



Detoxification: The Big Picture

BY JOE LEONARD, M.S.

Detoxification is not as simple as merely fasting for a couple of days, drinking a lot of water, or popping some herbal and nutritional supplements designed to stimulate the organs of detoxification. Effective detoxification is an integrative treatment that should involve several health promoting behaviors, as well as the guidance of a trained practitioner knowledgeable in the basics of physiology, biochemistry, and perhaps most importantly, nutrition.

Last year, when the company for which I work was developing its line of detoxification supplements, I acted as an unscientific guinea pig by following the accompanying detoxification protocol of supplements, diet, and lifestyle enhancements recommended by the nutritional consultants who were guiding the project.

In addition to the regimen of dietary supplements that were targeted at my organs of detoxification, I was asked to follow a diet consisting of only raw or lightly cooked vegetables and fruits, and containing very little simple carbohydrate, fat, and protein. This diet lasted for 10 days (since reduced to seven), by the end of which I felt quite energetic, albeit somewhat woozy from lack of protein. It was explained to me that the minimal protein and fat in the diet reduced the workload on my liver so that it could redirect energy toward detoxifying my body. The diet was not difficult to follow, very little cooking was involved, and fruits and vegetables are considerably cheaper than meats and most processed foods at the grocery store.

Nonetheless, going from my familiar standard fare of Western cuisine to a more alien macrobiotic diet made me very aware of the difficulty of obtaining and regularly consuming healthy, toxin-free foods. We are confronted with an abundance of refined and devitalized foods in the West. They are available almost anywhere, from fast-food restaurants to vending machines. They are largely devoid of whole food supportive nutrients and many of them contain the very toxins that my body was now trying to purge — toxic food additives, pesticide and herbicide residues, hormones, allergens, heavy metals, and much more, accumu-

lated over my 30+ years of life.

By contrast, I discovered the nearest organic grocer to the rural Wisconsin town in which I live is some 20 miles away. The experience of trying to find healthy foods to eat was probably the most educational part of the entire detoxification protocol.

The concept of functional foods (those that promote health and prevent disease) is beginning to catch on in the U.S. With it come issues about the murky distinctions between foods and drugs, heretofore unexplored in the way Americans think about nutrition. Europeans have embraced the concept of functional foods for several years and have begun to come to grips with the nuances. In Asia, good diet and disease prevention are synonymous. In China, very little distinction is made between medicines and “health” foods.

Supplements

The supplements I took during my detoxification period contained dried herbs and whole foods specifically intended to support and activate many of the organs of detoxification: the liver, kidneys, intestine, blood, skin, lymph, spleen, lungs, sweat glands, and even hair and fingernails. The selection of herbs was based on existing peer-reviewed literature where available, and on hundreds of years of homeopathic use of these natural botanicals for detoxification.

The first thing I noticed, after about a day and a half of taking the supplements, was my body odor. I immediately began to question the marketability of these products to a largely hygienic public. Showers and deodorant notwithstanding, I reeked. The clinician involved in the pilot studies on these detoxification products verified this as a normal indicator of their effectiveness. The skin, being the body’s largest secretory organ, was assisting my body in carrying away toxins via the sweat glands. Further, it indicated I was very “toxic” because the skin is usually the overload organ when the liver and kidneys are maxed out and cannot remove toxins any faster. This made me feel quite a bit better, and the body odor disappeared after about three days.

Another concern arose with regard to the disruptive frequency of urination brought on by the sup-

plements. These products, I now understood, were heavily “excretion-oriented.” The juniper berry contained in one of the products was very effective in stimulating the smooth muscles of my kidneys and bladder, apparently, in conjunction with the voluminous quantity of water I was instructed to drink. Bowel movements were equally frequent and efficient due to the presence of Collinsonia root, fenugreek, apple pectin, and Psyllium husk contained in the products.

Lifestyle

Optional lifestyle enhancements were recommended to aid the detoxification process. These included, but were not limited to: Massage, Hydrotherapy, Colonics, Sauna, and Light exercise.

I found that heavy exercise was precluded during the dietary phase due to the low-energy diet. On the other hand, my baseline energy levels became markedly elevated and my attitude toward life was greatly improved. I found myself actively engaging in relaxing activities and hobbies that I had felt guilty about before. I now realized that part of detoxification was improving the mental quality of life as well as the physical.

Final Thoughts

Detoxification is not something to be taken lightly. Besides the major investment of time, will, and resources, detoxification is an integrative treatment. As a result, the detoxification process does not lend itself to reductionist clinical study. One cannot ask if the supplements alone will affect detoxification. They most likely won't if they are consumed outside the context of a complete detoxification treatment performed under the guidance of a trained practitioner. Just as the cancer patient is instructed to quit smoking, so the “toxic” patient must eliminate as much as possible the toxins found in food and ever-present in our modern world. That is no easy task.

About The Author

Joe Leonard received his B.S. in Biology from the University of Akron in 1992 and earned an M.S. in Journalism from Iowa State University with a specialization in Science Communication and a graduate minor in Zoology. He worked for two years as a technical writer for Abbott Laboratories (Chicago, IL) before joining the research division of Standard Process Inc. (Palmyra, WI) in the fall of 2000.

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