Herbal teas for more than flavour

South Taranaki Star · 3 Mar 2022 · 16

Herbal teas have been used as natural remedies for a variety of ailments for hundreds of years. But despite the name, they are not true teas like green tea, black tea and oolong tea, which are brewed from the leaves of the Camellia sinensis plant. Herbal teas, or ‘‘tisanes’’, are infusions of non-tea plants, which may include flowers, herbs, spices and roots. In recent years, research into herbal teas has provided evidence to support some traditional claims while dismantling others.



Chamomile

Chamomile tea is commonly known for its calming effects and is often used as a sleep aid. It is also believed to have anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory and liver-protecting properties, and in one study people with type 2 diabetes had improved blood glucose, insulin and blood lipid levels. More research is needed to confirm the effects.

Peppermint

Peppermint tea is traditionally used to relieve digestive discomfort. Studies have found peppermint oil can help relieve nausea, cramping, spasms, stomach pain and symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome. Simply smelling mint has been shown to reduce anxiety, and enhance alertness and memory.

Ginger

Ginger tea packs a punch of healthy, disease-fighting antioxidants; helps limit inflammation; and stimulates the immune system. However, it is best known as a remedy for nausea. A number of studies have found that ginger capsules reduce pain associated with menstruation, and in people with osteoarthritis.

Hibiscus

Hibiscus tea has a refreshing, tart flavour that can be enjoyed hot or iced. Test-tube studies have shown hibiscus extract to be effective against strains of bird flu, but there is no evidence to show drinking hibiscus tea could help people fight off viruses like flu. People taking diuretic medication hydrochlorothiazide should avoid hibiscus tea because the two may interact. Hibiscus tea can also shorten the effects of aspirin so it is best to take them 3-4 hours apart.

Echinacea

Echinacea tea is said to prevent and shorten the common cold. Studies testing this have not been well designed, however, producing conflicting results. Enjoyed warm, it should help soothe a sore throat or clear up a stuffy nose, though.

Rooibos

Pronounced ‘‘roy-boss’’, rooibos tea is made from the South African rooibos or red bush plant. It is high in antioxidants. One test-tube study suggests it may benefit bone health by stimulating the cells involved in bone growth and density, and there is preliminary evidence that it may help reduce heart disease risk. However, more research is needed. Rooibos also provides small amounts of minerals, including iron, calcium, potassium, copper, manganese, zinc and magnesium.

Sage

A number of studies have shown sage to be beneficial for cognitive functioning and potentially effective against the effects of the plaques involved in Alzheimer’s disease. One study in rats found that sage tea protected against the development of colon cancer, although more research is needed to see if this applies to humans.

Rose hip

Rose hip tea is made from the fruit of the rose plant. It is high in vitamin C and plant compounds that reduce inflammation, including in rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis. Its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant effects may also help fight skin ageing.

Passionflower tea

The leaves, stems and flowers are used to make passionflower tea. It has traditionally been used to relieve anxiety and improve sleep. One study found that drinking passionflower tea for a week significantly improves sleep quality.