

The Simple Key to Health

Not many substances are as widely studied as tea. Now the verdict is in. The bottom line: if you're not drinking tea on a regular basis, it might be a habit worth starting.

That's because when it comes to your health, tea packs a powerful punch. Combined studies examining hundreds of thousands of tea drinkers led a vast array of scientists to conclude that a consistent dose of tea is good for the body.

Most of the research was conducted in Asian countries, on people drinking hot, green tea. The amount mattered. Usually people only experienced health benefits if they drank at least three cups a day.

Dr. Patrick Fratellone is a cardiologist who practices integrative medicine in New York City. He advises his patients to make tea a part of their daily life.

"The active component in green tea is EGCG," he explained. "And that's a polyphenol that helps reduce cholesterol, heart disease and protects against cancer."

Green Tea Guidelines

Green tea comes from the *camellia sinensis* plant, as do black and white teas. Green tea contains the most EGCG. But with so many types of green tea on the market, it can be difficult to choose which is best.

Fratellone shares some guidelines.

"I like organic tea because you want to make sure it's grown in an area free of metal in the soil, so you don't want to have lead, cadmium, mercury, any bad, toxic elements," he explained.

"If it's in a bag, you don't want a bag that has a staple on

it," he continued. "Sometimes that can get in the tea. But I'd rather have loose, and sometimes I don't even strain it. I leave it in there and eat the leaves."

Research shows green tea lowers the risk of Type 2 diabetes and liver disease. It also has been shown to improve memory, reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and depression, as well as significantly lowering your chance of having a stroke.

"Tea is meant to be drunk plain and you get the more medicinal benefits," Fratellone explained. "When you add milk or sugar, you can deactivate some of the active medicinal components."

"If there's anything to add, I would add raw honey," he said. "It's better to have hot or lukewarm. When people have iced tea, green iced tea, you lose a lot of the benefits."

In addition to the teas you'll find at the grocery store, there are plenty of other teas that are effective at treating specific medical conditions in lieu of popping a pill.

Dr. Fratellone is also a registered herbologist, with a vast knowledge about teas made from various plants, trees and shrubs. He often prescribes those teas to his patients instead of allergy medicines, antacids, cough suppressants or other remedies.

"There are many teas that have antibiotic properties, so you don't always have to take an antibiotic," he said. "Yarrow has a great antibiotic profile against many bacteria and viruses. I use barberry, berberine—these are all teas from natural plants."

He points out that many conventional medicines you find at the average pharmacy are derived from plants.

"We have a tea for arthritis," he explained. "I use white willow bark, which comes from the tree salix. It's the active

ingredient of aspirin, so I mix white willow bark, a little turmeric, a little ginger and probably some devil's claw."

Dorota Meller needed to overcome chronic fatigue.

"I was really dizzy all the time," she recalled. "I felt weak, I felt tired, I couldn't get out of bed, and then when it was evening time, I couldn't fall asleep. But I was always lethargic."

Fratellone discovered she was anemic. But her problem went even deeper, originating in her intestinal tract.

"So not only the iron but my vitamin D, my vitamin B, I wasn't absorbing anything I was eating or my supplements or vitamins," Meller explained.

"I expected to be put on medication or additional supplements," she said. "I really didn't know, but Dr. Fratellone said it's as simple as a tea mixture. And when he first said it, I was maybe a little bit hesitant. I was like, 'How's this tea going to help me?'"

"My iron for the first time in 10 years is normal, and so is my vitamin D," she exclaimed. "So I know that whatever he gave me, it worked. And it's as simple and as easy as a tea."

Fratellone says his priority is getting to the root cause of his patients' illnesses, not just treating the symptoms.

"I believe as an M.D. and an herbalist, that the gut is the gateway of all disease, so I want to heal the gut first," he explained.

"You might take gluten, dairy and, let's say, corn, out of your diet," he said. "Unless you heal your gut, you're still going to have the symptoms. So the gut-healing tea contains slippery elm, marshmallow, meadowsweet and raspberry."

He said cleavers, mullein, blue violet and lady's mantle are

good teas for breast health and premenstrual syndrome.

“These are all teas for keeping the female side active, and we make that as a tea,” he continued. “I give that to some of my patients who are going into menopause to ease in with a nice, natural tea instead of taking a lot of things that are harmful.”

Herbal teas can interact with conventional medicine, so before drinking them, people should check with their doctor or registered herbologist.

The growth of these natural treatments has led to a relatively new healthcare provider known as a naturopathic physician. These physicians attend an accredited four-year program focusing on botanical medicine, food as medicine and other natural remedies.

Nick Edgerton is a student at the University of Bridgeport College of Naturopathic Medicine.

“I think there needs to be more marketing to realize this medicine is available,” Edgerton said. “And that you don’t have to jump on a statin or a blood pressure medication when you might be able to control it with some dietary changes and maybe the use of an herb, which is not that much different than a drug.”

“(That) is why it’s important, whether it’s tea or herbal pills, that you do see a naturopath because you do need to have coordination of care with other medications as well,” he said.

While naturopathic doctors practice in each state, they are only licensed on 19 states, with more licensing on the way.

So for overall better health, include three cups of green tea to your daily diet. Research overwhelmingly concludes it’s worth the effort.

For more specific health concerns, consult a registered herbologist or naturopathic doctor about a natural tea that could take the place of conventional pharmaceuticals.