

BY DANIELLE BEAUDETTE



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January is National Hot Tea Month, and a time when eating and drinking healthy is on everyone's mind. With cold and flu season upon us, it is even more important to know what we are putting into our bodies. So why focus on tea? Tea's history dates back over 5,000 years. It was first used as a medicinal beverage, and grew into a beverage of choice.

Tea is all-natural and free of calories and preservatives. It contains B, C, and E vitamins, and the minerals folic acid, magnesium, potassium, calcium, zinc, fluoride, and carotene. The health benefits found in each of these vitamins and minerals contribute to the overall health benefits in tea. The most important substances in loose tea are the caffeine, essential oils and polyphenols (found in flavonoids in tea).

All tea contains caffeine. Caffeine aids in digestion by stimulating the digestive track and promoting blood circulation. The L-theanine in tea counteracts with the caffeine and aids in relaxing you while also helping to boost your concentration and increase your stamina. The essential oils are important to the aroma of the tea and also aids in digestion.

Tea is one of the largest sources of flavonoids in our diet. Flavonoids are found in plants and offer many health benefits to humans. The flavonoids in tea contain approximately 30 polyphenolic compounds. These compounds are studied extensively for the benefits they contribute to tea. Polyphenols contain catechin molecules which are the antioxidants.

They are present in all teas made from *Camellia sisensis*. The major catechin in tea is EGCG and is the most potent anti-oxidant. The antioxidant properties in tea help cells replicate their DNA accurately by combining with free radicals and then neutralizing them. Free radicals are oxygen chains that attach to cells, mutate the DNA, and alter the replication of the cell. This may lead to the development of cancer causing cells and many chronic diseases. Free radicals occur naturally in our environment in the form of ultra-violet rays, and also occur synthetically in artificial dyes and processed foods.

Recent studies have shown that TEA:

May contribute to heart and circulatory system health by strengthening and keeping the blood vessel walls soft and decreasing blood thickness. This prevents blood from clotting, which could lead to strokes.

Appears to reduce the risk of certain cancers such as skin cancer, stomach cancer, digestive and urinary tract cancers, heart disease, diabetes, and eye disease.

Helps to strengthen the immune system. The theaflavins in tea aid in increasing white blood cells, which fight infection in the body. (Theaflavins are additional catechins only found in oxidized teas.)

May contribute to oral health. The flavonoids in tea contain anti-bacterial agents that attack plaque and help prevent gum disease.

Aids in blocking beta-amaloid protein that causes the nerve damage and memory loss associated with Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease.

Could help lower cholesterol in the blood stream by inhibiting the absorption of cholesterol in the digestive tract.

May improve fluid balance. Researchers suggest water and tea should provide the majority of our daily liquid consumption (4 cups of each/day).

In addition to its health benefits, the few moments it takes to prepare and enjoy a cup of loose tea can provide a calm respite to an otherwise hectic day. All high-quality loose leaf teas are rich in antioxidants and health-promoting properties. Each type of tea contains different levels of antioxidants. Your diet should contain a variety of whole foods and quality loose leaf teas to provide you with a range of health benefits.

Danielle Beaudette is the owner of The Cozy Tea Cart in Brookline, NH. One of 23 Certified Tea Specialists in the country, she continues to broaden her knowledge on tea through on-going studies with the Specialty Tea Institute, the World Tea Expo, and her travels to tea countries around the world. For more information call 603-249-9111 or visit her website at www.TheCozyTeaCart.com.

