

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a white tube top and a white skirt, is sitting on a beach. She is holding a tall glass of milk with both hands and looking down at it with a serene expression. The background is a soft-focus view of the ocean and sky. The text 'Cleanse Craze' is overlaid in large white letters, and 'What's th' is visible in red to the right.

Cleanse Craze

What's th

By Robin D. Stone

Just 21 days, I told myself. Twenty-one days and you can have all the Twizzlers you want.

That's the deal I made when I started a detox diet recently. Even on Day 1, I was already thinking about marking the end at a restaurant famous for its over-the-top sundaes. That, plus a movie-theater size bag of those strawberry licorice twists. Just 21 days.

I have a sweet tooth that rivals a 10-year-old's. My favorites: dark-chocolate chunk cookies, key lime pie, Jelly Belly jellybeans, Lemonheads and Twizzlers, of course. Problem is, I have ancient cavity fillings and multiple root canals to show for them. (Genes may play a role, but the rest is self-inflicted.)

What I don't have is much body fat. Long ago I'd figured out how to eat well

"Unless you're detoxing, trying to eliminate these chemicals, you increase the chance of developing cancers and autoimmune disease."

Detox diets, also known as colon-cleansing diets or cleansers, promise a host of other benefits, such as reducing fatigue and alleviating ailments like allergies, asthma and arthritis.

People have been fasting for centuries for spiritual, mental and health reasons. (Remember Jesus' fast of 40 days and nights?) If you've ever done the "Master Cleanse," the lemon-water-cayenne pepper-maple syrup fast that reportedly helped Beyoncé slim down for her "Dreamgirls" role, you have an idea of how detoxing works. Cleanses range from water fasts to juice, herbal tea and soup fasts to pre-packaged fasting "kits" with dietary supplements. One form of detoxing, nutritional cleansing, incorporates meals and snacks.

HOW DOES DETOX CLEANSING WORK?

By flushing out waste with liquids, supplements, laxatives and fiber-rich foods.

WHY CLEANSE?

Some sisters want to jump-start healthy routines. Jackie Burke, a TV producer in Los Angeles, did the Master Cleanse for six days last year. "I was turning 50 and not feeling good, the biggest couch potato," she says. Losing 10 pounds made her want to exercise. "I said now you can get off your butt and do something." Next up: working with a trainer.

Some want to kick bad habits. "I'm always on the go, but I can't eat how I did when I was in my 30s" says Sondra Campbell, 42, a payroll manager at a private equity firm in New York City. Campbell completed a nine-day Isagenix cleanse in the spring, and replaced her fast-food diet with home-cooked meals of lean meats and vegetables. The 12

Big deal about detox? A new way to appreciate what you eat and drink

enough and exercise like a madwoman so I can have my cake and stay slim, too. But when I heard of one sisterfriend, then another who'd done a detox diet, I decided to take a break from sweets—and a lot of other foods—to try one out. I also wanted to explore the popularity of detoxing and how it might help black women, whose rates of obesity and its attending problems like diabetes, heart disease and some cancers, are higher than any other racial or ethnic group—male or female—eat more healthfully.

Diet trends come and go, but detoxing, a form of fasting, has deep history and roots. The theory: Strictly limit and control what you eat and drink to help your digestive system get rid of internal and environmental toxins. There is little scientific evidence that detoxing works any faster or better than your body's own natural cleansing system, but some doctors swear by it. "Everybody's exposed to chemicals that bio-accumulate in the body," says Kamau Kokayi, M.D., a Yale-trained family and Chinese medicine specialist at Patients Medical, a holistic wellness center in New York City.

Not everybody agrees with detoxing, and some medical professionals say it may be unsafe. "What you lose is a lot of water, which could cause dehydration and electrolyte imbalance," which is especially dangerous for those with kidney or heart problems, says Acquanetta Frazier, M.D., a gastroenterologist in Lanham, Maryland. Dr. Frazier, like many conventional doctors, argues that the liver, colon and kidneys already eliminate toxins and that fiber (at least 32 grams a day for adults) aids the process. And as for the weight loss, Dr. Frazier says, cleansing works only if you "change your thoughts and habits around food." Otherwise "you'll return to the way you ate before and weight will come back—even more."

