

Fall cleansing: celebrate the harvest and prepare for the dark months

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As the days grow shorter and we enter the second “transition” season of the year, it can be helpful to pause for a few days and work in concert with this change to adjust digestion, immunity, and circulation for optimal winter health. These three broad physiological processes work together to ensure that the denser foods, wind, and cold that typically accompany Winter don’t lead to patterns of congealed energy: sluggishness, chronic congestion, cold, and even depression.

Furthermore, as we move indoors after being outside all Summer, and we move from action to reflection as the darker night hours outnumber the day’s, a period of introspection that gathers the threads of thought and learning from the last few months can provide insight, purpose and passion to drive us through the more inwardly-focused months.

To these ends, we can choose simple seasonal foods along with mildly bitter but also sweet and nourishing roots to enhance digestive energy. Next, we can combine warming and aromatic herbs to awaken both digestive and circulatory strength. Consuming these traditional teas and extracts works in concert with the simple soups and grains we consume.

Last but not least, the traditional fall cleanse involves a period of about a week where caloric intake may be less than what a person is accustomed to. It is important not to undergo a fasting or cleansing process if one’s constitution is overly cold, deficient, or weak – as the system may not have the requisite energy to respond to the gently challenges the cleansing process poses. Don’t fast or cleanse if you are pregnant!

The main ingredients for a fall cleanse are:

- nourishing roots, squashes, and whole grains
- plenty of water
- gentle exercise, like a 45-minute walk daily in the sunshine
- digestive and liver support
- immune support
- circulatory support

Usually, this can all be accomplished with one or two extract blends, a tea, and easy recipes that can be prepared ahead of time.

Step 1. When and How Long? Choose a time when you can devote a little more of your day to rest, introspection, and walks outdoors. The process can leave you feeling tired, especially on the first day or two, so don't plan it for an overly busy time.

→ Average time is about a week.

Step 2. Meals. There will be two basic meals taken during the cleanse days. These meals are very simple though spiced to taste, and both focus on nourishing. I usually recommend a 1-day 'lead-in' period, when only one meal during the day is different from usual, with the regular schedule beginning the next day. During the cleanse period, aim for a total of 1,000 to 1,500 calories daily, depending on your weight and metabolism.

MEAL 1: oatmeal or other whole grain, well cooked in water. To between 1 and 3 cups of this grain you can add a little coconut milk (2-3 TBS per cup), a little salt, and a pinch of cinnamon and nutmeg, or ginger and cardamom, to taste.

MEAL 2: medicinal soup. Combine a gallon of cold water, 4TBS of Astragalus root and 4TBS of Codonopsis root. Cover, and simmer at least an hour, then strain. Discard the herbs and add 2 chopped carrots, 2 chopped burdock roots, about 4 cups of chopped winter squash, 1 cup of chopped sweet potato, and 2-8 cloves of garlic. Simmer covered for another hour or until the vegetables are tender, then blend and salt to taste. Take between a pint and a quart of this soup daily.

OTHER FOODS: Generally, these two meals will serve as the bulk of daily calories. **Warm constitutions** can have a piece of fruit for breakfast / snack if desired, but it should be apart from other meals. **Cool constitutions** should just have a little more of MEAL 1 for breakfast or as a snack.

Step 3. Beverages. Aim for 4-5 glasses of pure water a day. Additionally:

BEV. 1: 'Master Cleanser' made with the juice of 1 lemon, 2 TBS maple syrup, 1/8 of a teaspoon of Cayenne, and 1 pint (16 ounces) of water.

BEV. 2: Herbal infusion prepared with 1 TBS dry ginger root (or 2TBS fresh) and 2 TBS Hawthorn berries, steeped in 1 quart of hot water for 1 hour.

→ Drink 8 ounces of BEV. 1 twice a day, about an hour or so before lunch and before dinner (100 cal/cup). Drink 16 ounces of BEV. 2 twice a day, about 30 minutes or so after breakfast and after lunch. The herbal infusions support the liver and circulation.

Step 4. Herbal extracts. The following blend gently encourages digestion while also warming and reducing spasms along the entire GI tract. Additionally, Thyme is protective to the respiratory system.

Dandelion root tincture, Angelica root tincture, and Thyme in equal parts.

→ Take one whole teaspoon of this extract, in a little bit of water, twice a day 15 minutes before lunch and before dinner.

Step 5. Finishing up. After 4 to 10 days, a typical fasting and cleansing process is complete. The first day or two are always the hardest, but most people feel quite good after 3 or 4 days and many times want to continue with the reduced-calorie regimen. This is fine, though I would consider adding a digestible protein source if going longer than 2 weeks, and I strongly advise caution in overly cool, deficient, or weak constitutions.

When you are ready to return to your more regular diet, transition back slowly. The first day should still feature MEAL 1 and MEAL 2, but perhaps a vegetable soup or stew can be added. After that, slowly introduce protein sources; dairy products (if desired); wheat and sugars (if desired); and alcoholic beverages / recreational drugs over the course of two or three days.

SAMPLE PROGRAM:

7-day program, with a 1-day transition at the beginning and a 2-day transition at the end, for a total of 10 days.

DAY 1: regular food, but replace 1 meal with MEAL 2.

DAYS 2-8:

→Breakfast: 1 apple (100 kcal)

→BEV 2, 16 ounces (Ginger and Hawthorn)

→BEV 1, 8 ounces (100 kcal)

→15 minutes before lunch: 1 tsp. Herbal extract (Dandelion, Angelica, Thyme) in a little water.

→MEAL 1, 3 cups (about 750 kcal)

→Nice after-lunch walk (at least 45 minutes)

→BEV 2, 16 ounces (Ginger and Hawthorn)

→BEV 1, 8 ounces (100 kcal)

→15 minutes before dinner: 1 tsp. Herbal extract (Dandelion, Angelica, Tyme) in a little water.

→MEAL 2, with 1-2 TBS olive oil (100-200 kcal)

→Short after-dinner walk, 15 minutes

DAY 9: MEAL 1 for breakfast, soup and salad for lunch, MEAL 2 for dinner.

DAY 10: regular breakfast, soup and salad for lunch, regular dinner.

VARIATION based on constitution:

Warmer constitutions that might tend towards swollen glands, or retention of fluid, might want to focus on the lymphatic system along with the circulatory system. This can be helpful for anyone who has a tendency to retain excess moisture. Modify the Ginger and Hawthorn infusion by replacing the Ginger root with Cleavers herb (2TBS Hawthorn, 2TBS Cleavers).

If recurrent winter infections are a concern, add 1tsp of the following herbal extract blend to every pint of medicinal soup you consume:

→ Spikenard, Reishi, Red Clover in equal parts.

If mood and energy are affected by the change of seasons, take ½ tsp of either of the following extracts first thing in the morning: Mimosa (Albizia julibrissin), for sadness and withdrawal; or Rhodiola (R. rosea) for fatigue and sluggishness. Also, modify the infusion to be 1TBS Hawthorn, 1TBS Ginger, and 1TBS Linden flowers.