

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

FAX: 932-5261

December 27, 2003

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776  
e-mail:makeith@mail.ifas.ufl.edu**Take a Deep Breath and a Sip of Tea**

Okay, you've survived the Big Day. The tree is still standing, the presents are scattered all over the house, and your nerves are hanging on by a thread. You need some serious de-stressing. So put some water on to boil, set out a mug, and take a couple of deep breaths. But don't reach for the coffee, put a tea bag in the mug.

For years people thought that the calming effect of tea was mostly due to the waiting time while the water heated and the tea bag steeped. Now they've found there's actually something going on in the cup and in our brains. Maybe the most surprising part is that the calming tea ingredient theanine is an amino acid, a building block for protein.

But don't drink tea to build your strength. Instead of making muscle, theanine goes directly from the blood into the brain. There it slows down some of the brain's messenger chemicals and actually makes us calmer, instead of speeding us up the way caffeine does. It slows our alpha brain waves and produces a feeling of relaxation.

Mice injected with theanine are calmer, less frantic in their actions. They also show lower levels of several chemicals associated with certain types of cancers. There is no evidence that lots of theanine will prevent cancers in people, so don't expect miracles. Plus, you would have to drink gallons to get the amounts the mice got as concentrated doses.

But there are lots of other ingredients in tea that, all combined, seem to give us some protection from early death. Huge studies in Japan, where they do drink gallons of tea, found that people who drank 5 cups or more a day were 30% less likely to die from cardiovascular disease, and 16% less likely to die from any cause. But thousands

of different studies have not found any protection from cancer in tea drinkers.

Trying to tease out which of the dozens of chemicals, the antioxidants, amino acids, flavonoids, phenols or polyphenols in tea, really might help protect us will keep researchers busy for decades. In the meantime, we can safely relax with our mugs of hot steamy tea these chilly evenings, or sip our iced tea when we need to cool off. Either way, tea will help us chill out!

All types of true tea, from the camellia plant, have theanine. It doesn't matter whether the tea you drink is green, black, oolong or white. All of these, plus the pekoe, Darjeeling and others, come from the same plant. They are just picked and processed differently.

White tea is made of the tiniest fresh leaves. Green tea uses larger, more mature leaves. Both are steamed as soon as they are picked to keep them from turning black. Oolong tea is slightly oxidized, while black tea is allowed to completely oxidize until it turns black and develop much stronger flavor. Some black tea is dried over a smoky fire and has a wonderful smoky flavor. They all have theanine.

Decaffeinated tea does have fewer of other beneficial compounds, but all the theanine seems to still be there. Adding flavoring or fruit juice to tea, as many of the popular tea-based drinks do, just dilutes the real tea and its beneficial ingredients. So there will be less theanine in a fruit-tea blend than in the same amount of plain tea. Bottled teas are often loaded with sugar too, so use them with care. Despite their other potential benefits, herbal teas don't have any theanine. But you can use a cinnamon or peppermint stick to stir your hot tea and add a delicious new flavor.

Now for those of you who would still rather have your coffee, here's a recipe for Mexican spiced coffee. It uses Splenda® to cut the calories to practically zero, but it's classy enough to serve after dinner for your holiday guests. Enjoy!

#### Mexican Spiced Coffee

1/3 C ground dark roast or espresso coffee

3/4 tsp cinnamon

1/4 tsp ground nutmeg

2 Tbsp Splenda® granular

1 Tbsp fresh Florida orange juice

3 C water

Put the coffee, cinnamon and nutmeg in the filter basket of coffee maker. Put the Splenda and orange juice in the pot. Add water to coffee maker and brew as usual.

Serve immediately with warm milk, or black if desired.

Serves 3.

*Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.*

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an Equal Employment Opportunity - Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap or national origin. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN AGRICULTURE, HOME ECONOMICS, STATE OF FLORIDA, IFAS, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COOPERATING