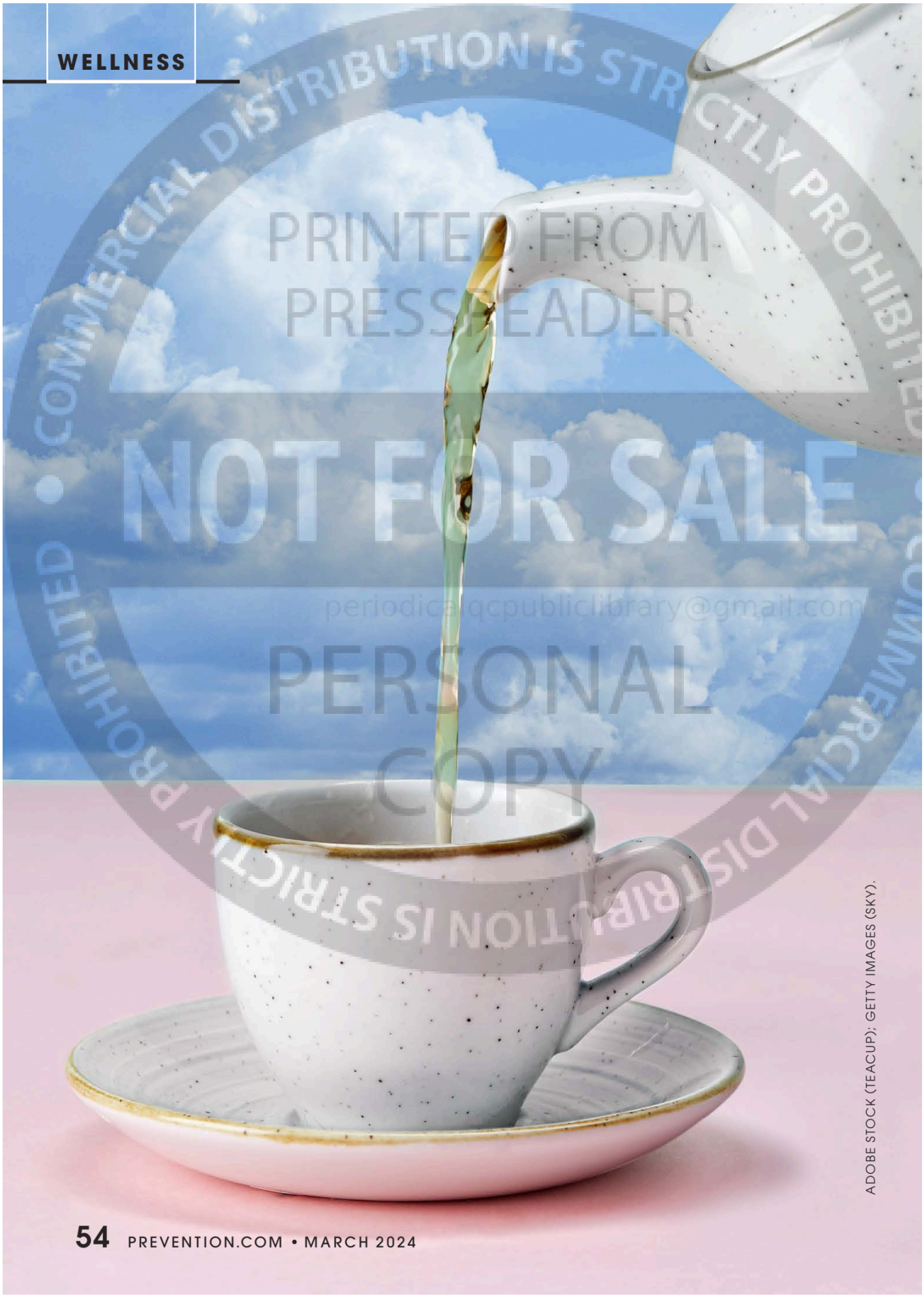
- Tea / Beverages



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sip, sip, hooray!

Tea is not just a twee beverage to enjoy with pinkie out as you watch PBS—it's a hot way to stay healthy.

BY MARISA COHEN

I'M STAUNCHLY TEAM COFFEE, but everyone else in my family is a passionate tea drinker, so my Nespresso pods and coffee beans in the pantry are getting crowded out by bags of Earl Grey, cans of matcha, and tins of fancy blends with names like "Misty Paris Morning on the Left Bank."

Even I have to admit that they're on to something: Tea is both sophisticated and homey (Princess Kate sips it, and so does your grandma), and it is one of the healthiest beverages you can drink. "There are some differences in the

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composition of various types of tea, but current science suggests that regular consumption is good for long-term health," says Benjamin Haddon Parmenter, Ph.D., of Edith Cowan University in Australia, who researches this very topic. By "tea," we mean the caffeinated stuff that is derived from the *Camellia sinensis* plant, which is grown all over the world (see "Comfort, Minus the Caffeine," *opposite page*, for info on other types). Tea's healing powers come mainly from chemicals in the leaves called polyphenols, particularly catechins and epicatechins, which protect the body by inducing antioxidant defenses.

