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“CLEANSES-DANGEROUS OR A GOOD IDEA?”

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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. Here’s why...

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. Other people may want the colonic because they lose some weight with it, but that will come back once 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. Here’s how...

Fiber 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, fiber, 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 3 days before a vegetable-based juice fast for 2-3 days and again for 3 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 machine and drink it fresh at each meal time.

I would recommend about 5 8-ounce glasses per day of the vegetable juice for those 2-3 days that you are consuming just the juice. 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 first. 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, just to name a few factors, 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.

Dr. Julie T. Chen, M.D. an integrative medicine physician who is board-certified in internal medicine and is also fellowship-trained and board-certified in integrative medicine. She has her own medical practice in San Jose, CA, is the medical director of corporation wellness at several Silicon Valley-based corporations, is on several medical expert panels of websites as well as non-profit organizations, is a recurring monthly columnist for several national magazines, and has been featured in radio, TV, newspaper, and magazine interviews. She incorporates many types of healing modalities into her practice including, but is not limited to, medical acupuncture, cupuncture, clinical hypnotherapy, strain-counterstrain osteopathic manipulations, and biofeedback. To learn more about Dr. Julie, you can check out her website at www.makinghealthyez.com.

