

Detox the Body, Renew the Skin Eliminating Toxins Can Clear Complexions

By Barbara Hey

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Toxins produced from stress, poor diet, fatigue, the environment, and less-than-optimum health can result in a dry, lackluster, acne-ridden, or hypersensitive complexion. When you have a client whose skin just won't stabilize, no matter how diligent the efforts to hydrate and renew, it may be time to consider another tactic: internal cleansing.

The term itself may suggest colonics or scrubbing bubbles for the digestive tract, but really it's simply a rest period for the body, a time devoted to detoxification by eschewing the bad stuff (sugar, chips, coffee, and cocktails, for instance) and consuming wholesome, clean, unprocessed foods. The aim is to give the body time to rid itself of the detritus of a life fueled by caffeine, red meat, and refined foods, and then see and feel what happens. The benefits to body and appearance, experts say, can be dramatic.

Where to Begin?

The epidermis reflects what's going on in the body, whether it's running on fumes or at full-throttle. "The skin is a mirror of one's internal environment," says Susan Ciminelli, founder of Susan Ciminelli Day Sap in New York City, a line of natural skin care products, and a believer in a holistic approach to beauty. The skin, she says, reflects "how one digests, assimilates, and eliminates food." Ciminelli prefaces any beauty treatment with an assessment of not just outward appearance but the emotional and physical state of her clients.

Hale Sofia Schatz, author of *If the Buddha Came to Dinner: How to Nourish Your Body to Awaken Your Spirit* (Hyperion, 2004), agrees. The reasons for undertaking a cleanse are twofold: "to allow the body to eliminate toxins and to increase the body's natural ability to renew itself through the rejuvenation of cellular growth," Schatz says. She recommends a food-based cleanse in three phases, which decreases the amount of food consumed -- to ease up on digestion and give the organs a rest -- and focuses on proper food combinations, predominantly fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and nuts.

The detoxing process takes time. A few days is a good start, but a week or even a month is better. When the process is complete, the body is renewed and, Schatz says, "the skin all of a sudden starts looking more luminous, more radiant." But be forewarned: It often gets worse before it gets better.

"As the toxins get eliminated from the body, you see them most readily on the skin surface. Impurities in the body can come out as blemishes, eczema, or rashes," she says. And that worse-before-better phase can cause distress. "Clients will call me after the first days of a cleanse and say they've had a breakout, and I say, 'That's a healthy sign. The impurities want to get out.'" At this stage, patience is required, because whatever manifests will dissipate with time. Schatz's advice: "Listen to the body, work with the body."

Providing detox guidance for your clients will require a little homework on your part, as different people may require different programs. See "Detox Resources," sidebar. Regardless of the specific protocol, following are some general detox fundamentals.

Detox Basics for Clients

Start slow. With any cleanse, the best advice is to ease into it. "Most of our bodies are pretty

toxic," says Schatz, noting that many people are at least somewhat addicted to the toxins of day-to-day life -- those lattes to invigorate the afternoon doldrums and sugar, wheat, and dairy, all of which are tasty foods common in the American diet. She suggests starting with a preliminary period -- a week or two of gradual dietary shifts -- to prepare the body for what's to come. During that time, you wean yourself off caffeine (gradually, to avoid the headache), refined flour products, alcohol, and milk. Then, the cleanse can commence.

Up water intake. Critical during a cleanse, and always important for skin, is to increase the amount of fluids ingested. Schatz suggests doubling what you ordinarily drink, which will help the body eliminate the toxins it's releasing. That means lots of spring water, herbal teas, and fresh vegetable juices.

Eat seasonally. Make dietary selections appropriate to the weather and include fresh, seasonal food. That is, it's preferable to eat whatever fruits or vegetables are harvested in the particular season. Also, make sure to consume foods in the winter that promote warmth (soups instead of salads) and in summer that are cool (melons rather than baked yams). In all seasons, sea vegetables such as arame, wakame, and nori are recommended, since they are rich in vitamins and minerals that benefit the liver -- the organ at the front line of detoxing the body each day.

Support yourself. The particulars of a cleanse vary -- what foods to eat and when -- but have in common specific supplements to support the body (like a supplement of fiber, green food, or probiotics) or herbs to augment the detoxification of the liver. (Schatz recommends dandelion root, for instance.) Detoxing is also a time to relax, meditate, and rest -- essential for the body to be refreshed.

Each phase may last from two days to a week or two. Schatz's plan begins with a period of just fruits and vegetables. Next, grains, seeds, and nuts are added to the menu, and finally protein (tofu, certain fish, beans). Detoxing doesn't necessarily mean bland food, either, Schatz explains. Her book includes dynamic recipes like Ginger-Leek Miso Soup and Salsa Snapper (www.heartofnourishment.com).

In between cleanses just plain eating well can have concrete results, even in the eye zone. For example, Susan Ciminelli has a homemade under-eye lightener in the form of a soup recipe made with adzuki beans that are said to help the kidneys cleanse the body (www.susanciminelli.com).

Of course, nourishing the body with healthful foods is about more than appearance. It's about maximizing health and bringing a consciousness and respect to the foods we put in our bodies. And then, the realization comes that the effort has brought about a multitude of gifts -- more energy, vitality, vibrancy, and, not incidentally, looking better too.

In providing detox information, you become a multifaceted resource for your clients. "Skin is the manifestation of who we are and how we feel," Schatz says. "The more radiant we look, the more radiant we are and vice versa."

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