



HEALTH

Spring cleaning for your body: Try this tonic

BY MARGIE RUTLEDGE

For hard spring cleaners who discover Halloween candy wrappers, hard bits of Christmas cake, nachos (hint of the Super Bowl party) or cinnamon Valentine hearts through their travails, remember: Its not just the nooks and crannies that collect debris. The better part (let's hope) of those souvenirs made it into somebody's body. For generations, spring meant not just spring cleaning, but also spring tonic.

"Around the globe and through history, many cultural groups have routinely done a ritual body flushing," says Celina Ainsworth, a Toronto clinical herbal therapist. "Singularly or in groups for religious purposes; people have focused on purging and cleansing to give their body systems a break and maintain a healthy state. Cleaning is both a spiritual goal and brings general good health.

"A spring cleanse is very common because in the new year it brings rejuvenation and growth. It is better to do a cleanse in warmer weather, from April to September, because with a reduced caloric intake the metabolic rate decreases and people are more sensitive to cold," she says.

With recent news that eating less may, in fact, help slow the aging process, there is no better time to start than now.

Ms. Ainsworth recommends a program of at least seven days to reduce food and focus on easily digested high-quality, non-refined foods to promote the cleansing process. She does not recommend fasting for most people, but instead suggests a gentler, gradual, day-by-day reduction of foods and consumption of organic fruit and vegetables.

In the days before the cleanse, Ms. Ainsworth suggests eliminating junk foods, fried foods, alcohol, coffee and tobacco. During the first few days of the cleansing period, whole grains, lightly steamed or raw vegetables, nuts, fruit, cold water fish (trout and salmon, steamed or grilled) and plenty of water should be consumed.

Along with these, saunas, massage and herbal teas will help the body's natural elimination of waste products.

After a few days of adjusting to the cleansing diet, Ms. Ainsworth suggests eliminating protein-rich foods (fish, seeds, nuts and legumes) and consuming only whole grains, raw or steamed vegetables, fruit and juices. She says this will optimize the cleansing process and give the digestive system a break.

By days five and six, organic fruit and vegetable juices, along with lots of water and spring tonic tea, are on the menu. And, after one or two days of this, solid food such as grapes, apples, pears and melons can be introduced. The following day, raw or steamed vegetables, grains and light proteins like fish maybe added.

At the end of this seven day cleanse, the body—and mind—should feel good, with increased energy and vitality.

Bottoms up

Spring Greens Cleansing Tea

Dandelion leaf 1 part (or 1/4 cup)

Cleavers 1 part

Figwort 1 part

Red clover 1 part

Stinging nettle 1 part

Peppermint leaf 1 part

Anise seed 1 part

(Greens may be fresh or dried. Available at health food stores.)

Place three teaspoons of tea blend in a teapot. Cover with 3 cups of just boiled spring water. Cover and let steep for 5 minutes. Strain.

Margie Rutledge is a freelance writer in Toronto.