



Raw deal

Can you combine a busy urban life with a 12-day green-juice and goji-berry detox? Calgary Avansino did, and took her willpower, and sanity, to the limit

A fan of vegan cooking and wheatgrass shots, Calgary figured she'd walk a 12-day raw-food detox. Photographer: Matt Holyoak

Hair and make-up: Victoria Barnes. Shot on location at Emmons Market

forget diamonds; my husband's birthday gift of a 12-day detox retreat in Bali was the best surprise I could have ever wished for. But, as flights and plans began to take shape, I realised there was no way I could prise myself away from my two-year-old for that long and expect to relax. So the thought occurred to me: could I achieve the same results without leaving home? Is it humanly possible to be a mum, work nine-hour days, go out at night and generally lead a normal, urban life while cleansing your body on a juice fast? Feasible, probably; sane, I'm not sure. But if anyone was up to the challenge it was this self-proclaimed health nut. How hard could it possibly be?

I momentarily considered prepping everything myself, but juicing and chopping vegetables at 6am didn't seem like much of a birthday treat. So, after much research, I entrusted myself to the Raw Fairies 12-day Botanical Cleanse, an urban detox regime the quality and authenticity of which rivals any far-flung fasting programme – except that your raw meals, juices and supplements are delivered to a London doorstep instead of a seaside cabana. The benefits, however, are meant to be identical: eliminating harmful toxins from the organs and tissues (caused by alcohol, chemicals, environmental pollutants etc), resting and repairing your digestive system, cleansing lymph glands and

increasing cellular energy. Not to mention an average weight loss of 3-6kg, clearer skin and less cellulite. All this in only 12 days. The first two days include three raw meals and three juices, then three days of one raw meal and four juices, followed by three days of only six juices – and then back up the way you came down. The road ahead is long.

Day one – Monday

The first delivery arrives at 8.30am. Having usually eaten a substantial breakfast by then, I devour the goji and coconut smoothie and bound out the door. By 11am I am eager – but not desperate – to sip my green juice (spirulina, wheatgrass, spinach, fennel) and the rest >

of the day, which includes walnut falafel for lunch and a carrot-and-ginger juice at 3pm, flies by. Work is incredibly busy at the moment, which doesn't allow for much culinary daydreaming, but the second I walk through my front door I become resolutely focused on dinner. I'm desperate to tear into my biodegradable box, but hold off so Don (my husband and fellow detoxer) and I can savour our shredded courgette "pasta" with red-pepper sauce together. Every ounce of every meal is raw, organic, local, seasonal and absolutely delicious – but that doesn't stop me wishing that five more portions would magically appear on my plate. It is immediately and painfully clear that my definition of a "serving" is grossly inaccurate.

Day two – Tuesday

I'm awakened early by an overwhelming craving for porridge and green tea (my usual), but try to focus on my prescribed dry-skin-brushing technique as a distraction: quick upward strokes with a coarse brush to stimulate and cleanse the lymphatic system. Next I jump in to a hot bath loaded with detoxifying oils and salts – which stings like hell after all that abrasion – then downstairs to pop my probiotics, milk thistle, psyllium husks and three other smelly supplements, all washed down with a large glass of cinnamon pecan milk. Not a bad morning routine at all. I feel pure, light and very, very clean.

The day flies by, and I happily eat my raw nut paté with cucumber salad for lunch. By 3pm I am fully prepared for a ravenous rage to overtake me, but, instead, I'm a focused and efficient machine. Two spreadsheets and three memos later, I look up from my computer and swear off long, heavy lunches

forever. This feeling of wellbeing doesn't last long, however, and soon I'm ravenous.

Teatime with my daughter at 6pm is by far my favourite part of every day, but, sadly, I'm finding any excuse to stay late at work. I don't think I've ever before asked my assistant about extra drink receptions that I could attend, but, to avoid watching Ava eat home-made Bolognese and sautéed veggies, I'd gladly endure an hour of mindless small talk.

Instead, I preoccupy myself with long-overdue filing until 8pm, when Don and I have to be at a dinner party. I was tempted to cancel, but they're close friends and I knew they'd understand, or at least humour me, when I rang ahead to say we could eat only raw vegetables.

