



To cleanse or not to cleanse

BY DR. JULIE T. CHEN

I've been hearing a lot about cleanses. Are they safe? Have I been neglecting my health by not doing them? I've also been thinking about doing colonics but I'm scared. Having said that...if it's good for me, I definitely want to try it. So, Dr. Julie, could you please shed some light and info on colonics and cleanses?

I recently had a friend ask me about my opinion on colonics; whether it was safe for her to get a colonic or not. I have many patients who have, on their own, gone to get colonics without first informing me and many of them love the experience because they felt "so clean" afterwards. But, my answer for my friend is that I personally am not a fan of them for my patients.

The natural function of our intestinal tract is to cleanse itself. There is no physiological need to further clean above and beyond what it naturally does as its inherent function. Some people may want the colonic because they are constipated but it would be better to place someone who has constipation on a regular bowel regimen, rather than an occasional colonic. Some believe it's a useful tool for the initiation of weight loss. True—until you resume eating and regular bowel functioning.

The process of the colonics is concerning to me because it disrupts natural intestinal micro-flora and has the potential to cause either microscopic or clinically significant intestinal tears. So, based on this idea of unnecessary trauma and risk to our bowel, my usual recommendation for those seeking cleanses is to use food as a natural non-harmful cleanse.

Fibre acts as a natural cleansing tool for the body. By eating a stringent vegan/vegetarian diet for a few days, you can utilize

the natural minerals, vitamins, fibre, phytonutrients, and water in the plant-based diet to cleanse your system without having to worry about potential mechanical trauma to your intestinal tract or physiological risk.

My usual recommendation for patients who are looking for a stringent cleanse to help calm and clean their system every few weeks or months, is for the patients to eat vegan/vegetarian for three days, take part in a vegetable-based juice fast for 2-3 days and resume that vegan/vegetarian diet again for three days after the juice fast.

This regimen can cause some fatigue when you first do the dietary cleanse and thus the juicing days should be on days where you do not need to be very active and can rest; weekends are likely the best time to be doing the juicing days. To make the juice, you would use a wide variety of vegetables and put them through a juicer and drink it fresh at each meal time.

I would recommend about five 8-ounce glasses per day of the vegetable juice for those 2-3 days of your fast. Do not add sugars or processed foods or additives in the juice.

This juice cleanse should only be implemented once you have obtained approval and clearance by your physician. It can be dangerous for those on certain medications (i.e., warfarin/Coumadin) and those with certain medical conditions such as diabetes, kidney



problems, hormonal issues, liver diseases and electrolyte/mineral disorders—just to name a few. This is because the types of food, fluid shifts/amounts and minerals/vitamins are altered from your natural diet and can cause issues in an otherwise stable medical condition.

So, for those of you interested in doing a cleanse, consider food as your friend and not your enemy. It's just a matter of choosing the right foods. And this method of cleansing is much less risky and significantly less medically concerning than colonics.

As I had mentioned to my curious friend who had asked me about the colonic, I think our money would be better off spent on purchasing healthy nutritious foods that act as a natural cleansing tool for our system; as Mother Nature had originally intended them to be, when she created the vast array of colorful fruits and vegetables grown in nature and made easily available to us at our neighborhood grocery stores. **Z**

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