

Elimination and Detoxification, The Cleansing and Interaction of the Biochemical and Spiritual Layers



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In a previous article, I discussed what we *need*. That list of necessities (not all sold on TV!) demonstrated that we are very connected to the earth, to our past, to others. Any illusion of disconnectedness is just that, an illusion. This month, I will discuss the converse--what we *do not need*, and how to get rid of such stuff. In fact, the clearing that we need to do on a regular basis is considered necessary for a devotional practice, to enable us to connect to that which is important. The first two steps of the eight-limb yogic path, yama and niyama, talk about personal and social/ethical precepts. The modern words for some of these practices are detoxification, elimination, and simplification.

At a glance, one might think that biochemical and spiritual processes are vastly different and separate. However, there are important similarities between these layers of function, and they interact on many levels in creating and maintaining health.

STRESSORS AND TOXINS

Let's begin with the concept of stressors. A stressor can be defined as a challenge to a system. A mechanical example is a truck going over a bridge, or a human body lifting a heavy object. The bridge and body are designed to handle these stressors. The difference between living beings and inanimate objects is that with the proper stressors, living beings become stronger; whereas inanimate objects do not change. Therapeutic stressors such as math homework or yoga practice are designed to make us better. We can think of the living organism as a system for handling stressors so that it can survive and procreate (and achieve spiritual goals). In fact, without stressors, the body never obtains optimal fitness. The state of fitness (which requires an article in itself) involves several realms, such as the mental, physical, spiritual and biochemical.

Toxins are a class of stressors that are harmful to the body. Toxins can be of many forms--from chemical substances, to ways of thinking, to relationships to others, relationship to time (past, present or future), and to certain environments. The

body is designed to handle most toxins. However, unlike other stressors, there is no good in toxins. While toxins are harmful--ideally we don't want any--they are inherent in life. Therefore, if they can't be eliminated, they must be detoxified. For example, even mercury, a serious toxin, occurs in nature. The body does have mechanisms to handle small amounts. However, this mechanism can be overwhelmed.

Toxins have two primary sources--from the outside, called *exotoxins*, and from the inside, called *endotoxins*. Exotoxins include pesticides, heavy metals, biological toxins produced by bacteria and mold, and the chemicals in our foods--both natural and synthetic. Endotoxins are produced by the body and by the bacteria and mold that normally live in our body. These will be discussed in more detail below.

The concept of exo- and endo-toxins can apply to the mind-body-spirit system as well. An example of an exotoxin is the TV news. (Why do they think we want to hear about every murder, car accident, and fire each morning and night?!) An example of an endotoxin would be a recurrent thought or feeling that poisons one's ability to succeed in reaching a desired goal.

Toxins, both biochemical and spiritual, accumulate over time. Fat-soluble pesticides deposit in our fat cells. Toxic emotions and concepts become ingrained in our thought patterns.

DETOXIFICATION

While most of the biochemical detoxification occurs in the liver, spiritual and emotional toxins are managed by our mind-body-spiritual systems. However, these detoxification mechanisms can also be overwhelmed. The best way to restore balance is to eliminate the toxic input and support the toxic output with supplements and practices that support detoxification processes.

Biochemical Detoxification refers to two different processes. The first is the continuous detoxification that occurs every moment in our body, as all of the chemicals we eat, drink and breath,

(exotoxins) as well of all those chemicals produced within the body (endotoxins) need to be processed and removed. Most of these chemical processes require supportive enzymes, which rely on specific nutrients. Some of this detoxification occurs in stages. For example, Chemical A can only be excreted through the kidneys or bowel if changed to Chemical C. To get to Chemical C, Chemical A must be changed to chemical B by one process, and chemical B is then changed to chemical C by a second process. In some cases, chemical B is more toxic than chemical A or C. If the second process is not occurring efficiently, there can be a buildup of chemical B, causing a myriad of toxic symptoms. For example, in the breakdown of alcohol, a toxic intermediary is made, which is further reduced by the liver to safe compounds. However, in some people, due to a genetic mutation, when alcohol is combined with Tylenol, the biochemical machinery is overwhelmed and there is a toxic build-up that can make some people very sick.