As we drink our spirulina smoothies – out of champagne glasses, nonetheless – while everyone else sips Veuve Clicquot, I realise how painfully hard the next few hours are going to be. We try to partake in the lively conversation, while eating the enormous salad our host had graciously prepared, but there is no point. The grilled fish, crusty bread and vintage Bordeaux in such close proximity preoccupies my every thought and transforms my husband into a complete mute. I know it seems obvious, but dinner parties really do revolve around the meal – without that you're better off just talking on the phone.

Day three – Wednesday

I quickly post a note to our hosts, apologising profusely for being such bad company, and then proceed to cancel all dinner commitments for the next two weeks.

Day two: by 3pm I'm a focused and efficient machine

Without intending to boast, I must admit that I'm usually pretty damn good at yoga. But tonight, after only three juices and a small rainbow salad for lunch, I'm a bumbling mess. No balance, no focus; I've regressed to a complete novice. My lovely instructor of five years finally suggests that I focus on floor poses and breathing tonight. Bless her.

Even after that moderate bit of exercise I am longing for carbohydrates – pasta, rice, crackers, anything to boost my energy – but we're down to one meal a day now, so I sip my juice slowly, trying to trick myself into thinking it's a meal. No luck – I am famished and fidgety. I need a project to take my mind off the beckoning

kitchen voices. I begin to frantically search for photo albums to organise or cupboards to rearrange – anything not to think about Parmesan cheese.

Day four – Thursday

I'm off for my first of three suggested colonics at The Balance Clinic. I'm no colonic virgin, and I know it's an essential element of any detox, but the process never fills anyone with warm, fuzzy feelings. Actually, I'm thrilled to be lying down for an hour.

Back at work, I reluctantly head to tea at Claridge's with some important clients. These are not people I can complain to about my pounding headache caused by my self-imposed starvation. But to pour on the charm surrounded by trays of scones and cakes will truly test my fortitude. Eye contact, eye contact, I remind myself as my focus keeps darting back to the biscuits. Normally I wouldn't even notice those biscuits, nor contemplate eating them, but if a fire alarm went off right now I'd struggle to focus on much else. This is definitely going to be one of the shortest meetings of my career.

Later that evening I'm riddled with guilt. Every time Don turns his back I run to the kitchen and grab a few almonds or some coconut. Where has my willpower gone? I'm renowned for my ironclad resolve when it comes to food, but this is a tougher adversary than I've ever faced before. I suppose it's not *really* cheating, because it's all raw, but technically I shouldn't be eating off-piste. I imagined this would be a wonderful bonding experience, but, instead, I am sneaking around like an addict – not exactly spiritual progression.



Deliveries included delicious salads of raw seaweed and beetroot, or olives, sprouts and shredded peppers

Day five – Friday

I'm in a foul mood today. *I need food!* I am starting to realise the vast difference between being a healthy eater and not bloody eating. There is no way I have enough energy to walk to work. In fact, I'm not sure there's any reason for me to go to work at all, since I've spent the better part of the past two days in the loo. Psyllium husks, loosemore herbs, supergreens and a 100 per cent raw-food diet certainly do the cleansing trick.

I don't think I've stooped as low as snapping at my assistant today (who, incidentally, is perfect in every way), but I've come disappointingly close. My husband might beg to differ, but at work this is uncharacteristic behaviour. I can't help but think that a giant goat's cheese salad would solve everything. Instead, I make myself yet another cup of herbal tea, hoping it will have some satiating effect. Fennel, peppermint, liquorice, camomile... you name it, Don and I have tried it over the past week.

Days six, seven and eight – Saturday, Sunday and Monday

"I'm so bloody hungry!" has become a mantra around our house. It has been uttered at least 100 times in the past three days, as we have no energy to say much else. We're drinking six juices a day – nothing solid for the next three days. The desire for food is so completely consuming that all I can do is contemplate whether any of Ottolenghi's salads could pass as raw. And do they deliver?

