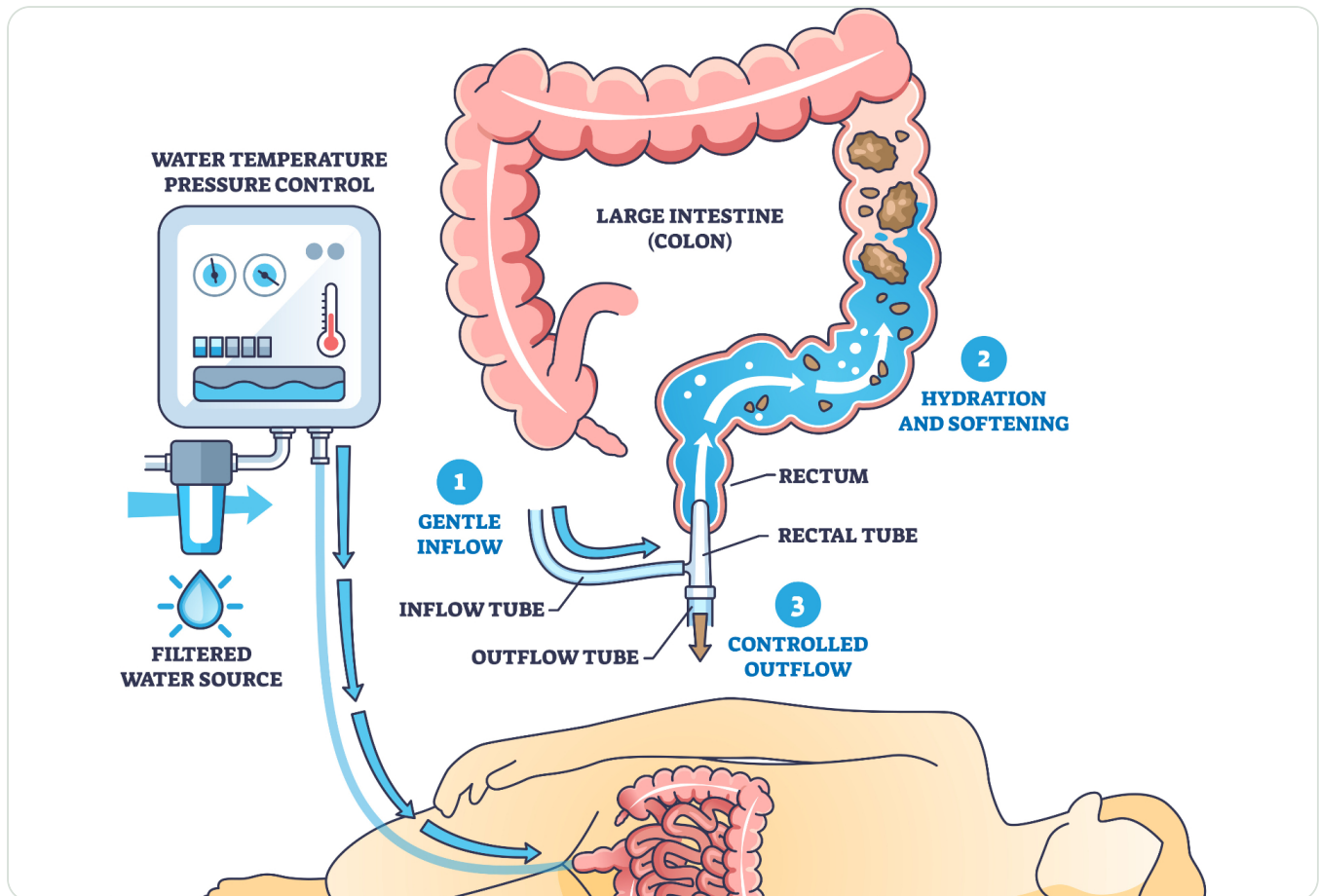


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The myth of colon hydrotherapy: what do the official health authorities say?



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Abstract

Colonic irrigation, often marketed as colon hydrotherapy or a "detox", is sold as a shortcut to more energy, better digestion and a stronger immune system. The official medical literature tells a very different story. The U.S. National Center for

Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) concludes in its status report *Detoxes and Cleanses: What You Need To Know* that detox regimens and mechanical colon irrigation are scientifically unsupported, unnecessary and can cause direct harm.

1. The biology behind the "self-poisoning" myth

The premise behind commercial colon irrigation rests on an old idea called autointoxication. It claims that undigested food rots in the colon and slowly poisons the body from within. Modern medicine abandoned that theory more than a century ago.

The body cleans itself around the clock without outside help. The real "detox organs" are:

- **The liver and kidneys**, which filter blood, break down chemicals and excrete waste through bile and urine.
- **The gastrointestinal tract**, whose lining renews itself every 3-5 days and removes by-products through normal stools.

There is no scientific evidence that healthy people accumulate "toxic plaques" on the bowel wall that need to be washed out.

2. What does the research show?

When NCCIH and independent reviewers go through the literature, the conclusion is consistent: there are no randomised controlled trials (RCTs) that document health benefits from colon hydrotherapy in healthy people.

