[IMAGE]

The Detox Diet

By Michael Roth, DC

Detoxification: it's a word that is being used with more frequency and urgency in today's toxic environment. With the advent of pollution awareness several decades ago, most people now know about the toxins that are present in our atmosphere, lakes, rivers, water supply and even our own homes. But what you may not realize is that toxins can be found in abundance in our present-day *food* supply. That's the bad news. The good news is there are easy nutritional ways to detoxify your body and avoid the perils of toxins.

The Bad News

Less than 150 years ago, chemical use was quite limited. These days, each successive generation is exposed to a limitless supply of unnatural chemical toxins that accumulate in our tissues and organs. These toxins, many of which may be originating from our food/water supply, include unnatural fats and cholesterols, xenobiotics (organic toxins), inorganic chemicals, and heavy elemental metals, to name a few. All of these toxins can severely affect the operation of the body's organ systems over time and cause significant health problems.

How do these synthetic toxins wind up in our foods? In addition to the contaminants that coat our food sources from rainwater, the soil is loaded with fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, insecticides, etc. These toxic chemicals seep into the soil directly and are absorbed through both the leaves and roots. Logic tells us these chemicals then end up in the fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds we consume every day.

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark These same foods are also being heated or irradiated to help increase their shelf lives and keep them from spoiling. And while these "treated" foods may provide calories, heat and radiation destroy the natural structure of their vitamins and enzymes, turning them into something the body cannot utilize as originally intended.

Fruits and vegetables aren't the only victims of toxic chemicals. Livestock, fowl, and farmed fish are given color-enhancers, steroids, antibiotics, and hormones, and are fed genetically altered food. And of course, they also consume the same contaminated plant matter as we do.

In short, all this has taken a substantial toll on our collective health. In the past 30 to 40 years, we have seen an alarming rise in autoimmune-related diseases. Many health experts believe this increase is directly related to the synthetic chemical poisons we are breathing, eating and drinking every day. Continued exposure to these toxic chemicals may cause an accumulation in the body, one that overwhelms our natural detoxification abilities. Eventually, the body can no longer keep eliminating these substances. This cumulative load, called the "body burden," is thought to lead to chronic and even life-threatening illnesses.

Examples of toxin-related health maladies include hormonal imbalance, impaired immune function, autoimmune syndromes, digestive impairment leading to nutritional deficiency, inefficient metabolism, and a host of immune and autoimmune aberrances. In addition, the digestive tract can develop microscopic ulcerations, pH imbalances, imbalances in bacteria and fungi, and many other problems. Heavy metals such as lead, cadmium, arsenic and mercury also may be found in our foods. Over time, these metals affect health and have the ability to cross the blood-brain barrier and cause systemic central nervous system disorders.

The Good News

The good news is that many of these toxic accumulations can be halted and even reversed. An overall healing plan must be initiated to remove stored-up toxins. A colon cleanse is simply not enough, since nearly every cell can be affected. In order to detoxify our bodies and prevent or reverse illness, a proactive, multi-pronged attack must be mounted, one that includes exercise, fresh air (less toxic exposure), clean water, limited sun, and a healthy diet.

The same types of foods that are the cause of our toxification can also be the source of our detoxification. The difference is the kind of food, their purity and combination. According to a 2007 study published in *Environmental Health Perspectives*, "It’s clear that nutrition and lifestyle are well-defined modulators of chronic diseases. Poor dietary habits, as well as a sedentary lifestyle clearly contribute to today’s compromised quality of life in the United States. It is becoming increasingly clear that nutrition can modulate the toxicity of environmental pollutants."

In a study published in the December 2007 issue of *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, feeding seaweed to rats increased the effectiveness of liver enzymes. Additional studies have shown the benefits of nutrition in clearing the body of the toxic buildup of lead and mercury using citrus peels.

As mentioned, the type of food is very important. Many fruits, vegetables and certain herbs have clear cleansing and detoxification properties, but they must be free of pesticides or any other harmful ingredients, and mustnot have been altered by exposure to radiation or other methods of shelf-life extension. Fruits and vegetables that fit this description are "certified organic." Essentially, this means they were grown using minimal or no chemicals at all.

Several years ago, it was very difficult to buy certified organic food. However, with growing health concerns and increasing demand by consumers, more supermarkets now carry an organic line of foods. Simply look for the organic produce section of your favorite grocery store or ask your grocer. Many are willing to begin carrying organic fruits and vegetables as long as you ask. Additionally, certified organic goods can be identified by the five-digit code on the label. If a food is certified organic, the code will begin with the number 9 and may also contain the phrase "Certified Organic." Most non-organic produce begins with the number 4.

Foods That Detoxify and Heal

image - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark So, what kinds of foods help our bodies to detoxify and heal? Examples of cleansing foods are (organic) green teas, which serve to induce detoxifying enzymes for chemoprotection (chemical protection) or cytoprotection (cell protection). Cruciferous vegetables such as kale, collard greens, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, brussels sprouts, and turnips are all excellent for energizing and cleansing the liver, your body’s built-in detox center. Lemons, watercress, garlic, oregano, sesame seeds, and fruits also are powerful detoxifying foods that not only aid in colon-cleansing, but also possess anti-bacterial, anti-fungal and anti-parasitic properties.

The benefits of these foods are well-documented. In fact, broccoli has been shown to detoxify carcinogens in liver cells. Another example is spinach, which is high in fiber and B vitamins. Spinach has been shown to help soothe the nervous system, protect against and possibly reverse macular degeneration. Legumes such as lentils and kidney beans are among the best sources of folate, which helps fight heart disease. Capsaicin, the "hot stuff" in chili peppers, has been found to soothe the stomach lining, detoxify the body and fight colds. And sweet potatoes have double the vitamin C, more fiber and fewer calories than white potatoes, contain antioxidants that may reduce inflammation in bones and muscles, and are a good source of beta-carotene, which protects against respiratory infections. They also may protect against sunburn and help wounds heal and scars fade.

Ensuring Adequate Nutrition

Many organic fruits and vegetables help to detoxify our bodies and maintain or improve our health. However, as wonderful as these organic foods are, they are not enough. The majority of even these carefully grown foods lack essential nutrients and complete detoxification properties. The reason for this is due to decades of chronic over-farming and toxic synthetic chemicals.

The primary growing regions of this country continue to use the same soil repeatedly to grow crops. This overuse eventually causes the earth to become depleted of essential organic complexes, nutrients and minerals, which means less is taken up by the plants. This vicious cycle weakens the nutrient benefit of fruits, vegetables and herbs. This is so prevalent in today's farming practices that we need to eat at least 10 cups of broccoli to get the same amount of nutrients that 1 cup of broccoli contained just 50 or 60 years ago.

The best way to combat this unfortunate deficiency and ensure complete nutrition is to supplement. Just like our foods, the type of supplement is very important. Try to avoid over-the-counter pills, capsules and powders that contain synthetic chemical nutrients, ingredients, additives, preservatives, fillers and binders. Ideally, one should look for organically complexed (carbon-bound) supplements derived from whole foods that are minimally processed and made from the highest quality ingredients obtainable. Good health is ultimately worth the investment and is ultimately your choice.

The Sample Detox Diet: 12 Foods That Promote Health and Wellness

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