



KARYN SHANKS MD

Heart, Hope, Healing

Detox is About Letting Go: Part One of a Series

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Detox is About Letting Go: Part One

Detoxification is about how we manage the toxins, irritants and negative energy that are an inevitable part of our daily lives. We can't live in a bubble. But we can be wise about how we live and eat and fortify ourselves.

This is a series of offerings that will dispel common myths about what detoxification is and how to stay safe and strong in our lives and this world that challenges us in so many ways.

Everyone knows what toxicity feels like. It's the sickening headache that comes on when we've inadvertently sniffed diesel fuel out on the road or tarmac, or walked past one of those bath and body stores that spew out objectionable unnatural scents. It's the awful feeling of being in the same room with someone who is resentful and blames others for their problems

or is needy, manipulative and slowly sucks the life energy from you before you realize what is happening. We feel it when we haven't slept enough, when we're hormonally imbalanced, when we're dehydrated or when we've eaten too much sugar. It's hard to describe but we just feel...well, toxic. These situations sap us of our strength, energy and vitality. And it's real. Toxicity is real. And it's something we must pay close attention to in order to heal.

Once we're revived, when we've eaten well, moved our bodies, gotten a good night's sleep, decluttered our living and work spaces and set good boundaries for ourselves with others, we feel clearer, enlivened, illuminated, free. And it isn't really that hard to get there, but it takes self-awareness and understanding what elements of our lives deplete us. And a clear plan for self-protection and support. This is another non-negotiable piece of our strategy to heal and to preserve our good health: we must avoid toxins, irritants and negative energy.

We live in a deep and complex relationship with our environments—physical, biological and social. There is a continuous exchange of influences and information that are both physical and energetic in their nature. We are one big web and we thrive when our interconnection and interdependence with the world around us is harmonious. When any aspect of this relationship is out of balance, our health and wellbeing are impacted. These imbalances can challenge us, make us sick, burden us, and act as blocks to our healing.

Here are ten considerations for avoiding toxicity in our lives that I will cover in this series:

1. We must avoid pesticides and pollutants in our living environments.
2. We must avoid plastics for food storage and consumption, as well as single-use bags and containers that are ravaging our environment.
3. We must emphasize organic in our food choices as much as possible.
4. We must bolster our innate detoxification systems (see below).
5. We must avoid toxic and irritating food (sugars, grains, processed foods, food additives and preservatives)
6. We must protect ourselves from the negative energy of others.
7. We must manage our own negative energy (practice optimism, gratitude, compassion and kindness).
8. We must avoid excessive distraction and obsession with technology.
9. We must protect ourselves from excesses of negative information (news).
10. We must create personal environments that are aesthetically pleasing and free from clutter.

How to Support Our Biological Detoxification:

Detoxification is one of the central physiologic processes of our bodies, designed to manage the toxins we are exposed to from both our internal and external environments. It operates continuously and demands a constant supply of appropriate nutrients and energy to function optimally. Detoxification is not something we can sustain with a twice yearly 7-day “detox” program, occasional colonic or sauna. Detox is a 24-7 proposition and we must be vigilant with our support of this part of our bodies to protect our health and vitality.

Detoxification is part of the innate intelligence of our bodies, yet can become overwhelmed when there are inadequate nutrients or energy, or when the toxic load overwhelms our capacity to handle it. When this happens, the toxins have an opportunity to interfere with our bodies’ complex physiology, making us more vulnerable to damage, disease and dysfunction. In the US, with the consumption of the “standard American diet (SAD),” detoxification problems become an important player in common health problems such as fatigue, joint pain, insomnia, irritable bowel syndrome, migraine headaches, autoimmune diseases, cancer and many, many others. The SAD is very nutrient poor and contains many food irritants. This combination leads to blocks in our physiology because there simply are not adequate nutrients or energy available for the important business of the body to proceed. The SAD’s impact on detoxification and health is compounded by common medications used by Americans that cause damage to our primary detoxification organs, the liver, gut and kidneys, or overwhelm their capacity to function optimally.

The Biology of Detoxification (especially for the geeks amongst us)

Most of our toxins are processed by the liver and kidneys. In the liver there are enzyme systems designed to transform toxins ultimately into safer compounds, amendable to elimination from the body. The first of these pathways is called the “hepatic cytochrome P450 system,” which serves to make toxins “sticky” and receptive to attachment by specialized molecules that will render them ready for elimination. The “sticky” toxins are high energy free radicals and are potentially damaging to surrounding tissue. They must be immediately processed through additional enzyme systems known as “hepatic phase 2 detoxification pathways.” Here the sticky free radicals are attached to the specialized amino acid molecules rendering them water soluble and more stable. These are dumped into our bile system, eventually finding their way to our guts, and eliminated from the body. Others pass into our blood stream to be taken up and eliminated by our kidneys.

These complex, multi-stepped processes demand that there be sufficient energy to run the whole operation. The cytochrome P450 system is particularly energy expensive. A fatigued person who has deficits in energy production will not be able to power this aspect of detoxification well enough to meet their needs, adding additional injury to their problem. It is imperative that the amino acids, fatty acids and micronutrients that are involved in each

phase of the process be present in good supply. And it is necessary to have a good supply of antioxidants, acquired from a healthy diet, to protect delicate cellular structures from the effects of the high energy free radicals created in phase 1 of the detoxification process.

