

Doctor debunks detox diets

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(Medical Xpress)—Detox diets are, simply put, a hoax. Just ask George Dresser.

"There's some sort of health claim around the idea that by doing the (detox) diet, you are eliminating something that's not good for you from your [body](#), and that these foods, in some special way, enhance the elimination of something that's not good for you. I think that's false marketing; that's the bottom line," said Dresser, a professor at Western's Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry.

"There is no evidence for the (diet's) elimination of toxins, in any fashion, from your system," added the toxicologist, pharmacologist and an internal medicine specialist at London Health Sciences Centre.

Dresser was recently sought out by CBC's Marketplace, for an investigation of detox diets. The episode, which aired last week, saw Western students test a popular 48-hour detox cleanse endorsed by Dr. Mehmet Oz on his television show. A group of sorority sisters put the diet to the test, while a control group ate with no restrictions.

Blood tests taken before and after the 48-hour cleanse, found no detoxifying benefits. In fact, Dresser said afterward, he couldn't tell, looking at the blood tests, which group did the diet and which group ate to its heart's – or stomach's – content.

"Detox diets are promoted as a healthy thing to do, and that by doing them, they are a root to quick health," Dresser said, adding this is far

from the case.

Your body is fully equipped to detoxify itself, he explained, noting organs such as the liver will take care of the job without any help.

It's important to note a detox diet is not a quick solution to a poor diet and unhealthy lifestyle, he continued.

"I think the desire for people to be healthy is a very positive thing. But I think, that if these diets are a dramatic change from what a person is normally doing, the likelihood is that they won't be able to sustain it, and therefore, the health benefit is minimal," Dresser explained.

"The issue is that people should not be living an unhealthy lifestyle for 28 days of each month, and think that two days of some detox diet will make up for the poor choices for the rest of the month. The ultimate healthy diet is one you can live with day in, day out. I would rather see people make very small changes to what they eat, and do it for five years."

If you're set on making a healthy choice, look at the whole spectrum of what is possible, Dresser added.

"If you drink alcohol in excess of the current recommendation, then your best way of detoxing, if you want to call it that, is to moderate the amount you drink. What it means, is to be eating balanced nutrition most of the time, get exercise most of the week, minimizing alcohol intake, getting a good amount of rest and dealing with the stress in your life. Those things are probably better than doing a crash detox."

When it comes to other popular diet fads, such as going gluten-free, Dresser has some similar advice.

"The number of people who are actually allergic to gluten is as low as 2 per cent, and as high as maybe 10 per cent," he said, noting if you haven't tested positive for Celiac Disease, there is really no need or benefit to eating gluten-free.

"If you start restricting food intake, it makes it very difficult to eat a balanced diet and you end up spending a lot of energy and anxiety making sure there's no gluten in your [diet](#). With that time and energy, you might be better off worrying about general health changes," Dresser explained.

"There are some things that are absolutely unhealthy, unlike gluten, like excess salt, trans fats, processed anything. Diets where they restrict legumes or gluten, where you're talking about taking out natural food that's unprocessed, I think that's problematic and difficult, when it doesn't need to be," he said.

"I think these (diets) are selling snake oil. A lot of their claims are certainly not based on scientific evidence."

University students are a good target for messages such as these, Dresser added, because they are, for the first time, responsible for their own [health](#) and [food](#) choices.

"If you're going to read up on detox diets, read up on healthy nutrition. Spend your time learning to eat healthy."

Provided by University of Western Ontario

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