Drink Tea for Improved Health

Herbal teas have been consumed since ancient times among people of all cultures. However, despite the name, herbal teas are not actually true teas. True teas include green, black, and oolong teas that are brewed from the leaves of the Camellia sinensis plant. Herbal teas are made from simply steeping dried fruits, flowers, bark, roots, spices or herbs in hot water to release their phytonutrients, antioxidants, and other healthful elements. Essentially, almost any edible plant can be made into an herbal tea to reap all the plant’s benefits in a form that is easy to digest.

Herbal teas come in a wide range of tastes and flavors, and make an alluring alternative to sugary beverages or water. Also, for those who are sensitive to caffeine, or already consume more than enough via coffee or energy drinks on a daily basis, many herbal teas can make for a pleasing caffeine-free addition to daily fluid intake. Some data suggests certain plant drinks help promote weight loss or reduce inflammation. Most herbal teas only contain about 2-4 kcals per 8-ounce cup – but are still packed with flavor.

Current research continues to unearth evidence supporting some of the traditional uses of herbal teas. The following list contains some healthful herbal tea options to potentially include into one’s diet for improved health. This is of course not an exhaustive list, select varieties are presented which provide several different proven and purported benefits.
Chamomile is well known to be calming and may improve sleep quality when consumed at night. It is often a key ingredient in “Sleep Time” herbal infusions, along with valerian flower/root. One study showed it to positively impact insomnia when consumed twice a day. It is also believed to have antibacterial and anti-inflammatory properties. Many individuals claim it helps calm the digestive system when consumed after meals and helps combat diarrhea. It has a very light, pleasing flavor and color as it is made from the flowers of the plant.

Rooibos comes from South Africa and is harvested from the red bush plant of the region. South Africans have long used it for medicinal purposes, but major research is lacking for this herbal tea due to its very recent boom in popularity worldwide. One test-tube study showed it to potentially benefit bone health – possibly via anti-inflammatory effects. Preliminary evidence shows it may help prevent heart disease by attenuating blood pressure or blood lipids, but more data is needed. It has a unique flavor which has been described as slightly sweet, woody, and floral with a touch of vanilla or caramel.

Ginger tea is quite flavorful and spicy. It contains healthful antioxidants, can help fight inflammation and stimulate the immune system to help fight infections. It is most well-known as an effective remedy for nausea, especially during pregnancy and with those who experience motion sickness. Some evidence seems to suggest it may help relieve indigestion or constipation. Interestingly, research has shown ginger to also be useful for relieving dysmenorrhea, or menstrual cycle pain consistent with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as Ibuprofen. Other studies attempting to link ginger with blood sugar control for diabetics has not been as conclusive.
This tea is made from the fruit of the rose plant, which provides the high vitamin C content and beneficial phytonutrients and fats. It possesses anti-inflammatory properties; some studies have shown it to be beneficial for reducing inflammation among people with rheumatoid arthritis or osteoarthritis. One study also suggested rose hips to be beneficial for weight management among overweight people, but more data is needed. This tea is one of the few to contain compounds purported to fight skin aging, including wrinkles around the eyes.

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This tea is made from the colorful flowers of the Hibiscus plant – loved by several animal species in its natural environment. It has a strong pink/red color and a strong tart flavor similar to cranberries. As its flavor indicates, it is also high in antioxidants, similar to certain citrus fruits. One study showed consumption of hibiscus extract for six weeks significantly reduced oxidative stress among male soccer players. Of special interest, test tube studies have shown hibiscus extract to be highly effective against strains of influenza. Unfortunately, no evidence has shown this tea to fight off the flu among humans. Several studies have examined its impact on blood lipid levels as well as blood pressure; some showed it to be effective, but many others did not – and some studies were poorly implemented. This tea may interact with some medications including diuretics and aspirin, minimizing their impact on the body.
This plant is native to Australia and when steeped possesses a minty, licorice-like taste. It is well known to stimulate the immune system and potentially improve respiratory system circulation. It possesses strong antibacterial properties that can help reduce phlegm and mucus in the upper respiratory tract. It is often used for a sore throat and as an adjunct for treating the symptoms of the flu. It is also rich in antioxidants and contains anti-inflammatory elements. It is purported to improve arthritis and is used on wounds and burns as an ointment.

