

## **Spring cleansing: a traditional, constitution-based approach**

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Traditionally, the days around the Vernal Equinox (mid to late March) were seen as a time of intense, rushing energy: days get longer and the sunlight more intense, the first signs of green growth emerge, and wildlife stirs again. Herbalists still consider this a time when the more inward, ‘congealing’ energies of Winter begin to transition into the more outward, ‘expansive’ energies of Summer – and when a little attention paid to the process can improve vitality, strengthen digestion and immunity, and keep us in tune with the changing seasons.

The traditional approach therefore does not rely on intensely stimulating or purgative herbs, nor does it stem from a perspective that, as human animals, we are somehow ‘dirty’ and in need of cleansing. Rather, it strives to strengthen and gently ‘reawaken’ the organs of elimination, attempting to simulate the changes that are occurring in Nature: increased flow of water, and sap; the movement of wind and clouds breaking up the ‘gray sheet’ pattern of winter weather; the softening of the soil; the increase of warmth. This is accomplished using foods, gentle exercise, and medicinal herbs.

Another important consideration involves the constitution of the person who is undertaking the spring cleanse. While generally the process is similar for most people, changes to the dietary and herbal recipes are warranted based on the nature of the individual physiology. This constitutional assessment ranges on a continuum from ‘deficient’ to ‘excessive’, or from ‘cold’ to ‘hot’. Cooler constitutions are more pale, quieter, smaller, and more dry; whereas warmer constitutions are more red, active, large, and perhaps ‘oily’. If you try observing people around you for a little while, you will find that, while many fall somewhere in the middle, others are more clearly ‘cool’ or ‘warm’.

Last but not least, the traditional spring cleanse involves a period of about a week where caloric intake may be less than what a person is accustomed to. It is important not to undergo a fasting or cleansing process if one’s constitution is overly cold, deficient, or weak – as the system may not have the requisite energy to respond to the gently challenges the cleansing process poses. Don’t fast or cleanse if you are pregnant!

The main ingredients for a spring cleanse are:

- simple, whole-grain and vegetable meals, with lots of fiber
- bitter greens that traditionally thrive in early Spring
- plenty of water
- gentle exercise, like a 45-minute walk daily in the sunshine
- digestive and liver support (constitutionally balanced)
- kidney and urinary support
- lymphatic support

Usually, this can all be accomplished with one or two extract blends, a tea, and easy recipes that can be prepared ahead of time.

**Step 1. When and How Long?** Choose a time when you can devote a little more of your day to rest, introspection, and walks outdoors. The process can leave you feeling tired, especially on the first day or two, so don't plan it for an overly busy time.

→ Average time is about a week. **Cooler constitutions:** 3-4 days. **Warmer constitutions:** 7-10 days.

**Step 2. Meals.** There will be two basic meals taken during the cleanse days. These meals are very simple, and will taste bland and plain at first as your palate transitions to the gentler flavors of undressed food. I usually recommend a 1-day 'lead-in' period, when only one meal during the day is different from usual, with the regular schedule beginning the next day. During the cleanse period, aim for a total of 1,000 to 1,500 calories daily, depending on your weight and metabolism.

**MEAL 1: nourishing.** A whole grain of your choice (my favorites are brown rice and quinoa). You can prepare enough for 3 days. Rinse your grains in 3 changes of water before cooking, and then prepare according to the grain you choose. For brown rice, use a 2:1 ratio of water to rinsed, wet rice. Simmer covered for about 25 minutes. The grain will then be mixed with steamed root vegetables: burdock roots, carrots, sweet potatoes, turnips. Finally, a little olive oil dressing will finish the meal. Portion size is determined by your caloric requirements: one cup of cooked rice/veggie combo is about 250 calories.

**MEAL 2: enlivening.** Based around the classic 'bitter greens', this is essentially a big salad made with dandelion greens, mustard greens, arugula, grated red cabbage, kale, and spinach. Don't use fruit, nuts or grains in this salad. Dress it with olive oil and lemon juice, and perhaps a little dash of salt (or better yet, seaweed powder or gomasio). A generous bowlful of greens, fully dressed, isn't more than 100 calories (mostly from oil).