Some concerns have also been raised that detoxing could lead to over-reliance on laxatives and enemas to eliminate waste. Cleansing products, considered dietary supplements, are not evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration.

Minding the pros and cons, here's what else I learned about detoxing and my own cleansing experience. (See "Detox Diary," page 62, for details.)

pounds she lost encouraged her to steer clear of drive-through dining and sodas.

And some cleanse for mental and spiritual balance. Lisa Cortes, a Brooklyn-based film producer in her mid-40s, does a three-to-five-day fast four times a year, as the seasons change. "It can help get rid of actual as well as conceptual impurities," says Cortes, whose most recent major project was the highly acclaimed "Precious." Weight loss is always secondary to her: "If you're not in an exchange with God, you're not going to be happy that you lost 10 pounds."

IS CLEANSING LIKE COLONICS?

Yes and no. The result—moving waste through the colon—is the same, but in colonics, also known as colon irrigation or colon hydrotherapy, water is flushed through the rectum and colon and fecal material drawn out. (Some detox programs suggest a colonic treatment.) As with detox cleansers that you take orally, there is little scientific evidence to show or dispute the benefits of colonics. And if you're considering a colonic, make sure the practitioner is reputable (check

the BBB) and uses disposable equipment that has not been previously used.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A DETOX KIT

Visit a health food store. Read labels and seek advice; naturopathic professionals are probably most familiar with how different cleansers work. Ask friends and family who've detoxed what they used. Discuss with your doctor, especially if you have chronic health problems. You can find many cleansing kits in health food stores starting around \$25. Some are distributed through websites and 800 numbers, some through salespeople on commission.

I chose the Clean Program, developed by Alejandro Junger, M.D., a cardiologist, detox specialist and director of integrative medicine at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. My choice was based on rave reviews from a sister who completed it and Junger's bestselling companion book, *Clean: The Revolutionary Program to Restore the Body's Natural Ability to Heal Itself*. The program calls for breakfast and dinner drinks using Clean supplements and a full meal for lunch. It emphasizes an organic diet of mostly fruits and vegetables, wheat-free, gluten-free grains, beans, and fish and lean meats. The book *Clean* shows you how to detox without the kit (and the kit's \$350 price tag).

WHO SHOULDN'T CLEANSE?

Don't detox if you're pregnant or nursing. Check with your doctor if you take medication or have a health problem. Dr. Kokayi, who has detoxed some 200 firefighters and police officers exposed in the 9/11 terrorism attacks, leads patients through cleanses tailored to their illnesses. If your life is hectic or unsettled, wait until you can devote yourself to the process. "Someone who works 70, 80 hours a week shouldn't detox," Dr. Kokayi says.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE TWIZZLERS?

I haven't craved those—or any of my favorites, since Week 2 of my cleanse. That decadent sundae? No longer on my "to do" list. That's not to say I won't have a sweet treat now and then, but my dentist may start to miss me.

Robin D. Stone, who writes regularly about health and wellness, now starts most days with a fruit smoothie.

DETOX DIARY



DAY 1

Start

"Vanilla" powdered supplement mix, stirred into coconut milk (all dairy and soy products are out), tastes like watery farina and scratches my throat. This will need some help. Take the first five of my 13 daily supplement pills. I hate pills. Head to the grocery with my Clean shopping list.

Two hours and \$250 later (thanks in part to organics, herbs, spices and vinegars, and pricey gluten-free foods), I'm ready for lunch, an adapted Clean recipe: baked salmon with lemon and capers, steamed broccoli with carrots and zucchini. I make it pretty on the plate—to savor colors and textures in my one meal of the day. Dinner: Blend the "chocolate" powder with ice. Much better than vanilla. By 10, craving a sweet. Eat grapes, which aren't on the list but are at least organic. Find a voice mail from Shannon, my Clean "health coach," checking in.

