Are Toxins Taking a Toll on Your Health?

An Interview with Brenda Watson
Digestive Care Expert and author of The Detox Strategy

by Dennis & Janice Hughes, Share Guide Publishers

Brenda Watson, ND, CNC is a New York Times best-selling author and a foremost authority on optimum nutrition and digestion, natural detoxification methods, and herbal internal cleansing. For more than 20 years, Brenda has dedicated her career to helping people achieve vibrant, lasting health through improved digestive function. In addition to Brenda’s latest book, The Detox Strategy, her titles include Renew Your Life, Gut Prescriptions, and The Fiber35 Diet.

The Share Guide: You wrote in your latest book, The Detox Strategy, that it’s the most important book you’ll write in your career, which is quite a statement. Why do you feel so strongly about this?

Brenda Watson: Detox has been my personal crusade through my rebuilding of my own health. I’ve always approached health from the perspective of gut improvement--better bacteria, more bowel elimination, colon cleansing. I often write about digestive problems, GERD, acid reflux, irritable bowel syndrome. That’s the crux of where my knowledge is and I worked in clinics for 10 years around those issues.

The Share Guide: You have created a lot of awareness around the issue of toxification and our need to detox regularly.

Brenda Watson: Detoxification was traditionally focused on people with specific digestive problems, but with this new book, we look at detox in terms of the average person as they get older--recognizing the overwhelming amount of chemicals that are being dumped on us daily, like a toxic soup, and how it weakens the digestive system and affects our health. Dr. Leonard Smith, who coauthored the book with me, has been a doctor for over 30 years. He is a crusader and researcher on everything in holistic and natural health that’s happening.

The Share Guide: Didn’t you have your own health issues that started you down this path?

Brenda Watson: Yes, I started out with my own personal health challenges. I won’t go through the whole story, but in my early 30s I changed to a more holistic approach to health. I educated myself, and began to understand my own digestive problems, and as a result of that, I actually changed careers. I went back to school and studied nutrition, colon therapy, and anatomy and physiology. The fortunate thing for me was that during that time, which is back in the late 1980s and early 1990s, doctors were beginning to look at more holistic approaches. I got to attend seminars with Dr. Jeffrey Bland and work with holistic doctors who were doing more non-traditional things like chelation, colon therapy, and nutrition workups.

The Share Guide: Didn’t you have your own health issues that started you down this path?

Brenda Watson: Yes, I was very fortunate to work in a very busy natural health clinic on the West Coast of Florida. Then around 1992, I began to work more on teaching people colon hydrotherapy. After that, I began my own natural health clinics across central Florida. I had five of them, called New Life Clinic. We basically did acupuncture, colon therapy, nutrition counseling, and colonics. We also had doctors in some of the clinics doing chelation therapy. I was very fortunate to learn a lot of things from these doctors. We were doing mini-labs--the natural, more alternative laboratories had begun to crop up--so we started to test people for mercury and other types of toxicity. Even back then, in 1995 and 1996, we started to grasp the amount of people who had heavy metal toxicity. But then we realized it's not just heavy metals--we've
get people loaded with dioxins, and pesticides, and dry cleaning chemicals…the list goes on and on and on. The average person is carrying around 91 different chemicals in their body! Then you see the increase in autism from the mid-1990s--from one in 2,500 children back then to one in 150 children today, and you begin to say, Wait a minute, what's happening?

**The Share Guide:** Would you say increased allergies are related also?

**Brenda Watson:** Yes, and increased asthma in cities where the air pollution is high. So that's why we decided to write about the effect of chemicals on the body, and how it's causing a decline in the digestive system and many health problems. There's two things that are happening to create inflammation in the body: one is poor digestion, and the other is poor absorption--because of the vast amount of chemicals being taken in. And the problem is not just one chemical, or one toxin. We are dealing with the synergistic effect of all of these in our body at one time. Traditional medicine has always said don't worry, the liver filters everything out of the body. However, that's not occurring because you've got too many circulating chemicals that are showing up in amounts that are toxic.

**The Share Guide:** So the liver is inundated?

**Brenda Watson:** Yes. Here's where the problem occurs: we're deluged with an inflamed digestive tract, too many chemicals coming in that the liver can't handle them fast enough. Now in order for the liver to be able to convert chemicals and get them to leave the body, it needs plenty of nutrients, specifically glutathione, selenium, zinc, your antioxidants, B vitamins, all of these are critical for good liver function. The problem that we have today is many people are on a lot of drugs like acid-blocking medications, and they don't eat good enough foods. Instead they're eating a lot of processed foods, and these foods do not give them the antioxidant and nutrient-support that the liver needs to detox.

