

Holistic Health: Spring Cleansing for Better Health

BY JACKIE DOBRINSKA

Organic, slow-cooked food appeals to the health conscious culture of Asheville. Yet, when it comes to discussing good health, digestion may be an equally important focus. With its metabolic processes and important neurochemicals, the body requires nutrients that don't just come from the food we eat. They also come from the ways our bodies assimilate the food we ingest.

According to ancient healing systems, good health is linked to good digestion. When the digestive fire is strong, it breaks down food, incorporates nutrients, and eliminates wastes, creating healthy tissues while building deep vitality and immunity. When digestion is weak, food ferments in the intestines and wastes can accumulate as toxins. We end up feeling fatigued, bloated, gassy, and achy. We get sick more often and live with low-level symptoms of illness.

Cleansing is an ancient practice used to reboot the digestive fire. Our ancestors cleansed every night in what was a 12-hour-long fast between the last meal of the day and first, now indicated by the term "breakfast." Today, we can support digestion by returning to this daily fast, adding a morning drink of warm, lemony, salty water and gentle liver-supporting teas.

Yet given life demands, blood sugar imbalances, and the practice of food as entertainment, 12-hour-long fasts may prove difficult to incorporate as a regular habit. Additionally, our food, air, and water have more toxins that we must process. For such cases, ancient wisdom suggests seasonal cleansing.

Both traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda recommend cleansing in harmony with the season. Winter cleanses provide simple, warming, nourishing foods that dispel the damp and cold. Summer cleanses incorporate fruit and vegetable juices to rest the digestion and cool the summer heat.

Spring is considered the best time to cleanse, in part, because the very season supports it. The first spring greens—chickweed, violet and dandelion leaves—are all gentle cleansing herbs. Chickweed and dandelion leaves cleanse the liver, and violet leaves clear stagnant phlegm, often a by-product of a cold, damp winter. In the past, when we lived more closely with the earth, these would have been incorporated into our spring diet, naturally clearing toxins and building the digestive fire.

Today, our food is less seasonal, and cleansing is often confused with weight loss and dieting. Though these are potential side effects, a good cleanse is more about restoring balance.

A simple way to start is to eliminate foods that cause inflammation. Begin by removing all processed, packaged, and prepared foods from your diet. Take out anything with hydrogenated fats, rancid oils, caffeine, alcohol, and sugars. Next eliminate foods that are known to cause a high incidence of allergies—wheat, corn, nuts, dairy, and eggs.



For one to three weeks, replace these items with lightly cooked, whole foods you recognize from the garden. These would include broccoli, beans, brown rice, bok choy, beets, and particularly anything in season. Drink nourishing herbal teas and room temperature water, as cold water extinguishes the digestive fire. Supplement your diet with probiotics or fermented foods to rebuild gut health.

These few simple steps strengthen the inner fire that turns our food into medicine. While it may require support, it is worth the price, as it helps us live with more energy, vitality, and clarity.

This article contains general information about medical conditions and complementary treatment, and is not to be considered expert advice. Always consult your physician and other qualified healthcare provider before beginning any new treatment, diet, or fitness regimen. Jackie Dobrinska is a wellness coach and owner of A Simple Vibrant Life (asimplevibrantlife.com). You can reach her at jldobrinska@gmail.com, or by phone at 828.337.2737.