



Tea Time



Tea has been around for centuries, and is said to have been discovered in China, in 2737 B.C.E. when the Emperor Shen Nong, a skilled ruler and scientist, accidentally discovered tea. While boiling water in the garden, a leaf from an overhanging wild tea tree drifted into his pot. The Emperor enjoyed drinking the infused water so much that he was compelled to research the plant further. Legend has it that the Emperor discovered tea's medicinal properties during his research.

Fast forward to current day in the United States. During the 19th century, tea drinking played an important role in social life, and new tea traditions began to develop in America as the beverage's popularity grew. Iced tea originated at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri. A tea merchant from abroad had intended to provide visitors with free hot tea samples. However, due to the unusually hot weather, it was not a big hit. To promote sales, he asked a nearby ice cream vendor for some ice, which he dumped into the brewed tea. Thus, the American iced tea tradition was born. Today, iced tea makes up around 80% of the entire U.S. tea market sales.



Tea, not iced tea, has many health benefits. Purists consider only green tea, black tea, white tea, oolong tea, and pu-erh tea the real thing. They are all derived from the *Camellia Sinesis* plant (the plant mentioned above in our history lesson on where tea originated), a shrub native to China and India, and contain unique antioxidants called flavonoids. The most potent of these, known as EGCG, may help against free radicals that can contribute to cancer, heart disease, and clogged arteries. All of these teas have caffeine and theanine, which affect the brain and seem to heighten mental alertness. Theanine may help mood, enhance brain function, and calm the body's response to stress.

- **Green tea:** Made with steamed tea leaves, it has a high concentration of EGCG and has been widely studied. Green tea's antioxidants may interfere with the growth of **bladder**, **breast**, lung, **stomach**, pancreatic, and colorectal cancers; prevent clogging of the **arteries**, burn fat, counteract oxidative stress on the **brain**, reduce risk of neurological disorders like **Alzheimer's** and Parkinson's diseases, reduce risk of **stroke**, and improve **cholesterol levels**.
- **Black tea:** Made with fermented tea leaves, black tea has the highest caffeine content and forms the basis for flavored teas like chai, along with some instant teas. Studies have shown that black tea may protect lungs from damage caused by exposure to cigarette smoke. It also may reduce the risk of stroke.
- **White tea:** Uncured and unfermented. One study showed that white tea has the most potent anti-cancer properties compared to more processed teas.

- **Oolong tea:** In an animal study, those given antioxidants from oolong tea were found to have lower bad cholesterol levels. One variety of oolong, Wuyi, is heavily marketed as a weight loss supplement, but science hasn't backed the claims.
- **Pu-erh tea:** Made from fermented and aged leaves. Considered a black tea, its leaves are pressed into cakes. One animal study showed that animals given pu-erh had less weight gain and reduced LDL cholesterol.

Herbal Teas have lower concentrations of antioxidants than green, white, black, and oolong teas, but can still have some very positive health benefits, although limited research has been done so some of the benefits noted are not largely supported by science.

- **Chamomile tea:** Its antioxidants may help prevent complications from **diabetes**, like loss of **vision** and nerve and **kidney** damage, and stunt the growth of cancer cells. Due to its nerve-calming affects, Chamomile tea, as well as aromatherapy blends, can aid people with stress and sleep disturbances.
- **Echinacea:** Often touted as a way to fight the **common cold**, the research on Echinacea has been inconclusive.
- **Hibiscus:** A small study found that drinking three cups of hibiscus tea daily lowered **blood pressure** in people with modestly elevated levels.
- **Rooibos** (red tea): A South African herb that is fermented. Although it has flavonoids with cancer-fighting properties, medical studies have been limited.

Instant tea, such as iced tea, may contain very little amounts of actual tea and plenty of sugars or **artificial sweeteners**. For health's sake, check out the ingredients on the label.

There definitely seem to be more positives to tea consumption than negatives. When something is truly good, it will stand the test of time. Tea has been around for many centuries, and the medicinal properties have not changed. So, take some time, find a tea you like and attempt to drink your way to a healthier you.

The following website was sourced and referenced for this article:

<https://www.mightyleaf.com/history-of-tea>

<https://www.webmd.com/diet/features/tea-types-and-their-health-benefits#1>

<https://www.verywellmind.com/stress-busting-herbal-teas-89634>