And, finally, the body must promote optimal elimination of the toxins, primarily via the gut, kidneys, but also through the skin, hair and breath. There must be excellent hydration, good bile flow and robust elimination from the gut. An overabundance of toxins can overwhelm even a relatively healthy detoxification system by damaging the delicate cellular structures involved in energy production and the transformation of toxins. So it is important that our safety strategy include both supporting our innate toxin transformation and clearance systems as well as avoiding exposure as much as possible.

Essential Elements for Optimal Detoxification

- *Stay well hydrated.* Water assists in the transport of toxins from all sites within the body to the point of elimination. A minimum of 2 quarts daily is needed by most people.
- *Keep the bowels healthy and moving.* Complete daily bowel movements are essential for proper elimination of toxins that have been processed in the liver, dumped into the bile, and released into the intestines. Adequate water intake, movement, dietary fiber and a healthy microbiome are essential. By following a healthy, primarily plant-based food plan (see the [Liftoff Foundational Intensive Nutrition Food Plan](#)) and by taking a good quality, multi-species probiotic daily, most people will enjoy healthy bowel elimination. For those people who are not able to easily move their bowels in large quantity on a daily basis, it is important to work with a Functional Medicine specialist to help you with this. Additional fiber, magnesium or mild intestinal stimulants may be needed.
- *Encourage good bile flow.* This will be accomplished by including healthy fat with each meal and snack. Bile is released with the ingestion of fat and serves as an emulsifier that allows fat to be absorbed through the hydrophilic aspects of the gut lining from where it accesses the blood stream or lymphatic system. This regular release of bile allows for the toxins, transformed within the liver to be released frequently and eventually eliminated from the body via the intestinal tract.
- *Nutritional support for the detoxification enzyme pathways and energy production:* The foundation of this aspect of support will be food. Follow the *Liftoff Foundational Intensive Nutrition Food Plan*. For those with inflammatory or autoimmune conditions use the more intensive *Liftoff Gut-Immune Recovery Intensive Nutrition (GRIN) Food Plan*. It is ideal to work with a Functional Medicine provider to have your nutrition status tested. We have the capability of assessing functionally whether your body has adequate levels of all the major macro and micronutrients. The testing allows us to personalize your nutrition plan.

Supplemental Nutrition to Support Biological Detoxification

If testing is not feasible for you at this time, here is a foundational nutrient support plan to be used as an adjunct to your food:

- Foods that are especially rich in detoxification support nutrients: liver from grass fed cows or free range chickens, other sources of healthy protein in quantities sufficient to meet needs (the average adult needs one-half gram protein per pound “ideal” body weight), fatty wild-caught fish, entire cruciferous vegetable family, onions and garlic, pomegranate seed and juice, watercress, cilantro, sea vegetables, bitters, coffee, green tea, red wine (though not in excess), foods rich in omega-3-fatty acids (fatty fish, ground flax seed, chia seed, grass fed beef), turmeric.
- A good quality multivitamin, multimineral supplement that includes biologically active forms of the B-vitamins, such as methyl-folate, methyl-B12 (cobalamin) and pyridoxine-5-phosphate. It should contain natural E complex and optimal amounts of the basic vitamins and minerals (see appendix).
- A mitochondrial support supplement that contains Co-enzyme Q10, acetyl-l-carnitine and alpha-lipoic acid. Magnesium and a good B-complex are required and will be contained in your multivitamin/mineral.
- Essential fatty acids: The omega-3 fatty acids, EPA and DHA, from fish are ideal. Vegans can use DHA from algae or flaxseed oil. Not everyone can convert DHA into EPA and both are important. Also include GLA (gamma-linoleic acid), an anti-inflammatory omega-6 fatty acid.
- Plant derived nutrients and herbs to support phase1 and 2 liver detoxification pathways, bile flow and toxin elimination: silymarin (from milk thistle seed), catechins and EGCG (epigallocatechin gallate) from green tea, artichoke leaf extract, watercress, ellagic acid from pomegranate, sulfur and glucosinolates from cruciferous vegetables, garlic and onions, dandelion root, Oregon grape root, gentian root. Turmeric, fat, bitter and sour. Cholorgenic acid from coffee (regular coffee use decreases incidence of gall stones).

In Part 2 of this series we'll dive more deeply into the detoxication aspects of food, including the impact of sugar, high fructose corn syrup, grains, irritant and pro-inflammatory foods.

In future parts of this series we'll take a closer look at our need to protect ourselves from the negative energy of others, negative information, clutter and technology.

Liftoff Foundational Intensive Nutrition Food Plan, www.karynshanksmd.com or www.karynshanksmd.com.

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Karyn Shanks, MD, is a physician who lives and practices in Iowa City. Her work is inspired by the science of Functional Medicine, body-mind principles, and wisdom gleaned from the transformational journeys of thousands of clients over her twenty-five-year career. Her work honors each individual and the power of their stories, their inner wisdom, and innate healing potential. She believes that the bones of healing are in what we do for ourselves. She is the author of *Liftoff*, a manual of energy recovery and healing through essential self-care practices.

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