

# Health

## 'Tis the season to detox – celebrity dieting fad or new year health boost?

Move over, festive boozing and overindulgence. January's here – and detoxing is the flavour of the month, writes **Abi Jackson**

Do a quick poll among your colleagues or friends and chances are some will be attempting some sort of detox.

It's no surprise really. The average person in the UK reportedly consumes around 6,000 calories on Christmas Day, not to mention all those mince pies and eggnogs beforehand. With far more booze and sugar on the menu than usual, and feasts that require belt removal and a lie-down afterwards, no wonder many of us are feeling sluggish and bloated come January.

We're conditioned to see the New Year as an opportunity to turn ourselves into new and improved versions: slimmer, fitter, healthier

Detoxing may seem like a recent celeb-fuelled phenomenon, or just a fancy word for dieting, but that's not really the case.

Celebrities have no doubt helped make the detox more mainstream, but many of the principles and methods can be traced back thousands of years, in Ayurvedic Indian and Chinese medicine. The Ancient Egyptians were fans of colonic irrigation (the ultimate internal cleanse!) and fasting has been around since the dawn of time.

Weight loss is often cited as a key motivation, but detox devotees will tell you the benefits are far wider.

The basic principle is to eliminate toxins – chemicals absorbed through food and drink, cosmetic and cleaning products, and the atmosphere around us. Methods range from extreme ten-day liquid-only fasts to moderate three or seven-day plans, with specific food types, alcohol and caffeine banned. Adding more 'good stuff' to the system features in many plans too, such as juicing, where nutrient-packed juices replace meals.

As well as feeling physically better and healthier, fans say they feel mentally re-charged after a detox, too.

"The key principles for me are to clean the system," says Fiona Robertson, 48, who runs detox holidays at Retreat Biarritz. "Firstly by returning to a simple cleansing diet, introducing more vegetables and fruits in the way of juices. Secondly to clean the digestive system and reset your body's way to eliminate old waste and toxins from you on a cellular level.

"Once you eliminate toxins and old waste successfully, your skin will glow and your eyes will sparkle."

Fiona's first encounter with detoxing was during a trip to Thailand in

2003, in search of an experience she'd "never get at home".

"I experienced a lift in energy, a clear mind, became really focused. I made some major decisions in my life that were to bring me to where I am today."

As well as running the retreat, where the detox programme incorporates high-fibre shakes, raw food meals and lots of water, Fiona sells Home Detox Box DIY kits.

She isn't a qualified dietician, but her holiday experience has become a way of life, and the testimonials of her clients reinforce her beliefs.

"It is really very satisfying and rewarding, as I see skin complaints, such as eczema, go away, digestion problems clear up, constipation sort itself out, and huge mood changes correct themselves.

"Your looks can also really change as the skin becomes radiant and glows with inner health. Once you start to clean up your act, everything changes and gets better and falls into place including your weight which naturally balances out."

James Griffiths, founder of Wild



Training, a fitness franchise which also runs retreats incorporating exercise, detox and relaxation, is another advocate.

"The first week [of our food plan] is what we call our elimination plan," explains James, 26. "It removes all the bad stuff from people's diets that slow their metabolisms down, makes them store fat and reduces energy levels.

"Detoxing does work but there are healthy ways to reduce the level of toxins in your body and other more dangerous strategies," he adds. "Your liver deals with a lot of toxins and can swell up to four times its normal size if we consume the wrong nutrition.

"Once your liver can't take anymore, your body starts storing toxins you can't process in your bum, thighs and, most often, abdominal area. There is a reason it's called a beer belly! If you reduce or cut out alcohol, caffeine and refined sugars, you might feel heavy for a day or two, but



The juicing method of detoxing sees meals replaced by nutrient-packed juices made from fresh fruit and vegetables

before long you will feel awesome. Clear head, better sleeps, more energy, clearer skin and eyes.

"You can also look at reducing dairy and grain intake as these foods can often slow down your digestion because we aren't very good at digesting them. Giving your body a break can add variety to your nutrition and help kick-start your metabolism."

If the idea of fasting or eliminating whole food groups doesn't appeal, even incorporating some of the basic principles could give your health a good New Year boost.

As leading dietician Dr Carrie Ruxton from the Tea Advisory Panel says: "Following a detox plan can be more straightforward than people think. It does not need to be extreme. It is important to make sure you are getting the right nutrients and anti-

oxidants with your food combinations.

"Many of us won't necessarily be aware how beneficial some food and drinks can be – for example, our favourite British cup of black tea is a good source of natural antioxidants to help support heart health, weight control, and brain health."

For lots of people, in January especially, reducing alcohol intake is another big appeal of the detox.

Dr Sarah Jarvis, medical adviser for Drinkaware, says: "Depending on how much you're drinking, you may notice numerous benefits from stopping even for a short time. You're likely to sleep better and feel more rested when you wake up, you may have more energy, your skin will look less sallow and tired.

"It also won't take long for you to

lose weight – a large glass of wine has almost 200 calories, and a new report by the World Cancer Research Fund suggests that about 10% of average calorie intake among people who drink comes from alcohol."

Dr Jarvis warns that people shouldn't be fooled into thinking that a short-term detox 'undoes' the damage of longer-term bad habits.

"One of the problems of 'detoxing' from alcohol is that many people believe that if they stop drinking for a month, it cancels out any ill effects from drinking over the recommended limits for the other 11 months a year. That's simply not how it works.

"If you're drinking within recommended limits, your liver is 'detoxing' – filtering the toxins in alcohol from your body – all the time, and you don't need to stop for a month."