

The BIG SQUEEZE

Are juice-based diets the recipe for a healthy lifestyle – or a potentially dangerous new fad? *Richard Godwin* extracts the facts. Photograph by *Jenny van Sommers*

When Juicers talk about juice, they tend to refer to Year Zero, the Damascene conversion, the blessed moment that juicing entered their life. Once, they were lost (bloated and stressed, tired and ill, and their skin was not glowing). And then, they were found! By green juice! "And I've been juicing ever since!" at least five radiant, alkalised, chlorophyll-rich human beings have said to me, each brandishing that life-changing green liquid.

A few months ago, if you had asked me when I began juicing, I'd have given you a funny look and said I don't know, maybe when I was a toddler? I see now that the watered-down concentrated OJ that my mother handed me in that red beaker was barely worthy of the name. Nor were the various false dawns of juicing that followed: the cranberry phase of the late Nineties, the great Tropicana upgrade of the mid-Noughties.

No, I really began juicing when I found myself cold, hungry, irritable, tired, aching and quite possibly hypoglycaemic after two days subsisting solely on liquid kale, celery, courgette, fennel, spinach, parsley, carrot, beetroot and apple, with a spot of pulverised cashew by way of variation. I felt awful. But strangely alive. Strangely glowing. Strangely determined that my next meal would not be the solid mass of

food that my body clearly craved, but another 500ml of Radiance's Alka Green. Damn, I was juicing then.

We Juicers are many. As early as 2010, Sarah Jessica Parker was reportedly eating solids at weekends only. Jennifer Aniston began juicing in 2012 and got engaged soon after. (Coincidence?) On Instagram, Cara Delevingne, Rosie Huntington-Whiteley and Jennifer Lawrence all show the telltale signs of juice use. Jay-Z and Beyoncé recently spent 22 days as vegans, "a spiritual and physical cleanse", and guess what they did a lot of? Juice.

We also face persecution. Tracy Anderson, personal trainer to the stars, says juice is basically "water that's going to give you type-two diabetes". Her client Gwyneth Paltrow fell short of a full 10-day juice "cleanse" as the hallucinations got to her. "Be aware: a juice detox can crash your metabolism and lead to future weight gain," she warned. Hardcore Juicers call this "hajucinating" and ride it out.

