



The power

These flavonoid antioxidants help reinforce the body's defence system by neutralizing dangerous free radicals. There is a link between regular tea consumption and heart health – drinking three cups of tea per day can decrease the risk of heart attack by 11 per cent.

Scientists think that the flavonoids may work by relaxing blood vessels which allows the blood to flow more evenly, or by reducing serum cholesterol levels.

Interestingly these same powerful antioxidants in tea may actually help strengthen bones in post-menopausal women.

Keep relaxed yet alert with a cuppa

Tea has long been valued for its ability to both relax and refresh you.

Now scientists have discovered that a unique natural compound in tea known as L-theanine seems responsible.

Research conducted by Oxford University - suggests that L-theanine is able to promote a feeling of relaxation while maintaining an alert state of mind. This reinforces earlier findings by Japanese scientists.

It's still early days but it appears that just 50mg of L-theanine – found in two to three cups of tea – stimulates specific brain activity known as alpha waves. High alpha brain wave activity is also seen in people during meditation and yoga. So drinking just two to three cups of tea throughout the day may help to promote a relaxed yet clear mind.

Tea is good for the heart

Tea is a natural source of powerful antioxidants known collectively as flavonoids.

The amount and type of flavonoids in tea depends on the variety, the amount of tea used in the pot or cup, and brewing habit. They are present in similar amounts in black (regular) and green teas but not in herbal infusions which are not made from the *Camellia sinensis* tea plant (see box).

Tea – the most widely consumed beverage in the world after water – offers many benefits to your health. For 5000 years, the Chinese have used tea to treat many ailments—from colds and coughs to body aches and headaches. More recently researchers have discovered tea's association with the prevention and management of several illnesses, including heart disease, certain cancers and osteoporosis.

2021 of tea

A healthy thirst quencher

Tea is a hydrating liquid and counts towards our recommended daily intake of two to three litres of fluid a day. We need to top up our fluid intake as water helps to transport nutrients around the body, remove toxins and regulate blood pressure.

Nutritionists have discovered that beverages can contribute anywhere between 15 and 21 per cent of the kilojoules (calories) we take in and so are a major contributor to obesity – we are drinking in the kilojoules! Consumption of all drinks, but particularly soft drinks and juices, has risen sharply over the past 20 years.

The Healthy Beverage Guidelines, recently published in the US, encourage the consumption of beverages that are nutrient dense yet low in kilojoules.

Tea is a healthy, low kilojoule beverage and a great way to stay hydrated. Taken without milk or sugar, tea contains virtually no kilojoules and can hydrate without overloading you.

By Catherine Saxelby

Catherine is a consultant dietitian and tea lover.

Her clients include Unilever.

Tea by type

Nothing beats a good cup of tea. Here's how they all stack up. Green, black and oolong teas come from the same plant *Camellia sinensis*. The difference lies in the way they are processed (traditionally known as fermented) after picking.

Green tea

Green tea leaves are simply heated soon after harvesting so they wither and then are rolled and dried. This stops the oxidation or fermentation activity so retains most of the simple tea antioxidants known as catechins.

Black tea

Black teas are left to undergo oxidation which changes the colour of the leaves from green to

brown, and converts the simple catechins to longer more complex antioxidants called theaflavins and thearubigins.

Oolong tea

Oolong tea is halfway between green and black.

Herbal infusions (tisanes)

Not strictly tea but infusions of fruits, herbs, flowers and spices. Peppermint, ginger and chamomile are examples. Some are rich in vitamins or plant extracts but none have the solid bank of research behind true teas.

Want more information?

Find all about tea, its history and health benefits, look at www.tea.org.au and also www.drinkbetter.com.au