

What is it?

Detoxification is the term used to describe the process your body goes through to get rid of toxins. Detoxification symptoms—both physical and mental—may appear when you alter your lifestyle by starting something new, such as changing your diet or exercising, or by discontinuing a current habit, such as eating chocolate or drinking coffee. These symptoms include headache, stomachache, cough, diarrhea, skin eruptions (rash), clogged sinus, and fever, as well as feeling rundown and irritable. The symptoms may be of short duration and slight irritation, or they could last longer and cause you considerable discomfort.

Because these symptoms are the same as those that show up in certain illnesses, changing your diet or lifestyle can result in misunderstanding: If I am doing

something that is supposed to be good for me, why do I have these symptoms? Why do I feel worse, and not better? Understanding this apparent contradiction is perhaps the first, and most important, hurdle you must get over when making a dietary or lifestyle change.

If you consider this contradiction carefully, however, it is easy to understand. Think of how you might have experienced this on a short-term basis. If you do not get regular exercise and then play some softball with your kids, the next day you might feel bad—tired with sore muscles. This is your body reacting to something that it is not used to doing. You can see the same thing when you stop a regular activity; if you are a soda drinker and stop drinking soda for a while, you may notice that you have less energy and you may even have a headache. When you change your diet or lifestyle, the same thing happens; your body reacts to the change.

Some Possible Detoxification Symptoms

Clogged sinus
Constipation
Cough
Diarrhea
Fatigue
Fever
Flu symptoms
Cold symptoms
Gas
Headache
Irritability
Moodiness
Skin rash
Stomachache

Why does this happen?

As we live, toxins accumulate in our bodies. Some of these are due to our diet and others are due to the environment around us. Of course, our lifestyle also fits in—if you smoke or use alcohol you are accumulating even more toxins.

When you make a change in diet or lifestyle, through stopping a bad habit or eating better, your cells begin to eliminate the toxic substances. Before finding the exit, however, the toxins are released into the bloodstream and are carried through the circulatory system.

This transportation and elimination may result in headache, diarrhea, or constipation, and often toxins are eliminated through the skin, resulting in rashes or skin problems (especially if you are prone to such problems). You may also feel a lack of energy, especially if you are eliminating meats from your diet. (The protein found in meat is more stimulating than that found in vegetables.) You may also find that, with the absence of toxins, you absorb substances more easily. Thus, the sugar and caffeine in a soda might really set you off.

In a nutshell, we could say that the body always goes for quality, and when the food coming in is of higher quality than the present tissue, the body will discard the present tissue because it wants to make room for tissue created by the higher-quality food.

How severe are the symptoms and how long do they last?

How long the symptoms last and how severe they are depend on your lifestyle before making a change and how quickly you make a change. If you have a diet heavy in red meats, for example, and become a vegetarian overnight, you might have severe symptoms for a time. If your lifestyle changes are gradual, the symptoms could be less severe.

The duration of the symptoms might not be linear; there is a greater chance that they will come in cycles. At first you may feel great and then experience some detoxification symptoms. After the initial toxins are flooded out, you will feel good again, if not better. However, the body “goes deeper” and finds more toxins to eliminate; the symptoms may reappear again, and after more toxins are eliminated, you will feel better yet. As things progress, you will find that the period of symptoms is shorter and the period of well-being greater.

What can I do during this period?

The hardest thing for many people to do is accept that they are not sick and realize that the body is cleansing itself. Once you get beyond this psychological barrier, the process becomes easy. The most important thing to do can be summed up in one word: Rest.

Rest, and let the body do what it needs to. If you have the luxury of staying home, do so! If not, cut back on social engagements and perhaps even cut back on any exercise you are getting. Give your body as much energy as possible to do its job. Eat light foods that are easy to digest—consume fruits and vegetables and drink plenty of water.

Further Reading

Swope, Mary Ruth, Ph.D. *Green Leaves of Barley*. Lone Star, TX: Swope Enterprises, Inc. (1990): 199-202.

Krohn, Jacqueline, M.D., Frances Taylor, M.A., and Jinger Prosser, LMT. *Natural Detoxification*. Point Roberts, WA: Hartley and Marks Publishers, Inc., 1996.

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