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TO DETOX *or not to* DETOX!

THE PATH TO PURITY OR ONE BIG HEALTH CON? GRAZIA PONDERES THE ISSUE OVER A NICE CUP OF GREEN TEA

WHEN Hayley Brown decided to embark on a 21-day detox diet earlier this year, she hoped to see a whole new her. She did – and she didn't like what she saw. While others swear by regular detoxing, Hayley just swore.

"It was absolutely awful," the 28-year-old explains. "I became a complete and utter bitch. One of my friends told me that I would look and feel fabulous but my skin looked rubbish, my hair went all lank and I hated every minute of it. I kept thinking it would get better but it didn't. In the end my boyfriend begged me to stop because I was such a nightmare."

But Hayley is not the only misguided soul to hope that adopting an extreme diet of denial will lead to health and beauty salvation.

Celebrities including Cate Blanchett, Jennifer Aniston and Victoria Beckham are all enthusiastic detoxers. Even that notorious hedonist Kate Moss has been known to indulge in the odd week of water and wheatgrass juice.

Oprah Winfrey recently finished a 21-day detox stint (although she reportedly celebrated immediately afterwards with a large glass of red wine). And Australian Olympic swimmers Jessicah Schipper and Eloise Amberger are rumoured to have detoxed to prepare for Beijing.

But can all these celebrities – and millions of ordinary punters – be deceiving themselves? Dr Rick Kausman is the Australian Medical Association's spokesman on food and dietary issues and an adamant anti-detoxer.

"When it comes to weight loss, there is absolutely no grey area about detoxing – there is no evidence that it has any benefit and it may actually have a negative effect," he says. "There is a risk that going without food for any length of time like that can increase the chances of developing an eating disorder. On the other side of the spectrum, people may come off a detox and then start over-eating or binge eating after going without food."

Far from being some kind of miracle toxin-elimination system, the simple reason some people may feel and look better during or after detoxing is that they are eating more healthily and cutting back on the booze. The minute

they go back to their old ways, all the same old problems will resurface.

"People simply do not need to detox. Our livers and kidneys cleanse toxins from our system naturally. It's just a business, and people need to be aware of that," adds Kausman.

Once, detoxing simply meant cutting out stuff – foregoing alcohol, wheat and dairy products, caffeine, sugar and meat and relying on water, fruit and vegetables for anything from a week to a month. Now, it involves adding a whole new range of products to your kitchen cupboard.

Detoxing is a multi-million dollar industry – you can buy drinks, patches, tablets, books – even detox socks that will (apparently) draw out all your body's impurities through your feet.

And you can pay thousands of dollars to stay in a luxury resort and be denied food on "detox retreats" – with a nice bit of colonic irrigation thrown in for good measure.

Endree Saade, managing director for the Lemon Detox (www.lemondetox.com.au) range of drinks and other products, is adamant that detoxing three or four times a year is good for body and soul. "Fifty years ago people probably didn't need to detox because ▶

they ate more healthily," he says. "Our bodies naturally cleanse themselves of toxins and other nasty stuff but there is only so much they can do. Nowadays we eat so much processed food, and so much junk that our bodies simply cannot cleanse all the toxins we are putting into them. They get overloaded. Detoxing simply helps that process along and gives your body a bit of recovery time. It's not a miracle cure but it does work."

He adds: "It's not just an inward thing – it has an outward benefit. People say they can see that they have clearer skin, healthier hair, more energy – they feel better all over."

But he would say that, wouldn't he?

