# [The Big Clean](http://www.runnersworld.co.za/nutrition/the-big-clean/%22%20%5Co%20%22The%20Big%20Clean) (DETOX) Runners World SA, posted on 28 February 2008

Every 15 000km I take my car in for a service. They change the plugs, replace the oil and air filter and round it off with a nice clean. Maybe it’s just in my mind, but I swear my car goes faster after a good service. The human body is much the same.

**So are detox diets necessary?**

The answer is **no**, as the body is perfectly capable of cleansing itself and removing toxins.

**But do they work?**

Yes, although it depends on the reason for starting.

Some people use it to kick-start a weight-loss programme by getting into a healthy eating routine. For others, it’s a way to boost energy levels by regularly eating healthy foods.

And finally, those of us who need a mental cleanse will find a detox diet is good for the mind, since it makes you feel pure and good. After sticking to the cleansing diet for a few days, you will feel more in control of your life and will become more motivated to continue with a more balanced eating plan.

There are different forms of detox or cleansing diets. The most common involves only consuming fruit juice, fruit, salads and plenty of water and herbal tea for the first few days, and then slowly reintroducing vegetables (raw, steamed or soups), nuts and seeds, legumes, fish and chicken. The taboo list includes caffeine, processed foods, artificial flavourants, colorants and preservatives, dairy products, alcohol, red meat and wheat.

Detox diets can last up to two weeks and can be followed once or twice a year. Long-term problems can occur if these diets are followed too often, including iron deficiency due to a lack of protein, irritable bowel syndrome due to large quantities of roughage which can irritate the colon, and calcium and vitamin B12 deficiency due to a lack of dairy and protein.

Possible short-term side-effects include headaches (usually related to caffeine withdrawal or dehydration if you’re not drinking enough fluid) and bloating (due to the increased fibre content).

Note: The medical profession believes in consistent healthy eating as a permanent detox, rather than a few spells of healthy eating and then returning to old habits. Pregnant or breastfeeding women, growing children and teenagers, and those with medical disorders such as diabetes should not go on detox diets.

***The Runner’s World dietician’s suggestion:*** never cut out whole food groups. Rather cut out unhealthy parts of food groups, such as processed refined foods (white bread, pies, etc), foods with colourants and preservatives (viennas, tinned foods) and stimulants (caffeine, alcohol and cigarettes). Eat a diet full of high fibre carbs, unprocessed foods and loads of fresh veggies and fruits. Essentially, this is how we should be eating anyway!