

The York University Staff Association Health and Wellness News and Views

These days just about everyone knows someone who is doing a cleanse. Cleanses seem to be the hottest trend around. A variety of celeb-endorsed regimens that promise to change your life. Therefore the question on the minds of many is "to cleanse or not to cleanse". Cleanses are said to do everything from detoxing the body, to helping you lose extra weight, to boosting energy and strengthening immunity. The most common cleanses involve the process of severely limiting food intake for some period of time. Often replacing food with a shake/smoothly or fruit juice. Believers in cleansing consider cleanses to provide a long list of health benefits, however, doctors never seem to prescribe cleanses for their patients. Are cleanses safe? Do they really work? And will they help you lose weight like the celebrities claim they do?

In one camp you have the alternative health professionals naturopaths, nutritionists, chiropractors, and other alternative medical providers, and on the other side you have doctors and dietitians whom many consider cleanses to be fad diets that deprive you of essential nutrients (and then trigger binges). Unfortunately, several of us find ourselves smack in the middle of the cleansing debate, trying to make healthy decisions based on the information that we hear.

Can a cleanse really help you lose weight? A cleanse is essentially a fast. Obviously fasting of any type will lead to some weight loss. Depending on the type of cleanse, much of that is likely to be water and even muscle mass. When people go into a cleanse thinking that it's the solution to their weight issue, they're in for a big surprise. Be aware, the weight you lose will most likely come back as soon as you reintroduce solid foods in to your diet, especially if you fall back into unhealthy eating habits. It's important that if you do start your diet with a cleanse that you have a plan for when the cleanse is up. Another weight-related downfall, a cleanse usually means you aren't fueling your body adequately for a normal workout routine. Taking an intense cardio class while on a cleanse is not usually recommended, nor is it a good idea. Some programs recommend you limit your activity to walks and low-impact exercise while you are on a cleanse. Which means you're burning far fewer calories than you could be while continuing with an important exercise program. You are missing out on metabolism boosting, strength training workouts as well. While it's not always a bad idea to give your body a break and incorporate more plant based food choices in to your diet, if you're trying to lose weight and are thinking of going on a juice cleanse to do so, be sure to have a healthy eating plan in place to return to and its effect on your workout routine is definitely something to consider.

Do cleanses really rid the body of toxins? First we must clarify what is toxic to the human body? Most people might start this list with things like refined sugar, alcohol and smoking, which are good answers, but interestingly enough, almost everything we consume is toxic on a certain level. Water can be toxic. Vitamin C can be toxic. The process of cooking food creates toxins... The reason that we can consume almost all foods and maintain a healthy body is because we have a number of extremely impressive organs that are specifically designed to remove toxins from the body. Our bodies naturally detoxify every day. The liver, kidneys, and intestines consistently rid the body of harmful toxins. So the question remains. Is there any benefit to a detoxifying cleanse? There can be a time and place for everything. If you need to use a cleanse to get you out of bad eating habits in hopes of getting on track to a healthier lifestyle, cleansing can surely have a place. If you feel the need for a mental break from making your daily food choices, then a short cleanse might be the answer. But don't lean on cleansing as a crutch for an otherwise unhealthy lifestyle. In my opinion, there is no cleanse that can eliminate harmful invaders faster than your built-in clean-up system. The best 'cleansing' strategy is a healthy diet, regular exercise, and not smoking.

The immune system is a unique network of sub-systems that are comprised of cells and organs. It is the body's first and only natural line of defense. Protecting the body from foreign invaders that will cause immediate or long term damage. Maintaining a strong immune system is necessary for a healthy body. But do cleanses actually strengthen the bodies immunity? It has been proven that nutritional deficiencies can certainly impair immune function, therefore it is important to maintain a healthy diet packed with plenty of fruits and vegetables. Does it matter if those nutrients come in the form of whole foods or juice? Not really. A simple cleanse may give the body a break from the effort expended in digesting complex whole foods. It can also serve to ease the mind and make it simpler to choose foods that can be turned into natural juice, thus allowing for an overall healthier diet. Some may think of a cleanse as a tune-up for your body and mind. Personally I find it hard to replace the pleasure of eating whole, real foods. Specific immune system boosting foods are natural Yogurt, garlic, tea, sweet potatoes, and mushrooms.

Almost everyone's diet could use some improvement. Maintaining good health is a conscious, ongoing commitment. Cleansing is a personal decision. If you choose to cleanse, just remember: it's what you give your body after the cleanse that will determine your health for the future. The key to optimal health is finding the balance that ultimately sets you up for long-term success and true vitality.