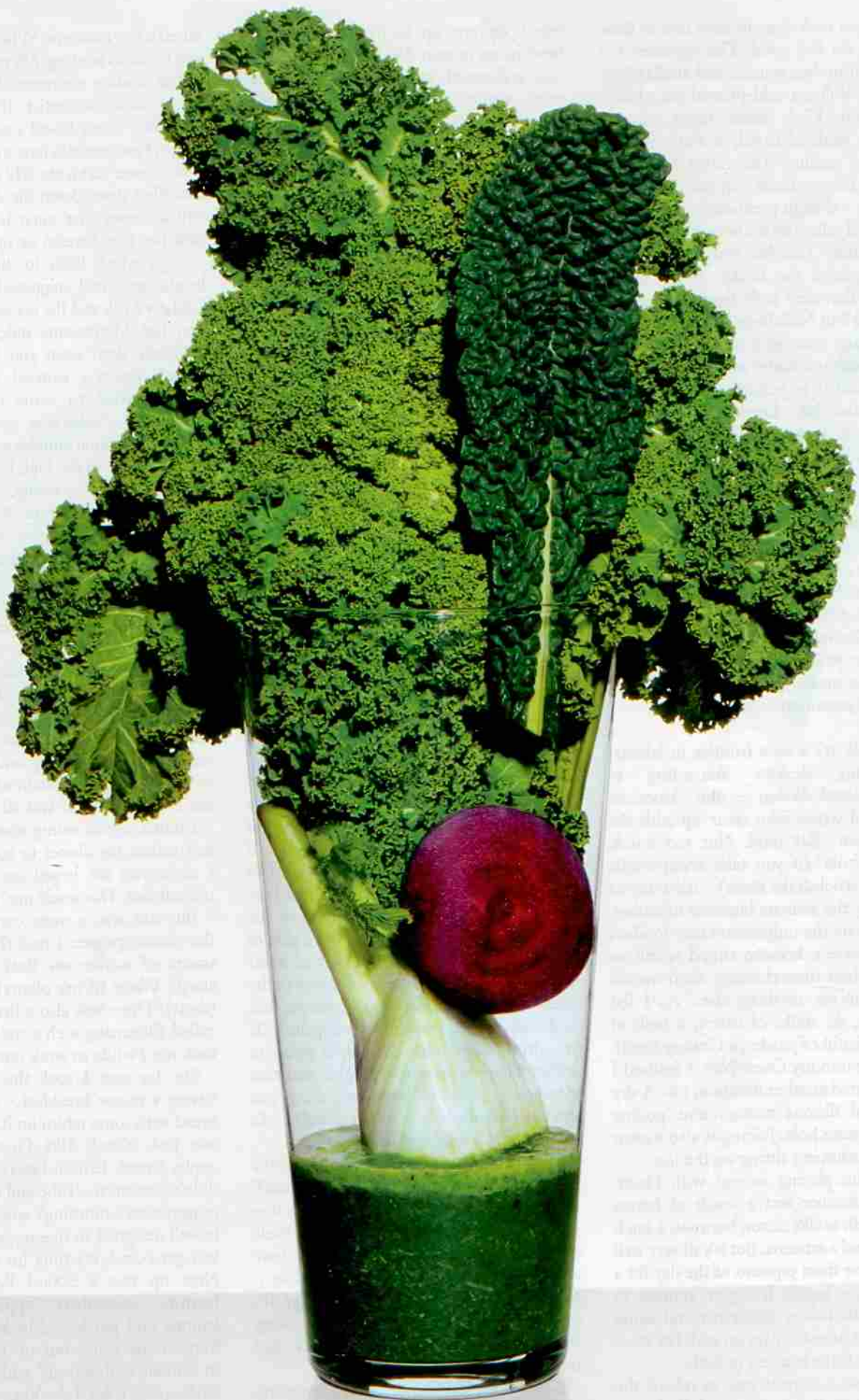
Since Juicers rarely tire of talking about juice (and enzymes and minerals, and wheatgrass and spirulina, and cold-pressing – and impacted faeces on your colon wall), it is fair to say you will hear a lot about it this year. The movement has grown from a trickle into a tidal wave of green matter, with a new wave of California-style cold-pressed-juice bars appearing on fashionable high streets to add to the existing mail-order companies offering "cleanses". Juicing is now

mainstream, at least in the way that Pilates and sushi are mainstream.

The claims for green juice are remarkable. The star ingredient is kale and it is one of the most nutritionally rich vegetables there is: more vitamin C than oranges, more calcium than milk, high in omega-3, vitamin A and iron. Regular juice is pasteurised by heating – which extends its shelf life but kills off a lot of the nutrients. With fresh, cold-pressed kale juice, the idea is that you get all that goodness, fresh and living.

To appreciate the claims made for juice, you need to hear a true Juicer testify. As Los Angeles transplant Amy Terry of Canyon Juicery explains: "One bottle of juice has about two kilos of raw, living vegetables – and that's more than anyone would eat in one sitting. By juicing, you break down the fibre casing, and the nutrients contained within it become so much easier to assimilate. In liquid form it's all readily available for the system. This is a modern tool that helps you to combat modern toxins. It's the only thing you can do besides working out for two hours that makes you feel so amazing."

There's much to chew on there: isn't fibre good for you? What's a toxin anyway? However, the most important word for the Juicer is "feel". "It really is one of the most indulgent things you can do for your body," says Terry. "It's very hedonistic. That's why the cost is high" – £9 for 500ml of Sweet Potato Pie (sweet potato, apple, carrot, ginger), for what it's worth. >



