

Body cleanses: Don't believe the hype

[Andrew Zasada, MD](#), can't help but chuckle when asked about the "latest and greatest" body cleansing fads.

But the internal medicine physician at OSF HealthCare says these whims can turn into anything but a laughing matter.

"When you put stuff that's not really regulated in your body, you don't know what's going in," Dr. Zasada says. "And if you mix in your regular medicine, too, you're not doing yourself a favor."

Dr. Zasada is reminding you to talk to your primary care provider before starting any significant treatment. Don't believe everything you read online or on a label.

Diatomaceous earth as a cleanse

Dr. Zasada says diatomaceous earth has several legitimate uses in industry. But it's also seen in powder form as a dietary supplement.

The product comes from ground-up and processed skeletons of algae. It contains silica, one of the main components of sand. There are two types of diatomaceous earth: edible, which contains 2% to 4% silica, and industrial with 60% or more silica.

Dr. Zasada says ingesting silica in small amounts – for example, mixing it in water – is harmless because it does not absorb into your body. But you should never inhale it.

"It causes irritation of the lungs which can be permanent and cause scarring. It can cause you to be short of breath. It's called silicosis," Dr. Zasada explains. "It's similar to what coal miners get when they inhale coal dust. People die from silicosis every year."

Dr. Zasada says some people claim diatomaceous earth cleanses your digestive tract and improves cholesterol. But he says scientific evidence for and against these claims is "scant at best."

"There have been a few studies that showed that it lowers cholesterol. But at the same time, we don't know what else that patient may have eaten because it was a poorly designed study," Dr. Zasada says. "Was the silica responsible? Was it dietary? We simply don't know."

Dewormers and other cleanses

Dr. Zasada says dewormers do what the name suggests – remove intestinal parasites from your insides. He says they serve a purpose in livestock but not humans.

"Some people believe we all carry some type of parasite, and we need to deworm ourselves," Dr. Zasada says with a sigh.

"If you really think you have an intestinal parasite, see your doctor. The test is simple. If you do, in fact, have a parasite, it can be eliminated."

Dr. Zasada adds that there's no evidence that our bodies are loaded with toxins that must be removed. He says that removal happens naturally through our liver, kidneys and bowel movements.

“We’ve been around as a species for hundreds of thousands of years without colon cleanses, and we’ve done pretty well,” he quips.