One can also think of the immune system as a detoxification system, in which case the toxin is bad bacteria, fungi, viruses and even cancer cells (at any one time, we are estimated to have 100 cancer cells in our body!)

The other use of the word detoxification refers to a defined period of time, a "Detox", when one changes the diet, or even fasts, while at the same time engaging in some cleansing process, to rid the body of toxic build-ups. The cleansing process can include the taking of special supplements, enemas or colonic irrigation, sauna, and Ayurvedic panchakarma practices (such as oil massage). At first, as these chemicals are mobilized, there may be a period of increased symptoms. This is a necessary part of the process. A complete detox can take weeks to months.

THE GUT, "LEAKY GUT SYNDROME" and "GALT" (Gut Associated Lymphoid Tissue)

The gut can be considered a "tube within a tube" with the contents of the gut officially "outside" the body. The purpose of the gut, therefore, is to let nutrients into the body without letting bad stuff in, such as bacteria and other chemicals. In addition, the gut is the home to trillions of bacteria, weighing approximately three pounds! In fact, of all the cells that make up our body, 90% are *not us*—they are the bacteria that we evolved to carry within and without!

In fact, we need this "good" bacteria to properly

process certain nutrients and to prevent the growth of bad bacteria. Treatment with antibiotics, NSAIDs such as Motrin or aspirin and other factors, can alter this ecology, allowing for unhealthy bacteria and mold (such as candida) to dominate this internal environment.

There are "tight junctions" between cells of the gut that act as gates. Alterations of bowel ecology can alter the integrity of these gates, causing a constant toxic exposure (endotoxins), which can overwhelm the body's detoxification mechanisms.

In addition, approximately 50% of the body's immune system is geared to the gut, to defend against invasion. This can be overwhelmed when the gut becomes "leaky", causing the immune system to become over-reactive (allergy and auto-immune disease) and under-reactive (recurrent infection, such as sinusitis). The observation that we lose our appetites when we are ill and that people with auto-immune disease often improve when fasting supports the notion that the immune system can be positively or negatively altered by how and what we eat.

A large portion of the body's energy and organs are oriented to digestion—extracting the good and removing the bad—from what we eat and drink. Most of the ancient disciplines such as Chinese and Ayurvedic (Indian) medicine use nutritional modification as methods of healing and prevention.

The gut also contains a nervous system that may prove as complex as our brains. This nervous system not only regulates gut function directly, it also produces hormones and neurotransmitters that can effect every cell of the body. This "gut intelligence" is involved with "programming" the immune system about what substances are friends vs foes. The leaky gut can cause immune dysfunction through these mechanisms.

FOOD ALLERGIES

As discussed before, some imbalances can cause a generalized allergic response to many substances, including the body itself ("auto-immune disease") or to numerous chemicals ("multiple chemical sensitivity"). The most common allergenic foods are proteins from wheat (gluten) and from cow milk (casein). Some allergies are reversible if the allergy is secondary to a condition of imbalance.

LEAKY MIND, SPIRITUAL TOXINS AND ALLERGY

The concept of leakiness and allergy can apply

to the mental/spiritual realm. If we are "toxic", then our integrity is compromised. Dangerous concepts, disruptive people and values can breach our mental-spiritual-energetic "force field" and cause us to become out-of-balance or off-center. This state is manifest though anxiety, depression, sleep disturbance, problems focusing, being confused over priorities, and being influenced by forces that we generally reject (such as materialism).

"Spiritual allergy" can be thought of as an over-reaction or toxic reaction to events and stressors that we should normally be able to handle, but can't due to a profound imbalance in this system.

ELIMINATION

Elimination also refers to two processes, one in which a certain input (such as a food, or TV) is removed from our diet. The other is where something that has already gotten into us is output--such as biochemical wastes or a dysfunctional belief.

