

Diet and Detoxification: Thoughts Upon Reading *The Detox Strategy* by Brenda Watson

Review by Rosalind Michahelles, Health Counselor

Why even consider a detox strategy? Who needs it? According to Brenda Watson, author of *The Detox Strategy: Vibrant Health in Five Easy Steps* (Free Press, 2008), everyone would do well to engage in detoxification because of pollution – pollution in the air we breathe, in the water we drink, and in the food we eat. Even organically produced food cannot entirely escape because pollution is ubiquitous.

Consider the known facts about the chemicals discharged into the air, water, and soil. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency reports that “industrial and federal facilities in the United States released more than four billion pounds of chemicals into the environment in 2005.” (*Nutrition Alert*, vol.13, No.4, p.7) Simply put, we are exposed to a lot of what our ancestors did not evolve to cope with and so we can expect the unexpected in our physical reactions. Those substances are what Brenda Watson calls “environmental toxins,” as opposed to “internal toxins,” the by-products of metabolism. To help with the former, she provides a useful to-eliminate list of household items. For the latter she goes into specifics to describe how the body deals with what it gets.

My own understanding of how our bodies deal with what comes along – food, drink, air, cosmetics, sunshine, etc. – is sufficient to know that science has uncovered a great deal but may only have scratched the surface. For example, finding cholesterol in arterial plaque, researchers concluded cholesterol was causing the plaques; now we read that perhaps cholesterol is part of the body’s first aid kit. (*Real Food*, Nina Planck, 2006: “Beyond Cholesterol,” ch.9, pp. 245-268). Similarly, the ups and downs of the antioxidant vitamin C also suggest the fitful progress of scientific dietary research. My advice: pay attention to how your body reacts and give it good, wholesome food with a focus on fresh, local, organic fruit and vegetables.

This attentive, caring, informed approach is also very much Brenda Watson’s. Her recommendations are sensible and gentle. If colonics (aka colon hydrotherapy) are not for you, then don’t do them. She does not recommend water fasting, and, if juice fasting, only for three days and under certain circumstances. Most recommendations are for limited diets of three or four daily meals. The idea is to work with your body, which, if not overwhelmed, is well equipped for the job. One chapter is devoted to the body’s natural detox program in which the liver plays a key role. In this context she describes the tri-peptide glutathione as a “star player” because it tackles carcinogens, industrial toxins, and free radicals, and then promotes their excretion via the bile. (p.89)

The liver being the premiere detoxification organ, it makes sense to eat and drink what helps the liver do its job and to eliminate those things which give it more work, to wit, caffeine, alcohol, and sugar. So what diet will do that? Paul Pitchford (*Healing With Whole Foods*, 1993) tells us that “Chinese medicine recognizes certain common foods as toxin neutralizers,” (p.68) among them adzuki beans, radishes, turnips, and figs. Raw apple

cider vinegar (two tablespoons in a tall glass of lukewarm water, with a little honey or a drop of stevia leaf extract if you want to sweeten it) can also be part of your detox regimen. Seaweed has the reputation of escorting heavy metals out of the body. Sally Fallon (*Nourishing Traditions*, 2001) touts fresh cilantro leaves as “stimulating the body to remove mercury and other toxic metals from the central nervous system.” (p.145) Milk thistle has long been used to support the liver and is available as a supplement in capsule form. Generally, bitter is better for the liver.

What to do about fish and mercury? We do want those omega-3 fatty acids many species provide us with but we don't want the mercury, which Brenda Watson points out is, unfortunately, efficiently absorbed. For readers worried about the mercury they may have taken on board either through diet or environment, she offers a heavy metal cleanse of one-to-three months. There is good reason to want to eliminate these metals as they can indeed be troublesome for the brain, the kidneys, and the nervous and reproductive systems. Watson's recommendation is for capsules containing vitamins, other substances like kelp, and a dozen trace minerals which will help transform and dislodge the undesirable metals and thus start them on their way out. It is, obviously, important to avoid future contamination. The Blue Ocean Institute will send you gratis their pocket-sized “Guide to Ocean Friendly Seafood,” which ranks fish by levels of contamination and also risk of extinction: www.blueocean.org.

Spring is our time of new beginnings. If you are thinking of turning over a new leaf through detoxification, you will find something to guide you on your way in Brenda Watson's book because it is definitely a something-for-everyone sort of book. One size does not fit all; but you can easily take what you like and leave the rest.