

THE *Detox Diary*

We're all contemplating a detox. But, asks beauty editor SARAH HALLIWELL, how does self-denial fit into daily life – and is it worth it?

Detox is a January cliché. Everyone we know seems to be locked into some kind of torturous self-denial, penance for an exuberant December. Apart from the 5:2 which works, we're not convinced by food fads: moderation in all things seems to be the way forward, and in the dark days of January it seems enough that we are no longer eating Terry's Chocolate Orange for breakfast. Detoxes always seem to be bookended by panicked "toxing", which cancels out any potential benefits. And how can anyone continue to work, face a commute or be in any way human without proper fuel and a morning coffee?

Even if we generally eat healthily, sugar stealthily saturates our diets. We're always on the go, eating too fast and fuelling ourselves with quick fixes. So the idea is that a detox, done sensibly, can help us break bad food habits and give our beleaguered systems a rest from anything processed as well as caffeine and alcohol. "The concept with detox diets is to avoid the toxins which build up and cause weight gain, lethargy, bloating and so on," says consultant dietician Aveen Bannan. Skincare guru Liz Earle, a juicing fanatic who literally glows with health (and not just because of her moisturisers), is a keen advocate: "When the body does not have to use its energy for digesting and processing food, it is better able to self-heal, eliminate poisons more easily and rebalance its internal chemistry. The excess wastes and impurities of today's world build up in our bodies, resulting in slow metabolism, fatigue, tired or blemished skin, dull hair and eyes and general malaise. All these signs tell us that we need to inner-cleanse."

GET WITH THE PROGRAMME

I decide to commit to the 12 Day Mind & Body Cleanse created by Chris James, a yoga and wellbeing guru who works with celebs and runs elite workshops in the swankiest of health centres. For €148, you get a box of supplements plus a booklet of instructions, advice and recipes. The idea is to build up gradually to the "Power Phase" – three days where you exist on just juice. "More nutrients are released from fresh fruit and vegetables once they are juiced," says Liz Earle. "And we obtain greater levels of nutrition from fresh juices than eating raw fruits and vegetables. We rarely eat a kilo of kale in one sitting, but we might well drink the juice that one kilo of kale creates in a single glass." Aveen Bannan

is cautiously positive about the programme: "The idea of incorporating the juicing phase with eating phases makes it sound more attractive than long-term juicing diets," she says. "There do seem to be a lot of supplements though; while the probiotics and high doses of vitamins and minerals make up for what you're missing, would it not be easier to get the nutrition from food?"

I meet James for coffee and am slightly starstruck: he is a vision of clear skin, filmstar blue eyes and luxuriant Hugh Grant-esque hair, with an enviably laidback aura. I am relieved when he orders an espresso. James explains how his food prescription and high-grade supplements are all designed to "reset

your mind and body, and deliver the most authentic and far-reaching detox that works at the level of your gut, giving you a healthy template that's ongoing." He recommends doing

REAL LIFE DETOX

READ *Deliciously Ella* by Ella Woodward, below (Yellow Kite); *The Extra-Virgin Kitchen* by Susan-Jane White (Gill & Macmillan). Food writers Yotam Ottolenghi and Nigel Slater have inventive ideas for making kale and sweet potato interesting. For juice recipes see www.lizearlewelling.com.



the cleanse two or three times a year for optimum results. I push away my flat white and practically jog to the healthfood shop in a burst of caffeinated adrenalin, eager to "detoxify from stress".

The bottom line is this: no gluten, dairy, meat or fish, caffeine or sugar for twelve days. Yikes. Pick the days carefully: it needs to be a quiet time when you're not socialising much – frankly you will be no fun, and the less temptation the better. "Preparation is key," chirps the booklet: this is off-putting, but true. If you're not organised, you eat whatever's to hand, and in my house that's generally Tayto. I spend the next week stockpiling fruit and veg and making vats of Nigel Slater's tomato curry. Invest in a juicer if you can: my Argos one does the job, or get a juicing attachment for your Magimix. Bottled juices might be highly fashionable, but all the experts emphasise that they're not necessarily the answer: "Fresh juices need to be consumed within a couple of hours, otherwise they may lose many of their nutrients," warns Liz Earle. "If a juice is left to stand, enzyme activity is reduced. Enzymes help chemical reactions take place in the body, making them vital to proper digestion." Aim to have more vegetable juices than fruit, which are naturally higher in sugars; dentists everywhere are grinding their teeth in despair over the juice trend.

A few days in and I'm fully in touch with my inner Gwyneth, striding around the local organic shop with a new sense of belonging as I pile buckwheat, amaranth and other dusty things into my basket. I have no idea what to do with them. Top of the list are sweet potatoes, apparently richer in vitamin C than oranges, along with quinoa, chickpeas and all manner of beans. It's an investment, but focus on what you save on a daily coffee (or bottle of wine ...).