In the case of heavy metals and certain ingrained toxins, once the toxin is identified, special techniques such as chelation or EMDR (for fixed emotional trauma) may be necessary and effective--these involve simultaneous detoxification and elimination--and need to be provided by a qualified practitioner. If one mobilizes these toxins and fails to eliminate them, then they can re-deposit elsewhere or become even more toxic.

SYNERGY BETWEEN BIOCHEMICAL AND SPIRITUAL (ENERGETIC) PROCESSES

The biochemical and spiritual realms are not separate--in fact they are interactive. We know scientifically that the hormonal, immune and sleep systems are especially sensitive to emotional-spiritual and to biochemical toxicity. Disturbances in one realm causes similar dysfunction in the other. Either can be harmed or healed by changes in the other.

The energy of the body, called *chi* by the Chinese and *prana* by the Indians, flow in meridians (Chinese) or nadis and chakras (Indian). These energy systems begin as defenses but can become imbalanced or intoxicated through numerous factors. Energy healers claim to be able to see or feel these imbalances. Oftentimes, such imbalances manifest as emotional, hormonal, or immune system dysfunction. They can be improved by detoxification/elimination and with modalities such as acupuncture, yoga practice, meditative practice,

and other body-mind work. These modalities can provide an ongoing low-level detoxification.

EFFECT ON AGING

At all times, there are two major processes going on in the organism--processes of destruction, or degeneration, and processes of construction, or regeneration. Aging occurs when the rate of degeneration occurs faster than the rate of regeneration. "Youthing" occurs when regeneration outpaces degeneration. Evidence of youthing includes Dean Ornish's proof that the coronary arteries actually become unclogged with changes of lifestyle. Those who have a regular balanced yoga practice, eat, sleep and eliminate well, and periodically detoxify experience the youthing of the mind and body. When we say, "I am stressed out", it really means that the detoxification and regenerative mechanisms are being overwhelmed.

HOW AND WHEN TO DETOXIFY AND ELIMINATE

Based on the above, we all need periods of detoxification and elimination. Detox/eliminations can be as short as a week or as long as a month or two, depending upon the extent. It is especially valuable to do them during change of seasons (spring and fall) as the mind-body-spirit is preparing for a new phase of weather. Planning for such a period is helpful, if not essential. During early phases of elimination/detoxification there can be an exacerbation of symptoms or problems, as toxins are released, or as addictions become more pronounced before they release their hold on us. Find a good time for a detox--when one can go slower, sleep more, and nurture oneself.

It is important if not invaluable to have some professional guidance during a detox, whether it be provided by a practitioner or spiritual counsellor or some other qualified professional.

There exists a synergy between modalities when detoxifying. Try to work on as many planes as possible--such as eliminating foods, taking supplements, drinking clean water, sleeping well, going for body work, taking a gentle yoga class, meditating regularly, journaling, reading, etc.

After the detox/elimination we re-introduce various substances and activities one at a time, to enable one to clearly see the effect of each. A detox/elimination has the important effect of making the toxins in one's life more apparent. Often times,

we are unaware of the toxic effects of a food, such as wheat or McDonalds, or a job, person, or habit. In fact, sometimes we are addicted to the things to which we are toxic (for reasons that are beyond the scope of this article). Having a vacation from these toxins, and then re-exposing oneself, sometimes makes the toxic reaction very clear to consciousness.

Finally, the concept of simplification, in my mind, refers to the effects of a detox/elimination, where one does not re-introduce certain toxins, making the choice of keeping them out of one's life on an ongoing basis (more on this in a future article!).

IMPORTANT NOTE: This general information should not be used to make decisions about medical care without the involvement of a knowledgeable practitioner.

For More Information

- O See Dr. Cheikin's related articles on: Detoxification, Elimination and Simplification and What We Really Need
- O Dr. Cheikin's website, www.cheikin.com, has helpful articles on related topics
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