**OTHER FOODS:** Generally, these two meals will serve as the bulk of daily calories. **Warm constitutions** can have a piece of fruit for breakfast / snack if desired, but it should be apart from other meals. **Cool constitutions** should just have a little more of MEAL 1 for breakfast or as a snack.

→ **Warm constitutions:** Fruit for breakfast; MEAL 1 for lunch; MEAL 2 for dinner.

→ **Cool constitutions:** MEAL 1 for breakfast and lunch, with a little ginger powder added in the grain. MEAL 2 for dinner, with a little pickled ginger on the side.

**Step 3. Beverages.** Aim for 4-5 glasses of pure water a day. Additionally:

**BEV. 1:** 'Master Cleanser' made with the juice of 1 lemon, 2 TBS maple syrup, 1/8 of a teaspoon of Cayenne, and 1 pint (16 ounces) of water.

**BEV. 2:** Herbal infusion, prepared with 4 TBS of herbal blend to 1 quart of hot water, and steeped, covered, for at least 30 minutes. **Warm constitutions:** blend Nettle leaf, Marshmallow root, Chamomile blossoms, and Cleavers herb in equal parts by volume. **Cool constitutions:** blend Nettle leaf, Marshmallow root, Fennel seed, and Calendula blossoms in equal parts by volume, and add a pinch of Cinnamon or Ginger if desired.

→ Drink 8 ounces of BEV. 1 twice a day, about an hour or so before lunch and before dinner (100 cal/cup). Drink 16 ounces of BEV. 2 twice a day, about 30 minutes or so after breakfast and after lunch. The herbal infusions support the elimination channels of the kidneys and lymphatic system, while soothing and balancing GI tract function.

**Step 4. Herbal extracts.** Special blends, constitutionally balanced, and designed to support gentle cleansing and elimination through the liver and biliary system. This also encourages proper elimination through the bowel.

**Warm constitutions:** Dandelion root tincture, Burdock root tincture, and Yellowdock root tincture in equal parts.

**Cool constitutions:** Dandelion root tincture, Burdock root tincture, and Angelica root tincture in equal parts.

→ Take one whole teaspoon of this extract, in a little bit of water, twice a day 15 minutes before lunch and before dinner.

**Step 5. Finishing up.** After 4 to 10 days, a typical fasting and cleansing process is complete. The first day or two are always the hardest, but most people feel quite good after 3 or 4 days and many times want to continue with the reduced-calorie regimen. This is fine, though I would consider adding a digestible protein source if going longer than 2 weeks, and I strongly advise caution in overly cool, deficient, or weak constitutions.

When you are ready to return to your more regular diet, transition back slowly. The first day should still feature MEAL 1 and MEAL 2, but perhaps a vegetable soup or stew can be added. After that, slowly introduce protein sources; dairy products (if desired); wheat and sugars (if desired); and alcoholic beverages / recreational drugs over the course of two or three days.

SAMPLE PROGRAM for a warm constitution:

7-day program, with a 1-day transition at the beginning and a 2-day transition at the end, for a total of 10 days.

DAY 1: regular food, but replace 1 meal with MEAL 2.

DAYS 2-8:

→Breakfast: 1 apple (100 kcal)

→BEV 2, 16 ounces (Nettle, Marshmallow, Chamomile, Cleavers)

→BEV 1, 8 ounces (100 kcal)

→15 minutes before lunch: 1 tsp. Herbal extract (Dandelion, Burdock, Yellowdock) in a little water.

→MEAL 1, 3 cups (about 750 kcal)

→Nice after-lunch walk (at least 45 minutes)

→BEV 2, 16 ounces (Nettle, Marshmallow, Chamomile, Cleavers)

→BEV 1, 8 ounces (100 kcal)

→15 minutes before dinner: 1 tsp. Herbal extract (Dandelion, Burdock, Yellowdock) in a little water.

→MEAL 2, with 1-2 TBS olive oil (100-200 kcal)

→Short after-dinner walk, 15 minutes

DAY 9: MEAL 1 for breakfast, soup and salad for lunch, MEAL 2 for dinner.

DAY 10: regular breakfast, soup and salad for lunch, regular dinner.