Still, you can't deny it: neck one of these and you do feel good. The signature G1 (celery, cucumber, spinach and alfalfa) from Roots & Bulbs, a cold-pressed-juice bar in Marylebone High Street, tastes mineral-rich, like oxidised blood, or fresh milk, or just-killed sashimi. The carrot content in Plenish's Cherry Beets may even make you glow, too – though presumably not like the girl turned yellow by the betacarotene in too much Sunny Delight. And that's before we've explored the freaky stuff, like the turmeric-flavoured kefir from Purearth or the Brazil Nut Milk from Purifyne Cleanse. Still, as juice bars claim the high street, the true revolution is under way at home, where soon we will all be pulping a harvest festival for breakfast. John Lewis reports a 60 per cent rise in juicer sales; Lakeland claims 4,000 per cent. The most coveted juicer is the Norwalk cold-press, which claims to extract far more nutrients than your average "centrifugal" juicer, which apparently heats up the enzymes and kills the juice. I made do with a £280 Oscar Neo, a "masticating" juicer from Australia, a chrome beast capable of wringing the essence from any piece of plantlife that comes near it. It is far easier to clean than your workaday juicer, while its capacity for making baby food may just earn it a stay of execution on the worktop.

In all, it's a new frontier in labour-saving devices. According to Michael Pollan – the American food writer who came up with the axiom "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants" (if you take seven words from this article, take those) – it's a way of delegating the tedious business of eating. "Blenders are the only reason raw-foodists can survive – otherwise they'd spend so much of their time chewing, there would be no time for anything else." As I fed 500g kale, six stalks of celery, a bulb of fennel, a fistful of parsley, a Granny Smith and a lime into my Oscar Neo, I realised I had delegated another function, too. A dry cylinder of fibrous matter came pooping from the waste hole. Juicing is also a great way of outsourcing sitting on the loo.

I had fun playing around with Oscar: parsley, cucumber and a touch of lemon worked well; as did carrot, beetroot, a knob of ginger and a satsuma. But it's all very well to swap your third espresso of the day for a cup of green liquid. It's quite another to forgo fibrous matter altogether and drink nothing but juice for days on end. For most juicers, this is the true test of faith.

"A cleanse is a great way to reboot the system," says the website of Radiance,

which delivers up to five days' worth of fresh juices to your door. Other companies, such as Purearth, go up to 14 days. ("Beyond that, you're going to need medical supervision," they said.) Joe Cross, an obese Australian who made a film called *Fat, Sick and Nearly Dead*, went on a 60-day juice cleanse and emerged a charismatic juice evangelist. Jason Vale, the self-proclaimed "Juice Guy", who runs a juice retreat in Portugal, says he knows people who have cleansed for up to a hundred days.

I wondered how that could possibly be good for anyone. Of the pro-juicers I spoke to, only Sarah Cadji of Roots & Bulbs advised against juice fasting. "I just don't understand this idea that you eat what you want most of the time, then every couple of months, you punish your body, don't give it any food for days." She favours juicing in moderation and, to be fair, the medical community agrees. Doctors say worrying

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things about type-two diabetes risk, and scornful things about how there is not one shred of evidence to support the idea of "detox". The dentist Dr Uchenna Okoye of London Smiling warned of further risks in a high-sugar, high-acid diet: "Sometimes I see patients that have been on this juicing fast who have worn the enamel on the inside of their teeth right away – and bear in mind that enamel is the strongest substance in the body." Dr Philip Kingsley, an eminent hair and scalp doctor, was similarly appalled. "If you drink solely juice, the hair is going to suffer. Hair is protein. From a nutrition viewpoint, the most important thing you can do for your hair is to eat proteins." In other words, I might go bald.

Then again, when I asked myself the questions on the Radiance "Why cleanse?" section, I began to wonder. Was I feeling perpetually sluggish, day after day? Well, now you mention it... Did I ever have digestive complaints? Once in a while... Was my skin not clear and glowing? It's definitely not glowing! Was I craving sugary foods or caffeine? I was just thinking that I needed a coffee...