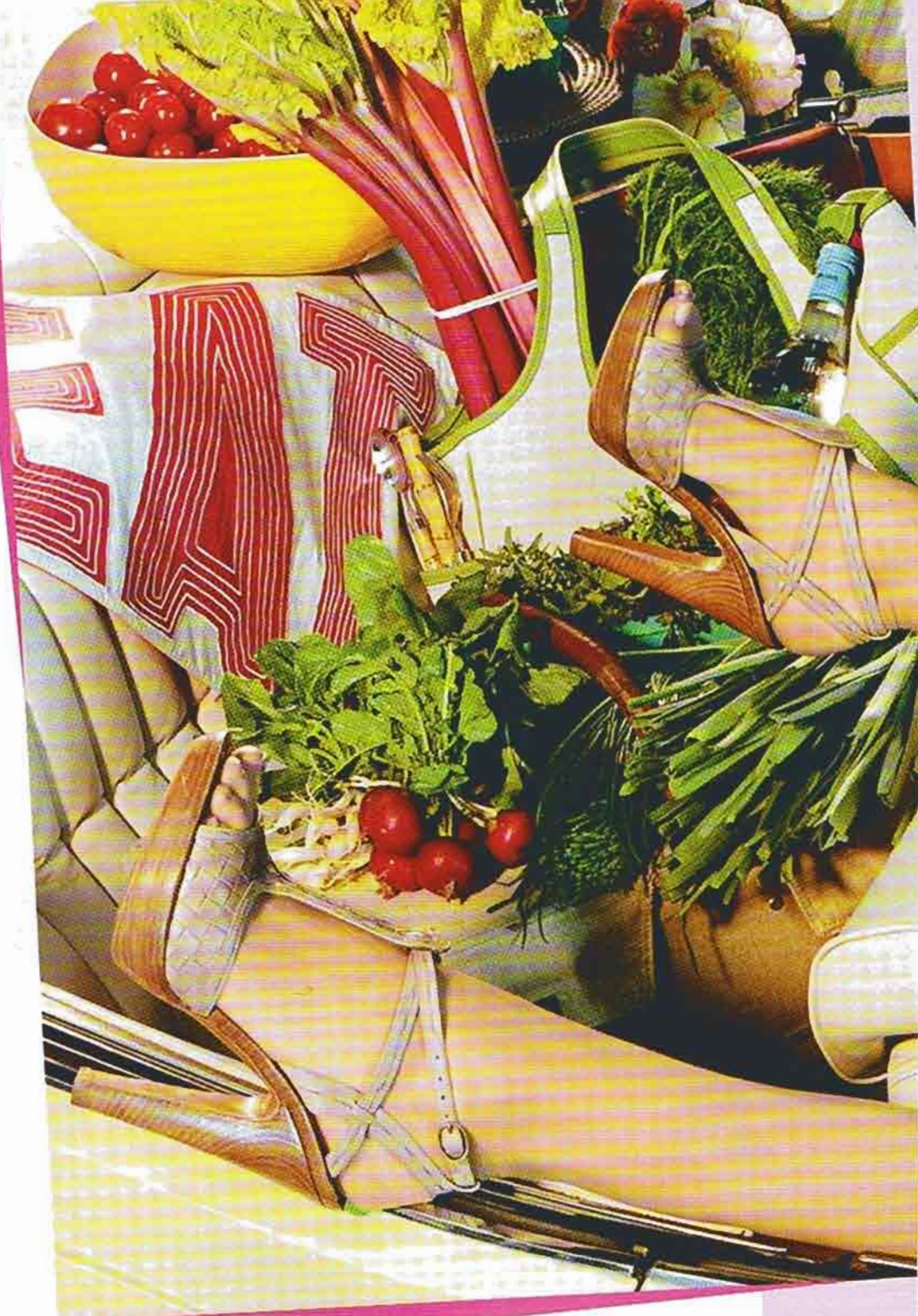
In the two years since Lemon Detox launched in Australia, it has gone from selling 500 of its meal replacement kits a month to more than 4,000 a month.

Saade says that detox products like his make the process of cutting out food easier by giving people more energy. But how does he counter claims from the *medical establishment that detoxing and detox products don't work?*

"I know of a doctor who puts in orders for our stuff for his patients every month, but when we asked him for a testimonial he declined because he didn't want other doctors knowing he used it," Saade says.

"Doctors are businessmen too. They don't like alternative therapies and treatments that take money away from them so instead they criticise detoxing to protect their own position."

One reason for the enduring controversy over whether detox works is the difficulty in scientifically proving what its devotees claim anecdotally. Researchers are currently conducting a few international clinical trials of detox diets, in which users will be rigorously assessed and compared with control subjects. The results should be known early next year.



But even without the clinical proof, there's always what doctors call the "placebo" effect.

Detoxing may not be scientifically provable but if you think it's doing you good, the psychological boost may give you physical benefits.

Louise Carney, 34, from Sydney detoxes for a week every four months. Her ritual includes cutting out everything except for water, raw fruit, vegetables and brown rice. She says the denial reaps rewards.

"I get to a point before I'm due for a detox when I just feel like I need to have a complete bodily overhaul," she says. "It's like a toy running out of

battery power. Maybe my body is used to it by now but I don't feel like I'm starving myself when I'm detoxing."

She adds: "I don't go out during that week and I do get a bit cranky but by the end I just feel so rejuvenated that it's worth it."

Catherine Collins, chief dietician at St George's Hospital Medical School in London, still isn't convinced.

"On detox, the Romans got it right when they said 'Mundus vult decipi' – the world wants to be deceived – better translated as, 'There's a sucker born every minute,'" she says.

"The only thing that loses weight on a detox diet is your wallet." ■

Organic tomatoes? Check. Green leafy veges? Got 'em! Get set for spring with a detox drive-by.