Spearmint and peppermint are different subspecies of the same plant – Mentha spicata and Mentha piperita, respectively. Peppermint has a stronger flavor as it contains a much greater quantity of menthol – 40% vs. 0.05% in spearmint. They both possess similar properties and benefits. Peppermint tea is one of the most commonly used herbal teas worldwide, mostly used for its pungent flavor and purported positive impact on digestive tract health. It also contains potent antioxidants as well as antibacterial and antiviral properties. Unfortunately, many of these effects have not been well studied in humans, so true health benefits are difficult to surmise. However, its impact on the digestive tract has been confirmed – including the relief of indigestion, nausea, stomach pain, and even irritable bowel syndrome. Interestingly, it has also been found to have an antispasmodic effect on the intestines and esophagus. It is sold as its own pure tea and often mixed with other herbs/plants as a “spicy or vitalizing” tea.

This tea is traditionally used to improve sleep and reduce anxiety – seemingly contradicting the name of the plant. The leaves, stems, and flowers are used in this herbal variety. Two human studies showed it to be effective for reducing anxiety – one showing it to be as effective as anxiety-relieving medications. Another showed passionflower to help relieve mental symptoms associated with opioid withdrawal when combined with medications used for opioid detoxification. Overall, it seems useful for promoting calmness and relieving anxiety. It has a very mild, earthy green flavor.
As its name indicates, lemongrass has a mildly sweet, citrus flavor. It is suggested to have a positive impact on cardiovascular disease via a reduction in blood pressure and lower potential risk for blood clots. It has long been a staple of Indian and Asian traditional medicine, where it is understood as a digestive aid and natural diuretic. A few studies showed it to lessen the symptoms of nausea and stomach pain caused by aspirin or NSAIDs, but more data is needed to make definitive conclusions. It is also rich in antioxidants that have been shown to prevent the growth of certain cancer cells in animals. It is rich in vitamin C and A, both of which can help boost immunity.

Lemongrass

This tea comes from the kava shrub found in western Pacific regions, where it has a strong history of being used in alternative medicine and traditional ceremonies. It contains several compounds and nutrients that make it unique including kavalactones which possess sedative properties. It is used to relieve stress and anxiety as well as improve sleep quality. Interestingly, the plant extract has calming, euphoric effects one could compare to the effects of alcohol. It is also purported to reduce smoking cravings among those trying to drop the bad habit. It has an earthy flavor and is usually sold as a “stress relief” concoction combined with other herbs such as cinnamon bark and ginger root for flavor.

Kava

Derived from the dandelion flower, this herbal tea has a somewhat bitter flavor. It may aid in digestion when consumed prior to a meal by increasing gastric acid activity; however, this can be a potential issue for those with acid reflux. It is purported to aid weight loss via increased metabolism of fat, and is also a natural diuretic. One study showed an acute reduction in excess water weight or bloating. It also contains calcium, zinc, iron and magnesium – lending to its purported benefits on bone health and anemia. More research is needed in these areas. Interestingly, dandelion root can be used as a natural substitute for coffee due to its caffeine content.

Dandelion

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Drinking steeped plants can provide a number of health benefits. One should always take caution with herbal supplements and teas however, and stick with reputable companies known for high product purity. Also, many herbs can alter the effects of medication and there may be unknown synergistic effects. There are many other types than those presented in the above discussion, so a variety of different flavors and benefits can be obtained from adding herbal teas to one’s daily diet. Overall, drinking herbal teas to improve one’s health will most likely work in their favor, as the phytochemicals in various plants provide more healthful benefits than current science has even yet to unravel.

12 Types of Herbal Teas for Improved Health

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