Clare Neill, the founder of the company, gave me a consultation over the phone. I

raised a few concerns. When I was a child, I was prone to fainting. My propensity to pass out at random moments all but ruined my career as a clarinettist. It also made me conscious of my blood-sugar levels. It's no biggie, I just prefer to have a decent breakfast, slow-release carbs, etc. My understanding is that fibre slows down the digestive system, which means that sugar is released slowly into the bloodstream as opposed to all in one go, which leads to sugar crashes and headaches. Neill suggested a bit of extra Cashew Milk and the occasional almond to keep the old glycaemic index in check. "We definitely don't want you fainting on the Tube." She was worried that my coffee intake needed to come down gradually beforehand ("otherwise you may vomit") and sent me some samples to try, so my body could "adjust" to the high levels of nutrients it would soon be receiving.

This was a heady time. My fridge at one point contained almost £500 of cold-pressed juice. (The three-day bespoke Radiance Cleanse alone costs £295, which amounts to about £18 per 500ml bottle.) Not all of my experiments ended well. One day, I skipped lunch in favour of 500ml of Clean Green. While the Juice Revolution is supposed to be fuelled by clean, low-sugar vegetable juice, I couldn't help noticing how much apple was in most of Radiance's juices. Apples are cheap and produce a lot of juice. They also contain a lot of sugar. By the evening, my GI was all over the place – I found myself eating about five biscuits as I waited for dinner to cook, something I never feel the impulsion to do on my normal diet. This made me "hangry".

But this was a mere curtain-raiser for the cleanse proper. I read through the A4 sheets of advice on Rest (eight hours' sleep), Water (drink plenty) and Exercise (don't). There was also a little subheading called Eliminate, such a coy euphemism it took me a while to work out what it was.

On day one, I took the precaution of having a minor breakfast – a piece of rye bread with some tahini on it. Otherwise, it was just 500ml Alka Green (courgette, apple, fennel, lemon, broccoli, spinach). I didn't faint on the Tube and even managed to negotiate a morning's work. The cleanse is well designed in one respect: as soon as you get bored, it's time for another juice. Next up was a 500ml Bespoke Blend (carrots, cucumbers, apples, beetroot, lemons and parsley). My head began to hurt. "Nine times out of 10 this is due to caffeine withdrawal," said the Radiance advice pack. (Not, I don't know, *not eating*?) I was also cold. Perishingly cold. Remember

how Ready Brek was “central heating for kids”? It was like I had the air-conditioning on in there.

Still, taste-wise, I didn't have too much problem with this stuff. Not even the 500ml Cashew Milk for lunch, which was as bland as cement but did have some blessed texture. And when I came home I saw the principal advantage. Usually dinner takes an hour, maybe two. There's the mooching down the high street for ingredients, bit of chopping to 6 Music, light apéritif, cooking time, eating time, making-pleasant-conversation-with-my-wife time, etc. On the cleanse, I had prepared, consumed and cleared away dinner within one minute. And they call McDonald's convenience food.

Day two, I woke up with a headache. Once again, I began with 500ml of good old Alka Green. I was weak, cold and my teeth were covered in plaque. I have never been so grateful to get a seat on the Tube. I also had a strange aching sensation in my calves. Mid-morning, I received an email from another Juicer who, on finding out I was cleansing, said: “I bet you feel amazing now!” Ha ha ha! I said. She suggested that any pain I was feeling was due to the cells in my legs beginning the “self-digesting” process. I wasn't at all sure I wanted my legs to digest themselves.

I had a terrible night, the ache spreading to my thighs and lower back. At 5.30am, I was Googling “juice fast leg pain”. The first site I came to informed me: “The pain is good as the body is completing the healing process. The legs can be the worst affected, as toxins accumulate in the legs.” Arrgh! Later, I contacted Clare at Radiance who suggested I was deficient in magnesium, and thus needed to drink more juice. I also contacted Jason Vale, the “Juice Guy”, who guessed that the ache was a “withdrawal” symptom. “It is a shame you are only doing three days,” he added. “I advocate either a five- or seven-day juice diet to really understand and to feel the results.” I told him I suspected I would die of malnutrition and my wife would die of boredom. For if my body was suffering, my conversation was pretty much dead. My poor wife had to endure my growing obsessive-compulsion: “Will you shut up about how many almonds you've not eaten today?”