DAY 2

An urge to pee wakes me before my alarm. Feeling sluggish. Don't know if it's the diet or that I went to bed at 1 a.m. Accept that I should "live" clean while eating clean. So I vow to turn in before midnight, and to start each day with a five-minute meditation. Breakfast: A doctored-up "vanilla" drink: ice, 1 pear, some blueberries and half a kiwi. Blend with coconut milk, the natural sweetener agave and a bit of vanilla

PRE-CLEANSE VITALS:

Weight: 128
Height: 5'4"
BMI of 22
Health: Except for slight iron deficiency and some nut allergies, no health problems.

● prepare for my 21-day detox with Clean's "Elimination Diet." From Day 1 on the diet, I have bowel movements sometimes twice (and once even four times) a day. These aren't urgent enough to send me racing for the toilet, but they're insistent. (If you're squeamish reading about BMs, you might want to skip some parts below.) My doctor advises to continue iron supplements; if I wasn't getting enough on my own, she says, I probably wouldn't get it in the cleanse.

The Clean diet eliminates many "healthy" foods in my fridge, including grapes (too much sugar and pesticides), strawberries (pesticides), oranges and grapefruit (too acidic), tomatoes, sweet peppers and potatoes (nightshade veggies, linked to inflammation). Eating will take some new thinking.

SOME CLEAN GUIDELINES:

- Ensure at least 12 hours' digestion time between your evening and morning meals (snacks, too).
- Drink eight to 10 glasses of water daily. Other than shakes, I only drink water with lemon.
- Avoid processed foods.

extract. Big improvement. About an hour later, the gas kicks in. Silent-but-deadly. So SBD that I need to walk away not to offend folks. It subsides with a trip to the toilet. Lunch: Yesterday's was so good I eat it again. A craving hits after my chocolate-shake dinner. Realize I'm not hungry for a sweet, but for the sensation of chewing. Grab a handful of cherries. **Weight: 127.**

DAY 3

Wake up sweating and with a runny nose. But no sneezing, no aches, pains or fever. A pimple crops up on my forehead—I rarely get pimples. Detox proponents say these are signs of my body shedding mucus and toxins. For more convenience, I throw several well-seasoned chicken breasts and ground-turkey burgers (the birds are OK as long as they're free-range) on the grill. Freeze some for later. I stir-fry baby bok choy, carrots, zucchini and broccoli with buckwheat noodles. Crumble a burger and mix it in. Who needs soy sauce? **Weight: 126**

DAY 6

Invited to a party so I have shakes for breakfast and lunch and save my meal for dinnertime. Fortunately the host has healthy party food: grilled chicken breast on skewers, green salad with vinaigrette and a salad made with the high-protein grain quinoa. Pass up the chocolate cake and nibble olives. My period starts with no premenstrual puffiness

or cramps. That hasn't happened since I was a teenager. **Weight: 124**

DAY 8

I'm nervous about how fast I'm losing weight (I know—don't hate). As someone who was never blessed with but always wanted a curvaceous "black-girl" booty, I'm horrified to see mine disappearing! I add squats to my workout and call Shannon, my Clean coach, to discuss. She says typical program weight loss is six to eight pounds. Her advice: drink bigger shakes, mix healthy fat and protein like sunflower-seed butter into shakes and eat snacks or light meals (fruit or veggie salad or hummus with veggies) with my shakes. **Weight: 124**

DAY 10

"Twigs and berries, twigs and berries!" my 13-year-old son teases as he enjoys a quesadilla oozing with Monterey jack. I feel for my sisters dieting without support at home. I tell the kid to stuff it and finish my chocolate-shake dinner. Still tired so I drop my every-other day exercise routine (I'm a P90x fanatic) to every three or four days. **Weight: 123**