**The Share Guide:** Isn't the liver one of the most important organs?

**Brenda Watson:** Yes, the liver is extremely important. People think: Well, I don't feel bad. They don't realize that you can have 70% liver impairment without any symptoms. When the liver cannot process a chemical, it will throw it off into fat cells--so people get fatty livers. That's why one of the fastest growing diseases in America is non-alcoholic fatty liver disease.

**The Share Guide:** Don't toxins also get stored in the brain?

**Brenda Watson:** Yes, that's the other thing that can happen, and that's why we're seeing a connection between mercury and Alzheimer's. Toxins are also stored in the central nervous system, and in any of the fatty tissue in the body. The fat soluble chemicals love fat, so they will go to areas in the body where there's fat cells and be stored. So the body becomes more and more toxic as people gain more weight.

**The Share Guide:** You've written that toxins can actually contribute to weight gain. Can you explain why?

**Brenda Watson:** When you have a lot of toxins in your body, first of all it slows down your metabolic rate, and second of all, it slows down your ability to feel full, so you overeat. The key is cleaning up the bloodstream, because the bloodstream's what feeds the organs, and what the liver's doing is filtering the blood. The liver becomes more fatty when people cannot detoxify, and the main reason for that is they are nutrient deficient. One in four women in America have hypothyroidism, and one of the main reasons is they're selenium deficient. The reason people cannot get chemicals out of their body fast enough, and the liver cannot filter them, is the liver does not have enough nutrients in order to take those fat soluble chemicals and water soluble chemicals and repackage them in a way they can leave the body.

**The Share Guide:** How much of the chronic illness in this country do you think is due to poor digestive health?

**Brenda Watson:** It's huge. One in three people in this country have a digestive issue.

**The Share Guide:** In your book, you stated that as much as two thirds of all cancer cases may be linked to toxicity.

**Brenda Watson:** Right, because if the digestive tract is weak and the liver's not functioning well, then a person develops a problem wherever they're genetically predisposed. Some people develop autoimmune problems like lupus or Crohn's disease. Someone who has a tendency for inflammation will develop arthritis, or fibromyalgia, or allergies. It depends on the individual. Once they have a declining digestive tract, and once the liver isn't functioning well and can't detoxify the chemicals, then they're going to develop problems where they've got genetic predisposition in many cases.

If you look at every single disease, it probably has some relationship to chemicals in the environment. For example, there is a chemical in air pollution that interacts with LDL cholesterol and increases your risk of heart attack and stroke. People who have been exposed to arsenic and dioxins have a higher risk of diabetes. People that have more fat around the middle of their body--which is where the major organs are
located, like the pancreas and liver--have a higher instance of Alzheimer's. That's because in those fat cells are stored your fat soluble chemicals. And that's why a lot of times when people begin to lose weight, they feel more sluggish for a good period of time.

The Share Guide: How big of a problem do you think household cleaners pose as a toxin source?

Brenda Watson: In general, your inside air is 10 times more toxic than your outside air, and that's because of several things. First, there's your outgassing of furniture and carpet. Then, depending on what kind of lights you're using, there's outgassing of mercury. Then there's the home cleaning chemicals, which is probably a good 25-30% of the problem. I think this is something that's very easy for people to change. In my book, I explain how to make your own natural cleaners if you can't afford to go out and buy something that's natural and eco-friendly. But if you can buy them, then that's a good way to go, because it supports the green movement.

I use a lot of vinegar and hydrogen peroxide in cleaning. I actually make my own soft scrub. It's really, really a good idea for people to go through their cabinets and get all of that toxic stuff out of the house.

The Share Guide: There's three major areas in the home for toxins: there's the bathroom; there's the stuff under the kitchen sink; and then there's the garage area, where the washer and dryer is in a lot of houses.

Brenda Watson: That's right. Another thing is the shower: you take in more toxins from a 10-minute shower than you do by drinking five glasses of tap water. Shower filters are really inexpensive, so you want to make sure you're putting on shower filters. Also, make sure you air your dry cleaning out in the garage before you put it in your closet because of the toxic chemicals used in dry cleaning.


Brenda Watson: We have created an 800 line to give people information where they can check medication against herbs. They can call 1-800-830-4778. Some medications are fine, some are not. People need to be informed.

The Share Guide: It seems like some of the best detox programs would involve going on a retreat where you can get away from it all and just relax. Then you have more time to do a more complicated regimen.

Brenda Watson: Yes, there's a lot of places around, and if you've got the time and money, that's a great way to do it. But I'm trying to teach the average person who's got three kids and juggling a home. So what I've done is try to simplify cleansing.

The Share Guide: So how effective do you think we can be if we try and detox while we're still working and dealing with our normal, hectic lives?

Brenda Watson: I think it's very doable. I used to take people into clinics and go through regimens, and colonics, and juicing, and all that stuff, but the average person couldn't do that. When I started lecturing on cleansing back in 1992, I had the deer-in-the-headlights look from everybody. People thought you had to fast, which is what I started doing first with Dr. Bernard Jensen. What happened next was I started looking at it and seeing that these people couldn't do those programs and still go to work.

