



HOLT HEALTH NEWS

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Colon Cleansing

In the past, colon cleansing may have been the "butt" of many jokes, but this process offers real and important benefits for your health and well-being. Read on to find out more about this hot topic.

Although you may not consciously be aware of it, your colon is actually "hard wired" to your brain and there is a highly complex pathway of intercommunication between the bowel and the mind. This is part of the "gutmind" or "mindgut." When one thinks about the colon, one most often thinks about its contents. The contents of the colon come and go, but the overall time (duration) that these contents reside in the colon may be an important factor in general health and well-being. "Friendly" bacterial inhabitants of the colon are also responsible for general health and well-being. For many years, the colon and its contents were viewed as a source of potential toxins to which the body was exposed, especially in the presence of constipation. These days, conventional medicine often rejects these ideas. (Holt S, Natural Ways to Digestive Health, M. Evans and Co. Inc, 2000, available at www.stephenholtmd.com)

There is no doubt that these thoughts of "colon toxins" led to the common belief that everyone should open their bowel, at least on a daily basis. However, it is recognized that a healthy bowel habit generally involves opening one's bowel less than three times daily, but more than once in three days. That said, many people suffer from uncomfortable changes in their bowel habit, most often in the form of temporary constipation due to lifestyle or environmental changes. Constipation makes many people feel lousy.

Conventional medicine has been rather unwilling to acknowledge any benefit of intermittent colon cleansing and colon hydrotherapy. While there is surprisingly little research on the benefits of colon cleansing, there are thousands of people who claim they derive an improved sense of well-being by restoring the regularity of their bowel habit. Achieving a regular bowel habit involves a healthy lifestyle including regular exercise, adequate fluid intake and good nutrition (especially adequate dietary fiber intake).

An important aspect of regular bowel habit depends on the amount of unabsorbed fiber that is taken in the diet. There have been many studies that show the benefits of insoluble types of dietary fiber (and combined soluble fiber intake) on the promotion of healthy bowel function. Dieters should consider ways of supplementing fiber in their diet because fiber provides a feeling of fullness that may benefit weight loss. Dietary fiber is not absorbed, but it is subject to fermentation by the healthy bacterial inhabitants of the colon (prebiotic effects). Furthermore, dietary fiber may provide added benefits, due to its ability to cleanse the colon and assist in detoxification of the body. Fiber can help to mop up "toxic" forms of bile acids and other toxicants that are present in colonic contents.

While regularity of bowel habit must involve positive lifestyle principles, a large proportion of the population requires temporary help in overcoming constipation. There are many over-the-counter (OTC) laxatives available, but some laxatives can be quite dangerous for some people. Laxatives that cause excessive purgation can actually damage the function of the bowel. There is a disease entity that is well described among people who use powerful, stimulant laxatives on a regular basis. This is called "cathartic

colon," which means forced exit of stool from the bowel.

Strong laxatives are unpleasant to take because they can cause griping abdominal pain and they may stimulate imbalances of body fluids or chemistry and cause excessive discharge of sticky mucus in the colon. Continuing to purge the bowel causes a "lazy bowel" that will only respond to the continuous use of strong laxatives. Over a period of time, strong laxatives can damage the nerve supply to the colon and the bowel cannot engage in normal movements that cause easy evacuation of stool. There is a common type of constipation that seems to be related to lack of coordination of muscles around the back passage (anus and rectum). This lack of coordination can be overcome to some degree by increasing the dietary intake of insoluble dietary fiber. Fiber helps to treat hemorrhoids and it lowers pressure inside the colon.

Many people have experienced an unpleasant initial reaction to increasing fiber in their diet. Delivering large amounts of fiber to the "untrained" colon often results in increased frequency of bowel habit and gas. This situation is fortunately short-lived. Some experimentation is always required when extra fiber is increased in the diet; and I advise people not to "give up" on fiber supplements prematurely. I advise individuals to keep adjusting the amount of fiber that they take in supplement form until their colon becomes agreeable and accepting of its new healthy contents.

As a gastroenterologist with a major interest in alternative medicine, I believe in the need for simple, natural and gentle ways to engage in the healthy habit of colon cleansing. There are complicated but effective ways of intermittent colon cleansing with colon hydrotherapy. Colon hydrotherapists can improve the outcome of their treatments by the correct use of well-formulated dietary supplements for digestive health. However, I stress that the supplements they use should have a clear evidence-base for an effect on digestive function.

Certain nutrients can effectively support regular bowel function in a simple, gentle and natural way. A complex nutrient-botanical formula is shown in Table 1. This formulation is quite versatile and it has detoxification implications.

Artichoke Leaf	Ashwagandha Root
Beet Leaf	Burdock Root
Chlorella	Corn Silk
Dandelion Root	Arabinogalactans
Milk Thistle 80%	Mullein Leaf
Red Clover Flowers	Turmeric Root
Aloe Vera 200: 1 Concentrate	Rhubarb Root
Slippery Elm Bark	Marshmallow Root

Fennel Seed	Ginger Root
Triphala	Magnesium (Hydroxide)
L-Glutamine	Fish Oil 50% Powder

Table 1: Ingredients of an effective colon cleansing formula.

This complex formulation is designed to support the principal function of the colon in the act of evacuation of stool. The formula draws upon several traditional medical systems that have focused their attention on the colon as a source of health and well-being. The formula uses an Ayurvedic herbal system for body cleansing (Triphala) and utilizes recommendations from master herbalists on a variety of different botanicals that can support or modify colon function. Some ingredients do provide gentle purgative actions (Fennel seed, Rhubarb root), but other ingredients are designed to support the lining of the colon or provide a mild astringent effect (Aloe Vera, Slippery Elm Bark). Fish oil and L-glutamine offer nutritive support for the colon's lining, while Mullein leaf and Ginger root provide a "soothing" effect. One principal mechanism of action of this formula is to hold water in the bowel to make the stool softer and easier to pass (known as the osmotic laxative effect).

Colon cleansing was once called "the royal pathway to health" because of its popularity among kings, queens and the aristocracy of the Victorian era. Members of the French aristocracy were the strongest proponents of stool evacuation for health. For a while, this activity was considered to be an "embarrassing joke." These days, individuals are more willing to talk about normal body functions in an open and constructive manner.

Medical practitioners continue to argue about the benefits of colon cleansing. Once relegated to the world of quackery, the act of colon cleansing as a part of detoxification of the body is emerging as an increasingly valuable process in the promotion of well-being.

Be Healthy!

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Dr. Stephen Holt, M.D. is a Distinguished Professor of Medicine (Emerite) and a medical practitioner in New York State. He has published many peer-review papers in medicine and he is a best-selling author with more than twenty books in national and international distribution. He has received many awards for teaching and research. Dr. Holt is a frequent lecturer at scientific meetings and healthcare facilities throughout the world. He is the founder of the Holt Institute of Medicine (www.hiom.org) and www.stephenholtmd.com