

Spring Clean Your Life

You know that time of year, around mid March, you wake up one morning, and something feels different. You're groggy because you had to set your clock ahead one hour and lost the extra hour of sleep you needed to make up for all the other hours you've missed. You glance around the apartment, and you actually have the urge to clean. You're hungry, but instead of craving the usual coffee and bagel, you want a glass of water and some fresh fruit? Well, you're not alone. The coming of spring has signaled your mind and body with the instinctual urge and biological impulse for a Spring Cleaning.

As creatures of the earth and her natural cycles, Spring is the season for our renewal and awakening. It's the time we clean up our lives, our homes, and our bodies. Interestingly, Chinese medicine has been thinking about this for some 2000 years or more. In classical Chinese medicine each organ in the body is associated with a particular season. The liver, for example, is associated with the spring. From a metabolic point of view, the liver is the most important cleansing organ in the body. So maybe there is an underlying biological reason that has us thinking about cleaning each spring. And for those of you who spent the winter with a bottle of wine in one hand and your VCR remote in the other, while playing a continuous loop of Desperate Housewives DVDs, a spring cleanse may be just the thing to bring you back to life.

The fact is, we are subjected to a variety of potentially harmful substances day after day, including: pollutants in the air, additives or hormones in our food, carcinogens, heavy metals, drugs, medications, chemicals, and various other toxins, not to mention toxic people. All of these chemicals in the liver can leave you feeling a bit weighed down at winter's end. The buildup of these substances in the body contributes to wide variety of conditions ranging from migraines or chronic fatigue syndrome, to immune disorder, stress, or neurological disease. A cleanse, therefore, is an opportunity for your body to eliminate existing toxins and better cope with the burdens we place on it.

In order to restore balance, it's necessary to detoxify and heal the body through a variety of food and lifestyle changes. So let's start with some simple yet effective recommendations for detoxification. First is water. Drinking filtered or spring water will help remove pollutants from the liver and kidney, and will keep your skin clear and beautiful. Have a minimum of 6 cups per day. Try to cut down on the coffee too, and perhaps replace the morning latte with a cup of green tea, which stimulates the immune system.

Next, choose natural (organic) foods free from pesticides and herbicides. Green leafy vegetables like kale, broccoli raab, mixed greens, dandelion greens, bok choy and collard greens are rich in phytonutrients and vitamins, and help cleanse the blood of toxins. Have them with garlic for added benefit. Green leafy vegetables are important too, because they contain fiber. Fiber helps to keep toxins bound together in the body so that they are more easily excreted in the bowels and aren't reabsorbed into the blood. Additionally, colorful fruits and vegetables of the red, orange, yellow and purple variety are very helpful in the cleansing process, since they contain powerful antioxidants that help repair much of the damage done to

the body. Choose things like carrots, bell peppers, beets, strawberries and turnips. Finally, add spices to your meals, too. Herbs like basil, dill, rosemary, cayenne and turmeric all help the body eliminate toxins, and will add zest to your day.

Stress is a major toxin too, and a good cleansing plan must include stress reduction. Techniques like stretching, exercise, deep breathing, yoga, and meditation will all be extremely beneficial in healing the body and calming the mind. It's important to make time for yourself, slow down, and be with yourself and be in your body.

The body also uses the skin as a means of excretion, so cleaning the skin will assist the body in eliminating waste, by encouraging blood flow, and removing the dead layers of cells that block pores. A loofa in the shower, a hot wash cloth scrub, body brushing, facials, and pedicures are all great techniques to keep skin glowing. Who needs Estee Lauder when you can spend \$2 for a wash cloth at the local Bed, Bath and Beyond?

Finally, keep things simple. You don't have to make radical changes overnight, but do try to focus on nice meals consisting of whole, unprocessed foods. Get plenty of sleep. Spend time with people who encourage you and make you feel comfortable, not those who drain you or cause you stress. Clean out the closet and donate those old jeans to the Salvation Army. And finally, stay away from too much alcohol, sugar and nicotine. If you focus on the cleansing and health of your mind and body now, you will feel and see the benefits well into summer and fall, as you peel on your bathing suit and hop the train to the beach or your favorite vacation destination, filled with energy and radiating healthfulness!

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