

The new juice fast: why more is more

I was not looking forward to the part of writing this article that involved actually doing a juice fast, for a number of reasons.

First of all, I'm not fun to be around when I'm hungry. Then there was the fact that the weather had taken a cold turn; I don't know about you, but I don't exactly crave cold juice in low temperatures. And then there's my scepticism about the claims made by the proponents of many juice sellers – I've never bought into the detox myth, and I know full well that my liver and kidneys carry out all the detoxing my body needs.

This, I was sure, was likely to be as much fun as babysitting five colicky children.

The day before I am due to start, I have one of those days when for no apparent reason I feel sluggish and tired from the moment I wake up till I close my eyes that night. My diet is normally fairly healthy, but on that day I have more coffee than normal, as well as a couple of digestive biscuits and more than a few squares of Dairy Milk.

As I make my way down Grafton Street to meet Domini Kemp, the owner of the health food café Alchemy on the first floor of the BT2 store, I feel certain that my over-consumption of sugar and caffeine the day before will make the first day of my programme even tougher than it needs to be.

But I am pleasantly surprised when I sit down with Kemp to talk about how it might work. For a start, there will actually be some food involved. "There's no way I would recommend that you only drink juice for three days," she says, to my great relief.

"Juice fasts are already starting to fall out of favour in the US, and for good reason. A juice fast is no different to a binge diet. It's incredibly hard to do, and you are not necessarily getting all of the nutrients you need. And, realistically, you will be miserable."

Instead, Kemp recommends what she describes as three days of clean eating: three juices a day, supplemented by one salad and one portion of cabbage rolls stuffed with quinoa and sea vegetables on each day. I should also drink as much water and herbal tea as I like, as well as miso soup.

The idea, she says, is to give my system a break from sugar, processed foods, alcohol and caffeine, and to take in plenty of nutrients in the process. "Listen to your body – if you feel hungry, have some miso soup. This shouldn't be an unbearable experience," she says.

DAY ONE

My son recoils as I pour out my breakfast, a 'Mean Greens' juice made with kale, spinach, cos, celery, cucumber, apple, lemon, ginger and mint. "That smells disgusting," he says, but I'm happy: it tastes great, and by the time I've finished it (there's a hefty 500ml), I'm full up.

That feeling lasts till 10am, by which



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Feargal Ward

time I'm starving. I stave off the hunger pangs with green tea, then at 11.30am it's time for 500ml of Beat It: a juice made with beetroot, spinach, cos, celery, flat-leaf parsley, apple, lemon and ginger. I don't know if it's because I'm so hungry, but it tastes divine, the juice equivalent of manna from heaven.

This keeps me going till lunchtime, and my salad of rare beef, kale and quinoa with roast Portobello mushrooms, sesame seeds, ginger and a dressing made with olive oil, tamari, lime juice, sesame oil and chili. I find the texture of the mushrooms a little rubbery, but other than that I've no complaints: the beef, Irish and served beautifully rare as promised, is as good as you would get in any good restaurant.

This keeps me going till around 2.30pm, when the hunger pangs kick in again, and I hit the lemon and ginger tea. It works – to an extent – but I'm happy when 4pm rolls round and it's time for my Anti-Everything juice.

This is a bit of an unusual one: as well as carrot, apple, lemon and ginger, it includes turmeric, black pepper and cold-pressed flax oil. But once I get beyond the fact that there's oil floating in my juice, I really enjoy it, and find it definitely the most satisfying of the three I've had that day.

I'm a little bit peckish at 5.30pm, so have half of my box of cabbage rolls, and have the other half at home around 8pm with a herbal tea. I skip off to bed that night not feeling remotely tired or hungry; maybe this isn't going to be so hard after all.

DAY TWO

I wake up with a splitting headache, although I don't feel hungry. Mean Greens drunk, I head off for my morning commute, but by the time I get to work I'm so desperate for a coffee that I email Kemp to ask her just how strict the anti-caffeine rule is. "You're better off not having it, but one cup of coffee isn't going to harm you either way," she replies. "But try to ditch

the dairy, so no milk, and if you take sugar in coffee, leave it out."

I leave dust behind me as I sprint from the office to the coffee shop next door for a black Americano to take back to my desk. And then a curious thing happens: I take two sips, then don't want it any more.

I stick to water, herbal tea and my Beat It juice before lunch, which today is a 'paleo caesar' salad of kale, chicken and toasted seeds in a tamarind dressing. It's gorgeous, and I know I am going to be making the trip to Grafton Street for this lunch long after these three days are up.

I've ditched the cabbage rolls today, so around 5pm I top up with an OMG: a smoothie made with banana, dates, almond milk, almond butter, vanilla extract, cinnamon and Himalayan pink salt. "Totally amaze-balls," says the blurb on the menu, and it is: it tastes incredibly indulgent.

I have my last juice around 8pm (I'm still in the office), and congratulate myself for having made it through my longest working day of the week in one piece. Then, in the taxi home, With Or Without You comes on the radio and I silently sob the whole way home. I am a calorie-deprived emotional wreck.

DAY THREE

It's Saturday, but I'm rostered to work, so I drag myself out of bed and attempt to make myself semi-presentable. I am famished, I still have a headache, and my long day on Friday has left me feeling tired. To say I'm not looking forward to my juice breakfast is an understatement.

I decide to flip things around, and start with a smoothie – this time a Green Brute, made with avocado, green juice, almond milk, spinach, banana, dates, lemon juice and ginger. The world instantly feels like a happier place.

I'm into the routine of this by now: juice mid-morning, salad at lunchtime, another juice in the afternoon. That evening, I have

two servings of Kemp's miso soup, and my last juice just before bedtime. I've made it to the finish line.

THE RESULTS

The first thing everyone asks you when you tell them you are doing something like this is: "Did you lose any weight?" I did, but don't get too excited – only a pound. That's not a bad thing; I wasn't doing this for weight loss, and I'm convinced that if I had done a juice-only plan and lost a multiple of that, I would have put it back on just as quick.

What I gained, however, was a realisation that I was deluding myself about having a healthy diet. I may not be eating cakes every day, but I'm certainly not drinking enough water, or eating enough vegetables, or watching my caffeine intake. And bit by bit, the level of sugar in my diet has steadily crept up since Christmas.

Over the three days, my digestion improved, my sugar and caffeine cravings disappeared, and I slept incredibly well. I didn't find it easy – I was hungry most of the time – but I did find it doable, and I would recommend it. But my advice is to do it when you're busy: I've no doubt that I wouldn't have got through it if I'd had nothing else to do but sit at home all day listening to my tummy rumble.

I've had a green juice most days since I finished the cleanse, and I've made a real effort to get more veggies into my diet. I'm much more conscious of my sugar intake, although I have rediscovered my taste for coffee – but only one a day, with lemon and ginger tea taking its place the rest of the time.

So would I take the plunge and do a juice-only diet next time out? No chance.

Gillian Nelis

The Alchemy 'spring clean' healthy eating plan costs €28 per day. See alchemyjuice.ie or call 01-6706217