

How's this for insane? One in 20 women would rather give up a limb than be obese, according to a study in the journal *Obesity*. So it's pretty much a no-brainer that hordes of rational women desperately want to believe in the power of a detox diet. "These diets are so popular right now, mostly because people think they're a quick fix for shedding kilos," says dietitian Jennifer Ventrelle.

Come the New Year, women the world over attempt to undo the damage of a booze- and fatty food-fuelled holiday period and embark on detoxes lasting anywhere from a weekend to 30 days, swallowing pills from chemist kits and checking into detox boot camp style holidays. In a recent online survey of *Women's Health* readers*, 52 per cent of you told us you had tried a detox.

As nice as it is to think you can simply flush fat away by drinking so much liquid you spend half your day in the bathroom, the reality is that some of these diets are not just hard to swallow, they may also be bad to swallow.

The concept of fasting – drastically reducing energy intake or following a liquid diet – isn't new. The modern-day detox has existed since at least the 1930s, with the first grapefruit diet fad.

Today, most commercial detox diets tout an unhealthy formula of minimal kilojoules and nutrients along with some key – usually foul-tasting – ingredient that has supposed fat-melting power, like cayenne pepper or vinegar. Sometimes they involve ingesting large amounts of supplements, or just living on veggie juices. The theory behind these virtual starvation plans is that it gives your digestive system and overworked organs a break, helps flush out environmental toxins and pesticides from fruit and veg, leaving you lighter on the scales and with a clean temple of a body. But no scientific evidence backs the idea that following a specific diet for a week or eating only one food will get rid of "toxins." Your body has the power to do that all on its own: that's why you have a liver, kidneys and a digestive system.

Recipe for danger?

"There's no reason that your body needs to detox," says *WH* nutrition expert Kristen Beck. "You can achieve the same results by following a healthy, balanced diet and limiting sugar, caffeine and alcohol."

What's worse, most of these so-called "detox" supplements and diets on the market aren't regulated by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) and are potentially harmful, especially if they're very low-kJ or contain diuretics that flush your body of

potassium and other crucial nutrients.

With these very real risks come minimal rewards. Much of what you're losing on this kind of extreme diet is water weight, which lasts only until you refill on fluids. If you see a more permanent drop on the scale, chances are it's muscle – not fat – that's missing. Without adequate protein (and a liquid diet doesn't offer much), your body takes it from its most available source: your own muscle tissue.

Not good. Muscle is your built-in kilojoule furnace, torching those muffin-top makers even when you're not moving. And the more muscle you have, the more kilojoules you burn, which is why dramatically slashing kilojoules can actually slow your metabolism in just a few days. "Your body thinks you're starving and panics," explains Dr Marc Hellerstein, professor of human nutrition at the University of California at Berkeley, US. "Your metabolism slows down to preserve your muscle and basic bodily functions." So when you go back to eating normally, you gain weight faster and from fewer kilojoules.

