

- Tea

BETTER LIVING

WELLNESS FOR BODY & MIND

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*How To
Make The
Perfect*

CUP OF TEA

BY *Helen Foster*

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EACH DAY AN estimated five billion cups of tea are drunk around the world—and every single one of them is potentially a health booster; if made correctly.

Now you might be thinking, there's tea, there's water—maybe milk and sugar depending on where you live—how hard can it be to do it correctly?

Well, actually there's a science to making tea that tastes good, and positively affects your health.

Health Benefits

According to recent studies, drinking two to six cups a day is linked to a lowered risk of arterial changes associated with heart disease and dementia, while one cup a day reduces the risk of diabetes—and just three cups a week might lead to a longer life.

“All tea—green, black and white—comes from the *Camellia sinensis* plant which is full of phytochemicals with antioxidant properties that benefit health,” explains Professor Quan Vuong from the University of Newcastle in Australia. “However, the tea you choose and how you prepare it makes a difference as to how many of these phytochemicals actually end up in your cup.” He says that is one reason why the research findings about how much tea confers health benefits are so inconsistent.

If you want to make the healthiest cup of tea though, here are the steps you need to follow.

Vary Your Colours

“The difference in tea colour comes from when it's picked and how it is processed after picking,” explains Professor Vuong. The less a tea is allowed to oxidize (react with air) the more healthy compounds it contains. “White tea is made from the buds of the tea and dried immediately to stop it oxidizing so it has the highest levels,” he says. “Green tea is heated to stop oxidation, black tea is allowed to oxidize fully and oolong is somewhere in between.” This might lead you to believe that you should only drink white tea, but, not only is that bad for the budget (it's very expensive), “we find different polyphenols in the different teas—so, it's a better idea to vary the types you drink to ensure a mix,” says Professor Vuong.

Stick With Leaves

“Making tea is all about chemistry—and the key to chemistry is proximity,” says Professor Michelle Francl, a chemist, at the US's Bryn Mawr University and author of *Steeped: The Chemistry of Tea*. “A tea bag is a barrier between the hot water and the tea leaves which affects how many of the compounds are released.”

In her book, she explains that you get 30 per cent less caffeine in a cup of tea made from a tea bag than one made from loose tea. And it takes three times as long for a cup of tea made with a bag to reach the maximum lev-

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els of antioxidants of a cup of tea made from leaves.

Freshly Boil The Water

To extract the optimum health benefits of tea, you need to use water that's at least 85°C. "And add a splash of hot water to the teapot, or cup, before you put in the leaves or bag," says Professor Francl. "This helps the pot maintain a higher temperature while steeping." The longer you can keep the temperature up the more antioxidants emerge. Short, squat teapots also maintain their temperature better than larger ones.

Be Patient

The traditional amount of time that tea is left to steep is about two minutes but, according to research from the University of Malaya, leaving black tea to steep for five minutes creates its optimum level of active antioxidants—and brings it up to a level not far off that of Japanese green tea. Green tea, however, actually loses antioxidants if

left to sit too long in hot water. So, make fresh cups rather than letting it stew in a pot.

Give Things A Stir

"Stirring or agitating the tea creates better contact between the water and the tea leaves which increases the ability of the chemical compounds to enter the water," explains Professor Francl.

In A Hurry?

If your tea-making process involves throwing a teabag in a cup and dunking it a few times, your tea is going to contain few antioxidants, but, as Professor Vuong puts it, "We're all busy", so he tried an experiment that might make a few of you shudder—microwave tea. In his study, dunking a green tea bag for 30 seconds and then microwaving the brew for a minute extracted more catechins (healthy compounds) from the tea bag than leaving it to sit longer. "It might even be too many as the tea is quite bitter," he told us. But, don't worry—we have a solution.

Add Pinch Of Salt

This suggestion set Professor Francl's email ablaze when she mentioned it in her book, "but the theory behind it is that sodium ions within salt affect our taste receptors for bitterness, effectively turning them off, so the tea doesn't taste as bitter," she explains.

If salted tea doesn't sound appealing, Professor Vuong suggests adding



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lemon juice—a trick that also has a second benefit. Researchers from the US's Purdue University found that our body absorbs five times the catechins from green tea when lemon is added.

Skip The Sugar

It's bad for your teeth and adds kilojoules. According to research from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the average person adds 180 kilojoules a day to their diet from drinking tea—85 per cent of which comes from sugar. If not offset in other ways, those sugar kilojoules could lead to a weight gain of over a kilogram a year.

Pick The Right Cup

When he does use teabags, Professor Vuong uses a thermal cup for his tea, “as the longer the water stays warm the more antioxidants are extracted,” he told us.

But, if you are using a china cup, pick the right colour. According to research conducted on the UK television programme *Inside the Factory*, drinking green tea from a green cup enhanced its flavour, and picking a red or pink cup made tea taste sweeter without sugar. **R**



RELAX WITH YOUR TEA

Tea already contains a stress-reducing substance called L-theanine, “but adding a ritual to drinking tea can enhance its calming effects,” says tea ceremonialist Cara Chen, from Altitude Tea in Sydney. A traditional tea ceremony has 21 steps that help enhance the mindfulness of tea, but Chen suggests trying a modified meditative process at home.

“Start with some deep breaths as the kettle boils, then as you drink the tea use small sips and focus on your senses,” she says. “Think about how the tea tastes, look at the colour and watch any sediment swirling in the cup and the steam coming up from the top. Spend some time inhaling the scent and enjoy the feeling of the warm cup in your hands.”

Paper Thin

Danish researchers studying paper cuts have discovered the paper posing the greatest threat has a thickness of only 65 micrometres—such as dot matrix printer paper. The research team notes that they found recruiting human volunteers to suffer for science difficult.

—SOURCE: YAHOO