Systematic reviews highlight two recurring problems:

- The few commercial studies that report a positive effect have too few participants, lack control groups and are rarely peer-reviewed.
 - Mechanical bowel cleansing only has a place in mainstream medicine for specific indications, such as preparation before a [colonoscopy](#) or treatment of severe [chronic constipation](#) that has failed other measures.
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3. Specific risks of colon irrigation and detox regimens

The most important section of the NCCIH report covers the documented harms of detox products and clinic treatments. The risks fall into four categories.

A. Colon hydrotherapy and strong enemas

The report warns explicitly against colonic irrigation at alternative clinics and against home use of strong laxatives or enemas marketed for detox purposes. The acute risks are:

- **Dehydration** after large fluid losses.
- **Electrolyte disturbances**, where imbalance in potassium and sodium can affect heart rhythm.
- **Infection** if the equipment is not sterile.
- **Bowel perforation**, meaning tears or holes in the colonic wall that require emergency surgery.
- **Dysbiosis**, where beneficial gut bacteria are washed out and opportunistic microbes move in.

B. Juice cleanses and kidney injury

Many people combine detox with extreme juice fasts. NCCIH warns that popular ingredients such as spinach, beetroot and kale are very high in oxalate. Drinking them in concentrated form for several days, while also consuming too little calcium (which normally binds oxalate in the gut), raises the risk of acute kidney injury known as oxalate nephropathy. The report cites case series in which patients have required temporary dialysis after a juice cleanse.

C. Unpasteurised juices

Raw, freshly pressed juices from clinics or juice bars are rarely heat-treated. They can therefore contain *E. coli*, *Salmonella* or *Listeria*, which is dangerous for pregnant women, older adults, small children and people with weakened immune systems.

D. Illegal ingredients in commercial detox products

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has repeatedly had to pull detox powders, teas and supplements from the market. The reason is that the products illegally contained prescription medicines, often potent laxatives or banned weight-loss drugs, that were not listed on the label.

The real "gut reset" is simple

If you want to support your body's own cleansing, NCCIH points to the same measures every health authority recommends:

- **A fibre-rich diet** with vegetables, whole grains, legumes and fruit that feeds a healthy gut microbiome.
- **Plenty of water** so the kidneys and bowel can work under optimal conditions.
- **Regular physical activity**, which stimulates the bowel's own movements (peristalsis).
- **Sleep and stress regulation**, which support the gut-brain axis.

See also [the gut-brain axis](#), [gut microbiome](#), [probiotics and IBS](#), [natural probiotics through food](#) and [chronic constipation](#).

When to see a doctor instead of a cleansing clinic

Many people who consider colon hydrotherapy actually have real digestive symptoms that deserve a proper work-up rather than an alternative treatment. Contact your GP or a gastrointestinal specialist if you have:

- Blood in your stool or [bleeding from the rectum](#).
 - A change in bowel habit lasting more than 4 weeks.
 - Unintentional weight loss.
 - Persistent abdominal pain.
 - New GI symptoms after the age of 50.
 - A family history of [bowel cancer](#) or inflammatory bowel disease.
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We investigate gastrointestinal symptoms with [colonoscopy](#), [gastroscopy](#), [sigmoidoscopy](#), coeliac screening and faecal calprotectin. With a referral from your GP, the examination is free of charge for patients covered by Danish public health insurance.

Frequently asked questions about colon hydrotherapy

Does colon hydrotherapy help with fatigue, bloating or skin problems?

No. There are no randomised controlled trials that document an effect on fatigue, skin issues, bloating or "detoxification". The liver, kidneys and intestinal lining already handle waste removal in healthy people.

Are there "toxic plaques" on the bowel wall that need to be washed out?

No. That theory, called autointoxication, was abandoned by medicine more than 100 years ago. The bowel lining renews itself every 3-5 days, and [colonoscopies](#) in healthy people do not show accumulated plaques.

Can colon hydrotherapy "reset" the gut after a course of antibiotics?

No. Antibiotics already disturb the [gut microbiome](#), and an additional flush washes out the remaining beneficial bacteria and worsens the dysbiosis. Rebuilding is best supported by a fibre-rich diet and possibly [fermented foods](#).

Is colon hydrotherapy dangerous?

It can be. Documented risks include dehydration, electrolyte disturbances (which can affect heart rhythm), infections from non-sterile equipment and, rarely, bowel perforation requiring emergency surgery.

Who should never undergo colon hydrotherapy?

People with inflammatory bowel disease (Crohn's, [ulcerative colitis](#)), [diverticulitis](#), recent bowel surgery, severe heart or kidney disease, pregnant women, and patients with bleeding disorders or [rectal bleeding](#) of unknown cause.

Does colon hydrotherapy help with weight loss?

No. The immediate drop on the scale is fluid and stool and returns within a day. There is no effect on fat mass.

Are there any medical situations where colon irrigation is reasonable?

Yes, but only under medical supervision. Examples include [bowel preparation](#) before [colonoscopy](#), management of severe neurogenic bowel (spinal cord injury) and selected cases of severe [chronic constipation](#) that have failed other measures.

What should I do instead if I have digestive symptoms?

Get a proper medical work-up. Symptoms such as a change in bowel habit lasting more than 4 weeks, [blood in the stool](#), unintentional weight loss or persistent abdominal pain should be investigated with [colonoscopy](#) or [gastroscopy](#), not masked with irrigation.

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