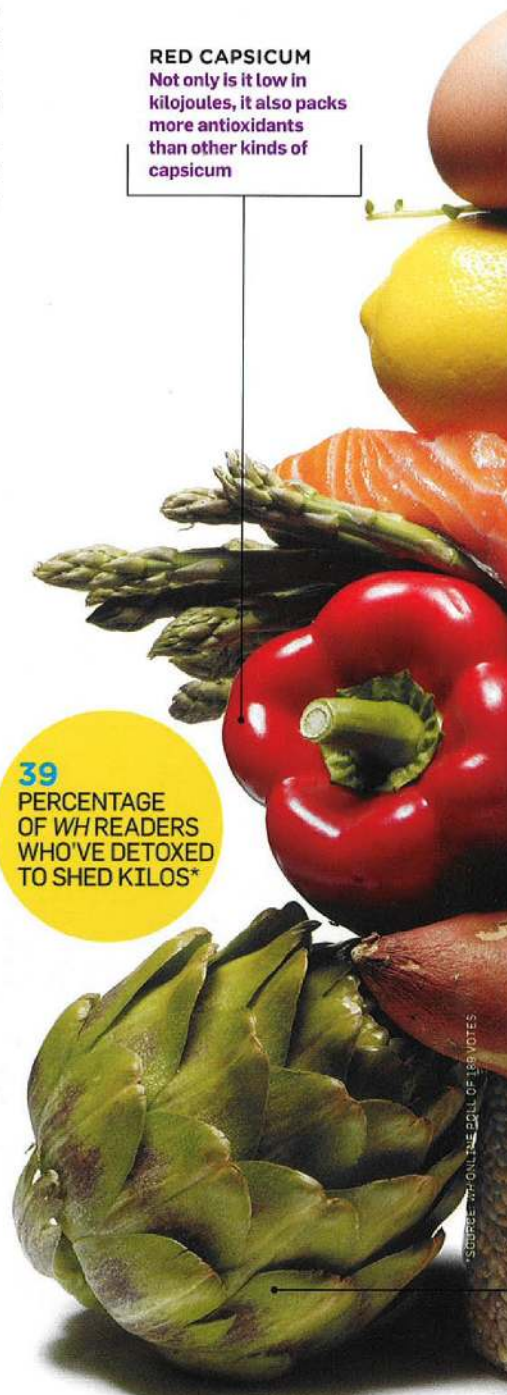
Detoxes debunked

There's no question that most detox diets drastically slash your kilojoule consumption. But research has found that after just a few days of skimping on kilojoules (even a very petite woman needs at least 5000kJ per day), your body stops producing a crucial growth hormone called IGF-1, and reduces thyroid and other hormones as well as insulin levels. Over time, all of this can lead to problems such as bone loss and menstrual disruptions.

And then there's the quality-of-life issue. "When you eat that little, your sex drive disappears, you feel tired all the time, and you're always hungry," Dr Hellerstein says. And seriously, what good is a slimmer body if you can't summon the energy to use it? 🍷

RED CAPSICUM
Not only is it low in kilojoules, it also packs more antioxidants than other kinds of capsicum

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PERCENTAGE
OF *WH* READERS
WHO'VE DETOXED
TO SHED KILOS*



*SOURCE: WH-ONLINE POLL OF 188 VOTES



CASE STUDY 1 THE GOOD

"I felt lighter, more energetic and my skin looked great"

Holly Enriquez, 29, online producer

THE DETOX
10 day Eat Fit Food detox (eatfitfood.com.au)

THE PROMISE
To get you energised and motivated

THE LOWDOWN
After a bad experience on a five-day juice detox, Enriquez approached this program with extreme caution. "I was worried it would leave me starving, moody and unable to leave the house in fear of coming into contact with something sugary." Turns out she had nothing to fear. This wasn't your ordinary, green-juice downing detox. "It's more how I imagine Gwyneth Paltrow lives," Enriquez says. "Every second day, I opened my front door to find two meal and snack packages waiting. Each pack contained breakfast, lunch and dinner, morning and afternoon snacks, a pre-breakfast juice and a high-fibre, psyllium husk bar." The 10-day program filled her body with seasonal fruit and veggies, locally-sourced fish and organic chicken. Off the menu is red meat, dairy, wheat and gluten and preservatives, so it's a great chance to weed out any food intolerances. They also recommend cutting out alcohol,

cigarettes and caffeine for the duration.

"The food is insanely delicious," Enriquez says. "Among other things I ate brown rice porridge with poached pears and walnuts, olive-crust salmon with new potatoes and shredded silverbeet and healthy fish and chips. Though the meals were in generous portions, as someone who does a lot of exercise, I found they didn't contain enough protein to keep me satisfied as lunch was generally plant-based. I'd recommend only doing light exercise on this program, such as walking or yoga."

THE SIDE EFFECTS

Enriquez says the no-caffeine bit was a struggle. "I cherish my first coffee of the day as a mother does her newborn," she says. "It also became tricky at social functions as I had to cart my dinner around with me. I ended up staying at home a lot more during the detox - not necessarily a bad thing. It made me realise how much my life revolves around food and wine." Although she didn't lose any weight, Enriquez says a few people mentioned she was looking slimmer, "Which I think was down

to being less bloated. But I certainly felt the benefits of eating fresh, wholesome foods and cutting out alcohol, sugar, wheat and dairy. I felt lighter, more energetic and I had a lot of compliments on how great my skin looked."

NUTRITIONIST'S VERDICT

"This is one of the best 'detox' programs I have seen because it just concentrates on eating healthy, nutritious foods," says WH nutrition expert Kristen Beck. "I have no problem with the claims as a program like this would undoubtedly get you motivated to continue to eat plenty of fresh foods. The fact that the meals are pre-prepared would also introduce you to new healthy recipes too."

Beck says that although this program is obviously targeting a specific, time-poor market, but there would be nothing to stop you preparing similar meals at home. "Natural psyllium husks are available in health food stores and pharmacies and could replace the high-fibre bars described. I like this program as it focuses more on what you should be eating, not just fixating on what you shouldn't."

38 PERCENTAGE OF WH READERS WHO'VE DETOXED TO CLEAR OUT "TOXINS"*

SWEET POTATO
If you're looking for a smarter way to satisfy your sweet tooth, this spud's for you. It's high in vitamin A and betacarotene

ASPARAGUS
Fibre-rich to fill you up, plus it's a natural diuretic to help stop bloating

WH FANTASY DETOXES

- Birthday master cleanse: 1 part cake, 4 parts champers, 34 parts hot chips
- All carbs after 5pm
- The 2-day liquid detox: lattes, dirty martinis, wine, chocolate milkshakes...
- The apple... pie plan
- The bubble bath and foot massage weight loss and anti-ageing program

That's not to say every cleanse is bad. Done in a healthy (read: sane) way, detoxing "can feel like an intervention, a fresh beginning," Dr Hellerstein says.

