



Crunch time: January is a big month in the health and fitness industry with thousands looking to put the worst excesses of the holiday season behind them

# Detox dilemmas

What is it? Does it work? How should you go about it? Edwina Ings-Chambers reports

By now the turkey, mince pies, lashings of cream and carafes of wine are but dim and distant memories. Unfortunately, the regret that comes free with the extra pounds we're carrying refuses to recede so quickly. The result, for many of us, is that as we welcome the new year we also welcome uncomfortable thoughts of detox. The question we rarely ask is: should we?

To start with, we need to be clear exactly what detox means – or, more precisely, what it doesn't mean. "Detox" really is quite meaningless," says Dr Frankie Phillips, a registered dietician and spokesperson for the British Dietetic Association (BDA). "It doesn't mean anything scientifically. It's really just marketing speak which plays on people's concerns about consumption. And because it's a meaningless term we can't really say if it works or not."

Even so, most of us understand what "detox" means, and that is to feel as though we've purged ourselves – either through diet, exercise, massage, or even spa treatments – of our eating excesses and, ideally, to lose a few pounds and gain a positive burst of energy in the process.

Consequently, in the health and fitness industry "January tends to be the big boom time," says Mark Thwaites, spa manager at Chewton Glen in Hampshire. Clients go to Chewton Glen for a mixture of

treatments from saunas to massage to a foot detox treatment (there are more pores on our feet than anywhere else so toxins can be drawn out more easily here) but, warns Thwaites, "unfortunately there is no miracle cure-all". And that includes detox.

This may come as a shock to anyone hoping that blending a few sprigs of broccoli and a handful of caraway seeds for a few days will be enough to digest away recent overindulgences. However, this approach, if adopted in a more scientific and detailed way, is not without its supporters. Nutritionist Christina Barton is a staunch advocate of the traditional dietary detox. "I think clean bowels prevent disease and there is this lovely expression that when you're green inside [from eating so many green vegetables] you're clean inside."

It is, says Barton, more a question of doing detox properly. That means ensuring you're ingesting all the crucial vitamins and minerals with the food you are consuming and also deciding your time

limit and slotting it into a period of the week or month when it won't matter if you feel too weak.

"You can do a three-day fast or a three-day detox, which helps to rid the body of toxins and cleanse the blood," says Barton. "If you detox for five days it begins the process of healing and rebuilding the immune system. And if anyone was brave enough to do it for 10 days then that can take care of any problems before they arrive and help fight any illnesses that could be lurking quietly.

"All the time we're tired, and we don't really realise it's because it's all related to the immune system. If you have a healthy immune system you're firing on all cylinders. The point of detoxing or fasting is to give the body a rest and to let it rebalance itself. A lot of people have these half diets, where they have white bread and lots of refined products." It's important, she feels, to replace that at least from time to time with a vitamin- and mineral-rich diet and it's best to seek professional advice to ensure that you consume essential

nutrients. For example, says Barton, juicing "is one of the fastest methods I know of for getting nutrients into the blood system, though she also recommends products such as nettle tea, milk thistle and dandelion, which "are really good for supporting the liver".

Alex Jamieson is another advocate of detox. Jamieson, the girlfriend and health restorer of Morgan Spurlock (he of *Super Size Me* fame) is also the author of *The Great American Detox Diet* (Rodale), a devoted plea to all of us to fix our diets.

By "shovelling in junk food we never give our bodies a chance to rest and to heal properly", she says. This means "we're never truly thriving, only surviving".

Jamieson believes it's important to cut certain foods out of our diets but as a long-term measure, not a short-term fix.

For her, the term detox goes further than our digestive tracts. "I think it's so much about what's going on in your body but it's also about what the rest of your life is like. If you hate your job or have a

## THE HOLY GRAIL OF DETOX

If you're still hell-bent on implementing a traditional detox then remember to go easy on the exercise. Leading London trainer Michael Garry says it's "a great time to concentrate on flexibility and stretching. If you're detoxing you should keep exercise to a minimum." Avoid high intensity exercise "so you don't stress out the body." Far better to seek out a

dedicated retreat: the Thailand-based Chiva Som. Many have sought it before – and returned time after time – for this is the holy grail for detoxers where high-profile clients are as plentiful as lotus flowers.

The resort's brochure will tell you they "believe HEALTH stands for Helping Each other Achieve Lasting Total Health". Devotees will tell you their dress sizes

significantly decrease in a week and they're now voluntarily healthy happy people (who need to return every six months).

This is achieved by an all-round lifestyle approach, by gentle encouragement rather than strict regime implementation. A healthy diet (alcohol only at evening meals), gentle exercise (yoga, tai chi), treatments (internal organ massages,

acupuncture), and specialists aplenty (doctors, and even a resident monk for tackling life's bigger problems) are all there to sweep you to your own physical nirvana.

Just be prepared for the cost to be as substantial as the results. Three-night packages start from about \$1,500.

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terrible relationship or don't get any physical exercise these things matter as well. You can have a very perfect diet on the planet. So the last chapter [of the book] is about detoxing the rest of your life."

She is adamant that once you've rid yourself of the rubbish (of all varieties) you'll be a whole new you. "What's the point of taking a couple of weeks each year to get really well and eat total junk the rest of the time. Why would you want to do that to yourself?"

Frankie Phillips of the BDA agrees that if you're looking at any kind of a detox diet, it should be in terms of a genuine dietary change rather than a quick fix remedy. The body itself "is a very efficient detox machine", she says, and though people "report feeling better when on detox this is [probably] because they are paying more attention to what they're eating and drinking more fluids than they normally would."

Her advice is to take "a more balanced approach" to our diets in general but this is easier said than done. A lot of our dietary habits are based around social events and habits so it becomes a question of not simply breaking our physical addictions but also our mental addictions. For however much we feel we want to change, the flesh may be more than willing, but it's our minds that can be weak. It's time to resolve that this new year's new you is not just for January but for life.

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