With the holidays behind us and a new year underway, we may feel the need to undo the damage we did to our bodies with all the comfort foods and Christmas cookies we ate last month. Some people hit the gym, start a new diet, or both. Others decide it’s time to detox or “cleanse.”

Detox diets claim to cleanse your body of toxins. Most claim additional benefits such as improving health, energy, digestion, and encouraging weight loss. There are many types of detox diets, all of which have different guidelines and durations (with most lasting anywhere from 3-10 days). Some versions involve fasting while only consuming a homemade drink or special tea for a designated period of time. Others involve only consuming fruits, vegetables and water. Some detox diets are more sophisticated and involve taking a series of supplements while following a specific food plan.

The safety of these diets are questionable for a number of reasons. First, these diets have little scientific evidence supporting their efficacy. Second, they seldom provide the amount of nutrients and calories our bodies need to function at their very best. While following a detox diet for 3 days won’t necessarily cause malnutrition, a restrictive diet lasting 7 days of more may be harmful. Lastly, the ingredients used in detox diets often act as laxatives or diuretics, which can lead to electrolyte imbalances and dehydration over a prolonged period. All of these factors may leave you feeling fatigued, irritable, and foggy, not to mention, “hangry”! They may also cause headaches, cravings, and stomach upset.

There’s no doubt our bodies are exposed to toxins. Lucky for us, our kidneys and liver are designed to filter and remove toxins from our bodies naturally. The best way to “detox” is by eating lots of vegetables and fruits every day while following a balanced diet based on variety and moderation. If you are hell-bent on detoxing, keep in mind that a detox diet should be treated more as a “kick start” to making healthier food choices as a new way of life. If you plan to pursue a detox diet that lasts longer than 7 days, it’s recommended you do so under the supervision of a professional and with an understanding of its potential negative consequences.

* from the environment, food, water, and personal care and cleaning products.