Experts caution that no type of tea is a miracle drink—tea can't counteract an unhealthy lifestyle or replace meds your doctor has ordered—but it is a tasty way to give your health a little boost. A few things tea can do for you:

Help keep your heart healthy

Along with exercise and diet, tea can assist in keeping your heart going strong. A large British study recently found that drinking two or more cups of black tea per day was associated with lower risk of death from cardiovascular disease, stroke, and ischemic heart disease. The flavonoids in green and black tea have long been associated with heart health, Parmenter says. One possible reason: Research suggests that these substances help improve the health and function of the inner layer of the blood vessels, supporting proper blood flow throughout the body and helping maintain a healthy blood pressure. Compounds in tea may also help lower LDL and total cholesterol, further helping reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke.



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Fight inflammation

Chronic inflammation—when the immune system tries to heal with inflammation even if there's no injury—is connected with numerous illnesses, including autoimmune diseases, cancer, and dementia. Tea can be one part of your fight-back plan. "Green tea in particular is full of anti-inflammatory compounds, including a particularly potent catechin called EGCG that can protect against cellular damage," says Boston-based nutritionist Alyssa Pacheco, R.D.

Soothe a cold or flu

You don't need to study biochemistry to confirm that tea can help you feel better when you are sniffling and have a sore throat. To start with, the hot liquid helps soothe your throat and break up congestion. One of its most important healing functions, though, may simply be that it keeps you hydrated, says Jaclyn London, M.S., R.D., author of *Dressing on the Side (and Other Diet Myths Debunked*), who points out that when you're sick you need to boost your intake of fluids, including by drinking plenty of unsweetened beverages.

Sharpen your focus

The caffeine in black tea can increase your focus and energy level while helping you avoid that eye-twitching, over-caffeinated feeling you can get from drinking coffee. Given that a cup of brewed tea has from a quarter to half the amount of caffeine as a cup of coffee, it's great for people who want extra support without a too-stimulating sip, says integrative dietitian Robin Foroutan, R.D.N. "Because tea has caffeine along with L-theanine, a compound that helps your body regulate the calming neurotransmitters, black tea can give you a more balanced boost," she adds.

COMFORT, MINUS THE CAFFEINE

While drinks made from dried herbs, spices, flowers, roots, and fruit are not technically "tea" (considered "herbals" or "infusions," they don't contain caffeine), they have health benefits of their own. Rooibos (pronounced "ROY-boss") tea, also known as "red tea," is made from the leaves of the plant *Aspalathus linearis* and is widely loved for its naturally sweet and nutty flavor as well as its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Mint, ginger, chamomile, and hibiscus also contain antioxidants and have other soothing benefits like fighting nausea and inducing calmness—and since they don't keep you up at night, they're perfect for making a soothing bedtime brew.

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But can tea help you lose weight?



This one's a stretch. The catechins and caffeine in tea may play a tiny role in boosting metabolism, but any weight loss may be more about what you're *not* drinking: Drinking tea "fills the void to replace beverages that are high in sugar and calories," says Josh Axe, D.N.M., cofounder of Ancient Nutrition. "When you replace flavored lattes, coffee with cream and sugar, and sugary sodas with tea, you're cutting a massive amount of calories a day."

DIY DELISH TEA TREATS

Here, three yummy ideas from Nadia De La Vega, director of tea sustainability and content at David's Tea.

LONDON FOG

- Steep 3 Tbsp loose Earl Grey tea (in a tea steeper) in ½ cup hot water for 5 min.
- Froth 1¼ cups plant-based milk
- Add ⅛ tsp vanilla extract to tea; top with frothed milk

ICED VANILLA MATCHA LATTE

- Add 2½ tsp vanilla matcha tea to ½ cup hot water
- Whisk until smooth and frothy
- Fill a 16-oz mug with ice; add 1¼ cups milk and top with frothed matcha

PEACHY SPARKLING ICED TEA

- Steep 3 Tbsp peach tea in ½ cup hot water for 5 min.
- Fill a large mug with ice; pour in tea
- Top with 1 can sparkling water and lemon or peach slices

Black, green, and white: What's the difference?

The leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant, the source of "true" tea, can be turned into a few different types of tea depending on when they are harvested, how long they're allowed to wither, and how long they're oxidized. Each of these factors affects the look and taste of the tea and elicits chemical reactions that change the micro-nutrients in the leaves. Check out these varieties and choose the healthy sip that you find tastiest.

BLACK TEA

When you think of "a cuppa" English Breakfast or Darjeeling or just a basic bag of Lipton next

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to your office coffee machine, that's classic black tea. To make this kind of tea, the leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* are rolled or cut and left out to dry fully; oxidation turns the leaves a rich brown or black. While polyphenols are abundant in all teas, black tea is particularly high in theaflavin and thearubigin, which give it its rich color and may help control blood sugar.

GREEN TEA

Despite their having another color and flavor profile entirely, green teas such as matcha and Hojicha come from the same plant as black tea does. The difference: Before the green leaves have a chance to turn brown, they're heated to forestall the oxidation process. This gives the tea its bright green color and grassy flavor. "Green tea, specifically matcha, is high in antioxidants such as chlorophyll, L-theanine, and catechins," says dietitian Amy Fischer, R.D.N.

WHITE TEA

Think of white tea as the baby of the family: To make this mild and floral-tasting variety, the *Camellia sinensis* leaves are plucked when they've barely budded. At this early stage, the leaves are usually covered in downy white fuzz, hence the tea variety's name. The leaves are dried as soon as they're harvested to avoid letting them oxidize. "White tea is the most minimally processed of all the teas, so it retains a higher amount of catechins," says Fischer, who points out that white tea has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties similar to those of green tea.

—Additional research by Adele Jackson-Gibson

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