

- Eating customs

## Experts weigh in on health benefits of juice cleanses

They can be used for up to a week to kick-off a change of eating habits, but there are drawbacks

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Who does not want to wake up in the morning full of energy and feeling great? This is what makers of juice cleanses – or juice fasts – promise you: a “reset” for your body. It sounds enticing, especially at the start of a new year.



There are pre-packaged juice plans with everything already mixed and instructions on when to drink what.

Or, if you are willing to put in the effort, you can save some money by switching on your juicer if you've got one.

Are juice cleanses really beneficial to health? We asked health experts what exactly juice diets do and how useful they are.

A simple juice cleanse – not to be confused with therapeutic fasting or so-called detox products – generally lasts between two and five days, and no longer than a week.

“During this period, you only drink fruit and vegetable juices,” says Niklas Schwarz, an instructor at the German University of Applied Sciences for Prevention and Health Management in Saarbrücken, Germany. “In addition can be tea, water and vegetable broth. You eat no solid foods.”

You drink from three to six servings of juice per day, each a mixture of various types of fruits and vegetables. A serving contains 250 to 500 millilitres of juice. “The total amount ranges from one litre to 1 1/2 litres,” Schwarz says.

You can start immediately. Some people might indulge in their favourite foods the day before, while others will avoid foods such as meat and white flour products.

People with a pre-existing medical condition should consult their healthcare provider beforehand, says Antje Gahl, a spokeswoman for the German Nutrition Society.

They include those with high blood pressure or disorders of the liver, kidneys or thyroid gland; cancer patients; and diabetics.

“Women who are pregnant or nursing shouldn't fast either,” Gahl says.

“Nor is it suitable for the elderly and children, because they have a high nutrient requirement.”

A juice cleanse is straightforward for healthy people. Both Gahl and Schwarz say it can be the start of an overhaul of your eating habits.

“Then it's a launch pad that makes changing your diet easier,” Schwarz says.

“The juices provide the body with many vitamins and secondary plant metabolites [substances that help plants survive, but that impart health benefits when consumed] along with minerals and fibre,” says Gahl, adding that the cleanses also lighten your bowels' workload thanks to the juices' easy digestibility.

As to whether they make you feel better, she says it is purely subjective: “Establishing a direct connection is difficult.”

On the negative side, juice cleanses deprive your body of many nutrients, for example proteins and essential fatty acids.

“So, in some respects, it’s an unbalanced diet,” she says.

This is why it is important to not do juice cleanses for longer than a week, and to spread the servings over the day rather than drinking everything at once.

If you resume your old eating habits, you will regain the weight in a week

NIKLAS SCHWARZ, GERMAN UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES FOR PREVENTION AND HEALTH MANAGEMENT

“Otherwise, your blood sugar levels will rise relatively high and then quickly fall,” Gahl warns, which can cause an energy slump, not an energy surge.

A one-week juice cleanse usually results in a weight loss of one to 1.5kg, and even as much as 3kg to 5kg, depending on your baseline, according to Schwarz.

“It’s not only fat though, but to a large extent the water that you always lose when you start a diet,” he says.

“The drop in digestive tract content reduces your weight too, and the lack of protein intake causes your muscles to break down some protein.”

So the key to losing weight is to overhaul your diet after you have finished the juice cleanse.

“If you then resume your old eating habits, you will regain the weight in a week or two,” Schwarz says.