For all my wailing, for all my plaintive Facebook posts, there was a part of me that was relishing the torture. Seeing how far I could push myself. The way that marathon runners do. Or David Blaine did when he

starved himself in that glass box over the Thames. I spent less time eating, but more time thinking about it. A juice cleanse is a great shortcut to an eating disorder, if you don't already have one. I began to mourn my old spaghetti life.

As the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote in *The Raw and the Cooked*, it is cooking that makes us human. No other animal prepares food in that way. Indeed, whatever the claims of the “raw food movement”, recent research suggests that it was cooking food that enabled humans to take that great evolutionary step forward, since cooking killed bacteria and released nutrients necessary for brain development. Lévi-Strauss defined human identity in terms of the tension between the “raw” (our natural, animal state) and the “cooked” (our civilised, polite selves).

On which side do the Juicers fall? Most would say “the raw”, but I'm not so sure.

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They talk of “modern toxins”, by-products of civilisation that our biology is not equipped to process. They talk of kale as if it were a pagan god. However, the general belief in the perfectible body and perfectible food is “cooked” – it contains a dismissal of community and family, of mealtimes and traditions, of fish forks, Michelin stars, shepherd's pie, *The Great British Bake Off*, pad thai, petits fours, martinis, Christmas. It dreams of a future without the muddy contingencies of harvest and gut, where nutrition and culture are wrested apart. What did food ever do to these people?

I suppose it comes down, in the end, to fear – fear that the modern world is full of toxins on the one hand, fear that your body is not equipped to cope on the other. Whatever my anxieties about what I eat, my fear of people who sell the idea that juice will make you live forever is greater. A Juice Cleanse is a symptom of a dysfunctional food culture – not a cure for it.

On the fourth morning, I broke my fast with smoked salmon and scrambled eggs. Within an hour, all pain had gone. (Presumably the toxins found a way out of my legs. Or had my cells completed their task of repairing themselves?) Wearying of

taking lifestyle advice from people who don't have the first grasp of science, I spoke to the nutritionist Ian Marber. “Did you feel dreadful?” Yes. “Were you told that was all part of the healing process?” Yes. “What a load of bullshit.”

I think the correct term is *bull eliminate*, but I take the point. All of my symptoms were explicable as symptoms of starvation, he explained. “There is a very big difference between nutrients and fuel, which these people just don't seem to grasp.” My body found a way of coping because the body is a miraculous thing; however, that didn't mean I was doing it any good.

“If you drop weight too dramatically, your metabolism responds by learning how to get by on the new calorie intake,” he said. “People who have been on these diets often say that they have put the weight back on and more – the reason is because they have introduced the concept of famine to the body. That means your body will store calories away for future use. The problem with juice fanatics is that they twist the basics of biochemistry,” concludes Marber. “They focus on one aspect and say it's the answer to everything. The benefits of juice are not to be discounted, but it is not the elixir they claim.”

Still, if this makes no sense in scientific terms, in religious terms, the parallels are striking. As Dr James Noyes, expert in religious studies at Sciences Po in Paris, explained to me, almost every religion incorporates some element of fasting. “It is fascinating how many of the new diets retain their old religious residues,” he said. “Purity through self-denial remains a mantra – and the list of prohibited foods looks strikingly similar in the old religious teachings and the new diet cookbooks: red meat, alcohol, sugar, leavened bread.”

Early Christianity abounds with tales of the heroic elimination diets of the saints – the celebrities of their day. “Saint Jerome stated that ‘the repletion of the stomach is the hotbed of lust.’ Saint Simeon Stylites sat on a pillar near Aleppo fasting for 37 years. Saint Catherine of Siena fasted to reject bodily temptation, a phenomenon that was given the label ‘anorexia mirabilis’, or ‘miraculous lack of appetite’.”

In a very real sense, the celebrity Juicers are the new Saint Catherines of Siena. Toxins are the new sins. Bodily perfection is the new God. The ultimate aim is the same. Look at all those claims: “radiance”, “purity”, “anti-ageing”. Kale juice may be consumed as part of a balanced diet. It may be the best thing in that diet. As for whether it grants eternal life – ask me again when I'm 462. ■