Raw Fairies says to expect "low energy" during the three-day fasting period, but I assure you that I have absolutely *no* energy. *None.* I couldn't even push the pram on a 10-minute walk around the neighbourhood. I now understand why children are not allowed on destination detox retreats. It is impossible to exhibit any semblance of good parenting on 500 liquid calories per day. Ideally, Don and I would be holed up watching endless series of *24*, but, instead, I'm trying desperately (and unconvincingly) to appear interested in Ava's imaginary tea party. I really should have shipped my parents in for the week and relinquished all domestic duties to them. Big mistake.

So, eager to escape temptation and find some calm, I trek across town to a chanting class. Once the meditation begins everything falls into place. Unlike the constant stress of everyday urban life, the slow rhythm of my



breath complements the fast perfectly. I'm completely at peace with the gnawing hunger in my belly, and, for the first time, truly appreciate how ethereal I feel having purged toxins for eight days straight. Aha! *This* is how it's meant to feel.

Day nine – Tuesday

I've never been so happy to return to work after a bank holiday, but by 11am five people have told me I look tired, so I guess I underestimated the toll of the past three days. I was aiming for glowing and healthy, but maybe that comes later.

Why didn't I cancel this work lunch? As I order ginger tea and a side of fruit I feel compelled to explain my regime to avoid rumours of anorexia circulating by late afternoon. Everyone is so fascinated by the programme, though, that I barely get a word in edgeways about work – what's more, I've had to stop walking around in public with my green drinks because they attract so much attention. This is definitely an untapped market.

Later that night we sip our smoothies outside in the garden, until the neighbours stoke up their barbecue and we're forced inside by the torturous smells. It's amazing how powerful the sight and smell of food has become. Things I'd never noticed before (my assistant's lunch, the noise of food wrappers across the office, the smell of chips that emanates from pubs) completely preoccupy me. Luckily, tomorrow we make the transition back to two raw-food meals, so it's an easy ride from here.

Days ten and eleven – Wednesday and Thursday

When our deliveries arrive, we rush to see the solid food. It seems like such a novelty to chew. Enough with the liquids! I am desperate for something crunchy, something I actually have to use my teeth to eat. The seaweed and vegetable salad for lunch and nut burgers for dinner are well worth the wait and, remarkably, the portions – which are the same as before – don't feel abnormally small. Our stomachs have adjusted quickly and now need far less food to feel sated. Portion control has got to be the most valuable lesson we've learnt. On a daily basis people stuff themselves well beyond what is necessary. We have been programmed to believe that we *need* a starter, main course, bread, dessert and coffee when, in reality, so much of what we eat and drink is superfluous and void of any nutritional value. The moral of the story is quality over quantity, and if you can implement that change you'll witness a revolution in energy and wellness.

Now we're back on solids, our energy has surged and we're gaining perspective on how beneficial the whole process has been. In the midst of a detox it's difficult to appreciate the restorative break you're giving your organs, but now, as we enter the last phase, we're amazed by the results. Energetic, focused, clear-headed, calm – the list goes on and on.

Day twelve – Friday

It's our day of reckoning. We haven't stepped on the scales in two weeks and are eager to see where the needle falls. Don has lost 6kg and I've lost 2kg! To be fair, I had less weight to give up and, remember, I was making more frequent sneaky trips to the kitchen. We are much more focused on how healthy and energised we feel than on the drop in numbers. Weight-loss is a nice feeling, but the vitality and clarity you gain from purging your body of toxins is far more motivating.

Prepping a 100 per cent raw-food diet is unrealistically time-consuming, but adding one raw meal per day and consciously limiting processed, heavily toxic food from your diet is a first step. At the moment, I can't imagine ever wanting to contaminate my body again, but I'm sure I'll be tempted by a cheese plate soon enough. I can always do another detox in a few months' time. ■

Raw Fairies 12-day Botanical Cleanse (£695) and five-day Mini B Cleanse (£295) (07508 015313; Rawfairies.com). Colonics at Balance The Clinic (020 7565 0333; Balancetheclinic.com). Yoga with Lisa Booahan (07769 890833; B-yoga.com)

Day six: I have *no* energy. I couldn't even push Ava's pram