DAY 11

A 10-hour road trip to visit parents. Fortunately for my fellow passengers, the gassiness is gone. Need to find a suitable lunch on an Applebee's menu. I zero in on their Asian Crunch salad with grilled chicken breast and have it with lemon juice and a drizzle of Asian dressing. **Weight: 123**

DAY 14

So why was I thinking I could detox and visit my people? I pass up barbecued chicken, macaroni and cheese, baked beans, potato salad, berry pie and my mom saying, "have a little taste" as she whips up a recipe. (My meal: rice-noodle pasta salad with turkey breast, steamed veggies and a vinaigrette with garlic and ginger. Sigh.) I don't miss eating my favorite rich, fatty foods as much as the socializing that happens around food. My energy picks up. I'm encouraged. One week to go. **Weight: 123**

DAY 15

Four BMs in one day. Seriously?! I double up on water, to replace what I'm losing on the other end. **Weight: 122**

DAY 17

Dentist. Root canal. My seventh. A sobering reminder of my detox goal to kick the sweet habit. Followed by dinner with friends in Brooklyn. (Hey, I'm a root-canal veteran; I keep on rolling.) I'm happy to find on the menu "Tea-Smoked" salmon on mixed greens with a ginger vinaigrette. Perfect. Pat myself on the back for declining after-dinner cupcakes. **Weight: 123**

DAY 20

Lunch: a Clean recipe of lentils on top of chopped cucumber, zucchini and pineapple, looks pretty but tastes awful. I set it aside and make a cherry shake. I

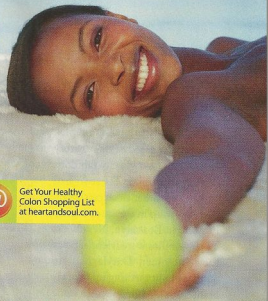
realize that when my meal is a dud (and there were a few), I want a sweet to make up for it. Prepare a chicken dish for my son, with lots more broccoli than usual. "This is more green," he notes, explaining how he learned in health class to fill half the plate with veggies, a quarter with protein and a quarter with pasta. There's hope for Mr. "Twigs and Berries." **Weight: 124**

DAY 21

Detox Done!

After yesterday's mishap, I want to cook something I really know and like. I sauté ground turkey, diced carrots and chopped onions and garlic, and add lots of chopped basil and oregano. I take a portion for myself and pour a can of diced tomatoes into the rest for my son. Add a bit of rice vinegar to my "plain spaghetti" and put it over rice noodles with chopped kalamata olives on top. It's the best meal I've had on this diet.

Do I feel "clean"? Well, I never felt "dirty." I do feel thinner, and more in control of my cravings. I'm glad to be done with pills and powders and want to continue eating simple, fresh, flavorful meals. Without sweet or salty snacks dulling my taste buds, fruits taste sweeter, vinegars tangier. Could I have gotten here without detox? Maybe. But the program helped introduce me to a more adventurous and have it with lemon juice and a drizzle of Asian dressing. **Weight: 125** (Still working on that black-girl booty.)



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Way to Go

Nobody likes to think or talk about it, but how often, how much and how easily you eliminate are critical to your health. Here's how to know if your system is working right.

IS IT REGULAR—FOR YOU?

Depending on the person, BMs can range from more than once a day to once or twice a week. "Studies show it varies, but I tell people to eliminate at least once a day," Dr. Frazier says.

IS IT NOT TOO HARD, AND NOT TOO SOFT?

Too hard reflects constipation; too loose, diarrhea. The consistency of peanut butter is about right, Dr. Junger suggests in his book *Clean*.

DOES IT HURT?

You shouldn't have to strain.

DO YOU GIVE IT TIME?

Dr. Frazier finds that some of her constipated patients "are often just too busy to eliminate." She encourages them to sit on the stool until they feel "empty. Some people feel something's still there," she says, but time's up, and they're up—and out of the bathroom.

DO YOU EXERCISE?

Consistent exercise helps the body's functions, and "stronger stomach muscles help with elimination," Dr. Frazier says. ♥