

Study: This 'Healthy' Beverage Isn't Always What It's Cracked Up to Be

Green tea has long been touted as one of the healthiest things you can put in your body.

It has been shown to fight many serious diseases, including heart disease, cancer and Alzheimer's. But, as it turns out, not all green tea is created equal.

The amount of the key health-giving ingredient in green tea—the antioxidant EGCG—varies greatly by brand. Further, a recent study by found that some teas contain substantial amounts of lead.

After the Mayo Clinic and other major institutions published studies showing the benefits of green tea, retailers seized the opportunity to market the drink heavily.

Buyer beware, according to Tod Cooperman, M.D., president of , which conducted independent testing on green tea. The company analyzed commonly sold bottled and brewable green tea products as well as green tea oral supplements.

Popular, ready-to-drink bottled brands Diet Snapple and Arizona Green Tea with Ginseng and Honey contain very little EGCG and were laden with sweeteners, the study found. And bottled Honest Tea contained only 63 percent the amount of EGCG claimed on the label.

Green tea bags fared better, with Lipton containing the highest amounts of EGCG. Bigelow tea bags also did well.

In the loose tea category, Teavana's Gyokuro Imperial contained the highest quantity of EGCG.

found significant amounts of lead in many of the Chinese grown teas. But if you make sure that the leaves remain out of your cup, you'll be mostly protected. About 90 percent of the lead remains in the leaf after brewing, said Dr. Cooperman.

"As long as you're not eating the tea leaves you'll get little lead," he told Newsmax Health.

To be on the safe side, some experts recommend avoiding tea from China, which grows much of its tea in polluted areas that have lead in the soil.

"All you have to do is read the label to see where it comes from," said Barbara Tea Specialist, a certified tea expert who uses her nom de plume professionally.

If you don't know where tea was grown, opt for another brand that's clearly labeled, she advised. Teavana, recently acquired by Starbucks, lists the regions where its teas come from, she said.

And if you're drinking tea for its health properties, avoid bottled varieties.

Medical Miracle?

Worldwide research increasingly indicates tea, especially green tea, is a medical magic bullet. The polyphenols in green tea have been shown to benefit patients with colitis and irritable bowel syndrome. And the leafy brew's potent antioxidant EGCG has been credited with preventing heart attacks, Type 2 diabetes, leukemia, stroke, high blood pressure, Alzheimer's and cancer.

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