



Natural Colon Cleansing: Is It Necessary?

The practice of natural [colon cleansing](#) dates back to ancient Greece. In the United States, cleansing the colon -- the large intestine -- became popular in the 1920s and 1930s. But when the theories behind it lost support, it fell out of favor. Recently, though, colon cleansing -- using, for example, teas, enzymes, or colon irrigation -- has experienced resurgence.

Is colon cleansing good for you? Does *anyone* really *need* it? To a certain extent, the jury is still out. That's because researchers have devoted little study to colon cleansing. For now, here is some information that might help you decide whether colon cleansing is for you.

What is natural colon cleansing?

There are two main colon-cleansing methods. One involves buying products; the other involves seeing a practitioner to have a colon irrigation.

Colon cleansing with powdered or liquid supplements. You take some supplements used for colon cleansing by mouth. Others you take through the rectum. Either way, the idea is to force the colon to expel its contents. You can find these products on the Internet or in health food stores, supermarkets, or pharmacies. They include:

- enemas
- laxatives
- strong herbal teas
- enzymes
- powders
- antiparasite capsules

Colon cleansing with colon irrigation (high colonics). The first modern colonic machine was invented about 100 years ago. Today, colonic hygienists or colon therapists perform colon irrigations. Colon irrigations work somewhat like an enema. But they involve much more water and none of the odors or discomfort. While you lie on a table, a machine or gravity-driven pump flushes up to 20 gallons of water through a tube inserted into your rectum.

After the water is in the colon, the therapist may massage your abdomen. Then the therapist flushes out the fluids and waste through another tube. The therapist may repeat the process, and a session may last up to an hour.

The practitioner may use a variety of water pressures and temperatures and may or may not combine water with enzymes, herbs, coffee, or probiotics. Probiotics are supplements containing beneficial bacteria.

What is the theory behind natural colon cleansing?

One of the main theories behind colon cleansing is an ancient belief called the theory of autointoxication. This is the belief that undigested meat and other foods cause mucus buildup in the colon. This buildup produces toxins, the theory goes, which enter the blood's circulation, poisoning the body.

Some people claim these toxins cause a wide range of symptoms, such as:

- fatigue
- headache
- weight gain
- low energy

On the surface, the idea of toxins being reabsorbed by the body makes some sense. After all, rectal suppositories are used to rapidly administer drugs. Could toxins, too, be quickly entering the bloodstream from the colon?

If colon cleansing has any effect, however, it likely has less to do with toxins than with its impact on the nervous system. What's the evidence? Reflexes in the bowel affect the entire nervous system. In fact, a wide range of symptoms caused by [constipation](#) can be relieved by enemas. If this is true of enemas, then perhaps colon cleansing has a similar effect.

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