REAL LIFE DETOX
SMALL PLEASURES help keep you going during a detox: swimming, sauna, yoga and walks lend a gentle natural high. Try a Voya body brushing and massage treatment at Dawson Spa, Dublin 2.

Voya Angelicus Serratus detoxing body oil, €37.

UNDER PRESSURE

As the days chug past, I feel lighter and more level without the sugar swings. Being hyper-aware of everything you put in your mouth is startling – cooking the kids' tea without tasting it is a challenge. It takes a few days to adjust to taking so many supplements, but they do mean my stomach's not growling, and I find Chris James' muesli, made with a pedantic six pecans, six almonds and an apple, surprisingly tasty and filling. The boredom factor is the hardest thing. I miss the way meals punctuate and lift the day.

Day seven. These are challenging times. I've had a low-level headache since day one. The kitchen is a bloodbath of splattered beetroot juice, and the kids are mounting a rebellion about the ongoing lack of biscuits. The dog has attacked the pile of mouldering vegetables and strewn a bag of spinach all over the kitchen – even he doesn't want to eat it, and he eats everything, including lightbulbs. I may feel warm inside, but I am as limp and colourless as a piece of old celery – everything seems too loud and too fast. I've had to retune the car radio to LyricFM. My mood is not improved by the booklet's cheery advice: "If you get hungry, snack on a tasty date". This is no way to live. The mere mention of Jo'Burger makes me tearful. I notice that Marlboro Lights are not specifically on the "forbidden" list and realise I'm seriously considering returning to smoking to get me through a weekend of no cafés, bacon sandwiches or, indeed, dinner. A family straw poll quickly establishes that I am "grouchier than usual".

THE AFTERMATH

Just as (I imagine) marathon runners feel, once at the finishing line you're glad you did it. Quite apart from losing eight pounds, feeling lighter and brighter is a great thing. Lack of sugar and gallons of water definitely transform your skin: it's like a dull layer has been lifted. Added benefits include a sense of calm – it's liberating not to have wobbly sugar lows or coffee-fuelled road rages. As a kick-start to breaking food habits and an exercise in self-control, it's been invaluable. Rather than tearing straight into a loaf of bread, I feel reluctant to undo the hard work and stick with some ideas (drinking lemon water first thing and choosing a juice over a Mars Bar), though I do detox in spectacular fashion at a wedding.

Aveen Bannan points out that you're likely to feel better after detox because you're better hydrated (all that juicing, water and herbal tea) and eating more fibre, in the form of fruits and vegetables. But she has reservations. "Cutting out dairy foods means you are missing out on calcium, putting you at risk for osteoporosis – you need to ensure you are having a calcium-rich alternative. Beware also of the lower protein intake which can result in loss of lean muscle mass – ensure you are eating protein-rich alternatives."

At the end of the day, while detox can be the way to ditch that stubborn extra half-stone, it's not enough to have a little blip of healthiness just once a year. "By all means use some of the advice to help you kick start a healthier regime – lots of fresh fruits, vegetables, nuts, pulses, water and so on," says Bannan. "But I think this plan is too long and restrictive. These additions can be part of a healthy regime that does not require huge amounts of expensive supplements and potions. My advice would be to skip the detox and choose eating healthily, get plenty of colourful fruits and vegetables in your diet, keep hydrated, exercise and limit alcohol intake." www.ChrisJamesMindBody.com, available at SpaceNK. ■

REAL LIFE DETOX

SPA DETOXES: Detoxing is easier if you're removed from your daily routine:

- 1. Monart's** Master Detox Programme is a five-day all-inclusive package including all food, several treatments and classes, individual evaluations and a personal trainer. From €1,095 per person. *Enniscorthy, Co Wexford; 053 923 8999; www.monart.ie.*
- 2. The Powerscourt Hotel Resort & Spa** Wellness Weekend (January 23-24) includes a two-night stay, personal trainer session, pilates and an ESPA treatment plus lunch and dinner on one day. €475 per person sharing. *01 274 8888; www.powerscourthotel.com.*
- 3. Dunboyne Castle Hotel** Detox Winter Package is an overnight stay during January and February plus a spa treatment and one dinner. From €230 per room per night for two sharing. *Dunboyne, Co Meath; 01 801 3500; www.dunboynecastlehotel.com.*
- 4. Inchydoney Island Lodge & Spa's** New Year package includes two nights' B&B in ocean-view room with treatments and one dinner, from €375 per person. *Clonakilty, West Cork, 023 883 3143; www.inchydoneyisland.com.*
- 5. Dingle Skellig Hotel and Spa** offers various detox treatments including a Yonka Body Detox (€84, 75 minutes). *Dingle, Co Kerry, 066 915 0200; www.dingleskellig.com.*
- 6. Ananda Destination Spa** in the Himalayas, India, has a seven-night yoga, Ayurveda and detox week led by Chris James: April 16-23. Includes full board, transfers and yoga sessions. From €2,995 per person. www.anandaspa.com.