"Most people eat way more food than necessary, which taxes the liver and kidneys," says Dr Ronald Stram, director of the Center for Integrative Health and Healing in the US. Not only does a healthy detox give your digestive system a break, but by eliminating added sugar, saturated fats, and alcohol, it also rids your diet of things that can exacerbate health issues, Ventrelle says. "Plus," she notes, "you'll cut kilojoules in the process."

A good plan provides enough kilojoules and nutrients to sustain you (the average woman needs 5000 to 7500kJ per day) and includes fibre and lean protein. With that in mind, Ventrelle created a 5850kJ plan (below) exclusively for *WH* (Note: kJ's given are for a 160cm to 165cm 52-56kg woman. You may need to adjust for your own height and weight.) Following it for three days will kick-start weight loss, but it's safe to use as long as you like (just vary your fruit and veg to get a variety of nutrients). Because you'll eat often – at least every four hours – and drink as much water and tea as you want, you'll beat the bloat while keeping blood sugar steady and energy high. This means you'll be able to cut back without feeling cranky, exhausted or hungry. And – pinky swear – you won't have to gulp down a single glass of cayenne-spiked liquid. *wh*

CASE STUDY 2 THE BAD

**"I ended up
in hospital
for nine
days"**

Nicole Starr, 34, stylist

THE DETOX

14-day raw fruit and veg fast, plus colonic irrigation

THE PROMISE

To cleanse the body

THE LOWDOWN

Two years earlier, Starr had completed a five-day fast at a resort in Thailand, which involved taking lots of herbs, eating nothing but raw fruits and veg and having colonic irrigations. "This time instead of doing a supervised fast, I stayed in dorms separate to the resort and did my own version," she says. "I ate raw fruits and veg and was allowed to do my own colonics, which I did three of in five days."

THE SIDE EFFECTS

Halfway through the second week Starr woke up with a terrible headache and went to get checked out at the local



hospital. "At this point I had an insatiable thirst – however much I drank I couldn't quench it. I left the resort on a boat and blacked out." When Starr woke up she had no recollection of what had happened. "I was told I had hyponatremia – a loss of sodium levels in the blood. The doctors put me on an IV and told me if it had happened in Australia I would have been in intensive care." It took Starr six weeks to recover.

NUTRITIONIST'S VERDICT

WH nutrition expert Kristen Beck says Starr went spectacularly wrong in a number of ways: it was too strict, it was too long (14 days), and in Thailand, it would not have just been the colonics that caused the hyponatremia, she was in a very hot, humid environment where she would have been

sweating a lot and then not replacing any electrolytes (salts) as she was only eating raw fruits and vegetables. "Your body can, up to a point, cope with radical changes, but if it continues for too long, long-term health implications can occur," Beck says. "If you're absolutely convinced your body needs some form of cleansing or detox, choose loads of fresh fruits and vegetables, but also eat fish, nuts, seeds and wholegrain cereals such as brown rice." With regard to colonics, Beck advises that it would be much better (and more comfortable) eating a high-fibre diet. "Or try a fibre supplement such as psyllium husks, and drink plenty of water to ensure effective cleansing of the bowel."

TO READ ABOUT ONE WOMAN'S DETOX TALE OF GREEN POO, LOG ON TO womenshealthmag.com.au

THE CLEANSE THAT ISN'T CRAZY

BREAKFAST

- At least 250ml water (and continue to drink water throughout the day)
- 1 slice wholemeal toast topped with scrambled egg whites and chopped fresh herbs (such as basil or oregano) and a dollop of salsa, or 1 cup cooked oats topped with ½ cup berries or 2 tbs nuts
- 250ml decaffeinated green or herbal tea

SNACK

- Sliced apple with 1 tbs natural peanut butter or ½ cup natural trail mix

LUNCH

- 1 cup fresh spinach or lightly sautéed spinach or kale, squeezed with fresh lemon or orange juice and 1 cup asparagus with 1 tsp olive oil, garlic and lemon juice
- 110g grilled or baked salmon, chicken or pork tenderloin, seasoned with spices
- ½ cup edamame beans, steamed
- 250ml decaffeinated green or herbal tea
- 8 pecan halves

SNACK

- ½ sweet potato, steamed, or one citrus fruit (orange or grapefruit)
- 110g low-fat plain yoghurt

DINNER

- Spinach or cos with vegetables. Dress with 1 tsp extra-virgin olive oil mixed with lemon juice or vinegar (any variety)
- ½ cup to 1 cup asparagus or artichoke hearts, steamed
- 110g lean chicken with spices, baked or grilled
- ½ cup brown rice, barley, bulgur or quinoa
- 250ml decaffeinated green or herbal tea

SNACK

- ¾ cup to 1 cup blueberries or ½ cup pomegranate seeds
- 110g low-fat plain yoghurt or low-fat cottage cheese