The Share Guide: The program you developed has five steps: Reduce, Eliminate, Nourish, Energize, and then the result is Wellness. The acronym is RENEW. Can you explain the steps?

Brenda Watson: First, we want to reduce exposure to toxins, like what we were mentioning earlier. Go through your house and look at what's there. For instance, a lot of those air fresheners on the market are not good for you. Go to your local health food store and get natural essential oils instead. Start using essential oils in your home instead of those things you plug into the wall, and air out your dry cleaning before you put it in your closet. Simple things like this can make a big difference. Take a look at your hair and bodycare products--a lot of them are full of chemicals. You can make your own very easily or buy natural ones at the health food store. And go buy mattress covers, because all your mattresses have flame retardant on them which is toxic. Everyone's sleeping on toxic mattresses, so that's a real important one. I would also recommend, of course, having your own water filtration system. Bottled water and plastic are becoming an issue.

The next thing to do is eliminate toxins. I have a whole detox program in the book. This is not fasting; you're still eating and you're drinking plenty of pure water. Eat organic as much as possible, but if you cannot, then soak your vegetables and fruits in veggie washes to clean them. I also recommend taking a product called Total Body Cleansing--it has liver support, lung support, skin support, kidney support, and colon support. This is not necessarily just a colon cleanse.

The Share Guide: You have several cleansing schedules in your book. Can you explain the options?
Brenda Watson: There's several options: you can do a 15-day program; you can do a 30-day program; you can do a specific liver detox; or you can do a specific heavy metal detox. Everybody should at least start with step one, which is very gentle. The first time you might do two weeks, then the second time increase it to four weeks. People should do the either the basic two week cleanse or the whole body four week cleanse before they do any other deeper cleansing, such as the liver cleanse or the heavy metal cleanse. If you have colon elimination every day, then go with the more gentle approach. You should cleanse a couple of times a year, to help the body lessen the toxic load.

The Share Guide: Isn't getting fiber important during this process?

Brenda Watson: Yes, in the book we lay out the program, which includes adding extra fiber and drinking plenty of water. There are certain herbs that affect the liver which are called choleretics. They initiate the bile to release more toxins to the gallbladder that goes to the digestive tract. If you do not increase your fiber during these detox times, what will happen is you will recirculate those toxins back through the bloodstream. You need to be getting at least 35 grams of fiber while you're doing a detox program.

The Share Guide: For all of these programs aren't there related food supplements you recommend?

Brenda Watson: Yes, that's the Nourish part of the acronym. There are certain things to do daily, such as green drinks, to make sure that you're keeping your body in a balanced state. You also want good bacteria, so probiotics are good thing to take, and you need to keep your fiber levels high. Also, if you have a continuing problem with digestion, then take a digestive enzyme as well. There are more details in the book.

The Share Guide: What are the most important supplements people should take regularly?

Brenda Watson: I think a multi-vitamin is important, and a probiotic, and an essential fatty omega-3 fish oil. I think those are critical for everyone.

The Share Guide: Having a desk job and eating healthy isn't enough. Isn't that what the energize part is about?

Brenda Watson: Yes! You definitely need to do some exercise and work up a sweat. People don't realize how much toxins they get out of their body just through sweating. Hot baths are also great. Here's the bottom line: if you don't sweat well, you do not detoxify well.

The Share Guide: At the beginning of your book you have the body burden test, which is a way of looking in the mirror and seeing where you're at before you start the detox program.

Brenda Watson: I don't believe in today's world we're ever going to be able to clear all the toxins out of our body. So do the best you can. Begin reducing toxin exposure in your home, as part of a prevention program. Then look at detoxing and nourishing your body. Here's the thing: when I think about the mantra of Save The Planet, I think in many people's cases, certainly for me sometimes, it's an overwhelming mission. But I think if we have a Save The Body mantra, it's less overwhelming. Just look at your own body and those of your family, and your home--the changes you begin to make on that level are things that will affect the planet, one by one.

To learn more from Brenda Watson or to subscribe to her free newsletter, visit her website at www.brendawatson.com.

Related Info:
Do You Need to Detox?  
You're Not Sick You're Thirsty!  
Detoxification and The Detox Diet  
Saunas for Detoxification  
Stop Smoking the Natural Way  
Detoxing the Liver  
Raw Food: Quick and Convenient Energy  
The Role of Pure Water in Detoxification  
Toxins In Your Home  
Toxic Household Cleaning Products  
Ann Louise Gittleman on Detoxing the Healthy Way  

Alternative Practitioners  

MORE HEALTH ARTICLES  

If you liked this interview, you'll love The Share Guide's Holistic Health Newsletter. Click here to subscribe for free!