting you at risk for osteoporosis. It is recommended that we eat three portions of dairy products every day to maintain healthy bones. See our osteoporosis fact sheet for more information on how much calcium you need everyday. Side effects often experienced while on a detox diet include feeling tired, headaches, light-headedness and nausea. These symptoms are often usually caused by a lack of food as detox diets are often low in calories. This lack of food can lead to cravings for high sugar and high fat foods which can knock you off your diet and do a lot of damage in a short space of time

What's the verdict?

If you really want to try a detox diet, look for one that includes all the food groups. Don't follow a detox diet for more than a week. Use it as a kick start or stepping stone to making more long term lifestyle changes – that way you can feel great and have fabulous skin all year round. Check out our fact sheet section on the INDI homepage for more practical information on how to improve your diet in a healthy way.

If you exercise regularly and follow a healthy balanced diet most of the time there is no need to get bitten by the detox bug.

If you would like to contact a dietitian go to our “Find a Dietitian” Section on the homepage.