

Blueprints for Change

TEA: NATURE'S SECRET FOR SLEEP, HEALTH, MOOD AND WEIGHT

Why has tea been known as medicine to the Chinese for the last 5,000 years? Perhaps because they have been aware of its effects on body chemistry that relax, rejuvenate, enhance the ability to think and change mood.

All regular (read non-herbal) teas come from the same plant (if you are into Latin it's called *camellia sinensis*) with the difference being in the processing. **White tea** is tea made from new growth buds and young leaves which have been steamed or fired to inactivate polyphenol oxidation, and then dried. **Green tea**, the first tender leaves of spring, are picked, rolled, steamed, crushed and dried with hot air. **Black tea** is fermented for three hours, then dried and scented to strengthen the aroma and reduce bitterness. **Oolong** tea is a black tea but the leaves are semi-fermented for one hour.

Many studies scientifically support the health benefits of tea. For example, US Department of Agriculture researchers recently reported that five cups of black tea a day can potentially lower LDL (the harmful cholesterol) as well as total cholesterol in people with mildly elevated cholesterol.

Do you have trouble falling asleep at night, staying asleep or feeling like you've not slept at all in the morning? Aside from issues such as illness, drugs and inappropriate sleep environments (like falling asleep with the lights on while watching the Super Bowl), the main reason for sleep problems is stress. Green tea is a great de-stressor. You may not have to rev yourself up with copious amounts of caffeine in the morning if you drink green tea the night before.

So why is green tea such a great de-stressor? Green tea contains the amino acid L-theanine which neutralizes the speedy, twitchy effects of caffeine without reducing its fat-burning, mind-enhancing effects. Volunteers working with researchers in Japan found that green tea didn't cause them to sleep longer, but it did cause them to sleep better.

Additionally, L-theanine can cross the blood-brain barrier and positively affect brain chemistry. It has been found to be a mood-enhancer by affecting serotonin (the feel-good chemical in the brain) and other neurotransmitters in the brain.

And for you "hard partyers" green tea can help your liver recover. Research from Japan has shown that it is a powerful antidote to the effects of alcohol. Drinking alcohol (among other things) causes significant suppression of the liver's antioxidant and detoxifier known as glutathione. Theanine helps counteract this alcohol-induced loss of one of the body's major antioxidants.

Caffeine is effective for speeding up the body's metabolism, thereby assisting weight loss. Green tea promotes thermogenesis (the body's generation of heat) and complements the fat-burning aspect of caffeine. A study in the Journal of Obesity shows green tea increases thermogenesis by a huge 20 to 77% in laboratory animals! It regulates blood sugar and insulin and has a calming effect for dieters.

What about white tea? According to recent reports, white tea may be the most potent tea for cancer protection. One cup has the antioxidant capacity of 12 glasses of orange juice. White tea is rich in the compound EECG which shows powerful activity in ridding the body of the dreaded and always no-good free radical scavengers.

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TEA TIPS:

- To lessen the amount of caffeine in a cup of black tea, pour boiling water over the tea bag in one cup, leave for 60 seconds and then place the bag into a second cup of hot water to steep for 2-3 more minutes. Up to 90% of the caffeine will be released into the first cup.
- To fully benefit from the health aspects of green and white teas, pour hot not boiling water over the leaves.
- Don't add milk to green tea – it not only clouds up the nice clear color it also inhibits absorption of the protective compounds.
- The astringent polyphenols (sometimes erroneously known as tannin) found in teas can be an irritant to the intestinal linings and kidneys.
- Organic teas are a better option because you are guaranteed they have not been sprayed with pesticides.
- There are many types of herbal teas in today's market. Try chamomile tea for an upset stomach or to relax, peppermint as a digestive aid, dandelion to detoxify the liver or ginger tea to relieve nausea.
- The Australian/British “afternoon tea time” is a wonderful way to relax from the day's stresses.

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