

ONE
SMALL CHANGE

DRINK MORE TEA

Your daily cuppa
could be a more potent
brew than you imagine,
says Anita Bean



Drinking tea is practically a national pastime, with Brits getting through a whopping 100 million cups daily. Three quarters of us drink at least one cup a day, and one in eight make their way through six or more! Black tea (see box below) is the favoured brew – English breakfast is the most popular, followed by Earl Grey, Darjeeling and Assam.

It's good news, then, that tea drinking comes with a host of potential benefits. A few cups a day can help reduce stress, protect your heart, strengthen your bones and may even extend

your life. A review of 96 studies published in *Molecular Nutrition & Food Research* linked tea drinking with no fewer than 40 separate health benefits. Researchers concluded that people who drank 2-3 cups a day had a lower risk of premature death, heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes, among other outcomes.

A separate review showed that both black and green tea significantly reduced blood pressure.

How do scientists explain these findings?

One possibility is the range of polyphenols, the beneficial plant compounds found in tea leaves. "We're not entirely sure, but it is thought to be related to the polyphenols found in green and black tea," says Victoria Taylor, senior dietitian at British Heart Foundation. "These polyphenols function as antioxidants, which can keep blood vessels healthy."

Tea can also help to protect ageing bones and reduce the risk of osteoporosis, a bone-weakening condition that affects more than three million people in the UK. A study published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* involving 1,188 post-menopausal women and spanning over 10 years found that those who drank three or more cups each day were 30% less likely to suffer a fracture due to osteoporosis compared to those who drank one cup or less per week. Again, the benefits are thought to stem from tea's polyphenols, which help increase bone mass and reduce bone loss. Loose-leaf tea

is made with higher-quality leaves that contain more polyphenols, so may be even better for you than bags.

Scientists have also found other chemical compounds in tea, including L-theanine, an amino acid. L-theanine has a calming effect on the brain and nervous system, helping tea drinkers to feel less anxious. In a study published in the scientific journal *Psychopharmacology*, volunteers who drank tea four times a day for six weeks were found to have lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol in their blood after a stressful event, compared with a control group who drank a placebo. "This has

important implications because slow recovery following acute stress has been associated with a greater risk of chronic illnesses such as coronary heart disease," says lead researcher Professor Andrew Steptoe from University College London.

Drinking tea may even help us live longer. A study of almost half a million people in the UK found that those who drank two or more cups of tea a day had a 9-13% lower risk of dying over the course of the 11-year study than non-tea drinkers. This finding is thought to be due to the drink's connection with reduced incidence of stroke and heart disease.

If you like your brew milky, don't worry; adding milk doesn't change the benefits. "It's the length of time you leave tea to brew that matters," says Dr Carrie Ruxton, a dietitian from the Tea Advisory Panel.

"The longer you brew, the more

polyphenols and L-theanine in your tea." Carrie recommends brewing for two to three minutes for maximum health benefits. It's also good to know that there are no recommended maximum levels for healthy adults, although the NHS advises pregnant women to restrict their daily caffeine intake to 200mg per day (the equivalent of two to three cups).

So, there you have it. Drinking tea is a healthy habit with many benefits. Time to put the kettle on...

Health writer Anita Bean is a registered nutritionist specialising in sports nutrition. She has worked with the London Marathon and is the author of The Vegan Athlete's Cookbook and The Runner's Cookbook.

BLACK TEA, GREEN TEA... WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Black tea is one of four main types of tea made using the leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant. The others are green tea, oolong and white tea. The difference between the types of teas is in the way they are processed, particularly how long they are exposed to oxygen in the air.

For example, green tea undergoes minimal oxidation, while black tea is fully oxidised, resulting in a dark, rich drink. Oolong and white teas are only partially oxidised.

PHOTOGRAPH DENNIS PEDERSEN

'A REVIEW LINKED TEA DRINKING WITH NO FEWER THAN 40 SEPARATE HEALTH BENEFITS'

Eating for menopause

Perimenopausal or going through the change? Increase your intake of plant foods, say Dr Federica Amati and Jane Baxter, authors of *Recipes for a Better Menopause*. Plants help to reduce inflammation and boost your gut microbiome – both of which support the reduction of common menopausal symptoms. The book explains how small dietary changes can have a big impact, and includes delicious, veg-packed recipes.



Better health

Tips, trends and updates, plus your diet questions answered by Waitrose nutritionist *Joanne Lunn*

ARE YOU GETTING ENOUGH VITAMIN D?

Official guidance recommends that we all consider supplementing our diet with vitamin D (10 µg daily) from October to March, but a recent study showed that at least half of us don't. Good dietary sources of vitamin D include oily fish such as mackerel and sardines, egg yolks, liver, red meat and almond dairy-free milk alternative.

DID YOU KNOW? It's almost impossible to overcook mushrooms. Their cell walls contain chitin, a substance which stops them from falling apart whether you cook them for a minute or an hour.



ASK THE NUTRITIONIST

Joanne has an MSc and a PhD in nutrition and has been a Partner for 14 years

Q I've heard a lot about the dangers of eating too much salt. But how much is 'too much' and why does it matter?

Ryan, Preston

A The human body needs sodium, and the main way we get it is through our diet as table salt (sodium chloride). Salt helps to control the body's fluid balance as well as the functioning of muscles and nerves. It's recommended that adults consume no more than 6g per day – roughly 1 teaspoon. Most of the salt we eat is already in the foods that we buy; it adds flavour and can act as a preservative. The main contributors to salt in the diet are bread, cheese, ready meals and cured meats.

Consuming too much salt has been linked to a number of health problems, including high blood pressure and osteoporosis. There's strong evidence to suggest that people with high blood pressure benefit from a diet containing less salt. In fact, most people would benefit from reducing their intake.

There are plenty of other ways to add flavour to food. Herbs, spices and citrus all work wonders. Choose more strongly flavoured cheeses for cooking (you can use less) and opt for fresh stock over cubes. Buy products with lower or no added salt. For snacks, instead of crisps or salted nuts, go for fresh fruit or unsalted nuts. And leave the salt shaker off the dinner table. As you cut back, your taste buds will adapt to less salty foods within a month.

All Waitrose own-brand products are labelled with the amount of salt per 100g and as a percentage of your recommended intake, so you can see at a glance how much you're eating.

Do you have a question about healthy eating and nutrition? Email waitrose.food@dentsu.com with 'Ask the nutritionist' in the subject line.