

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

June 28, 2012

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:mkeith@ufl.edu**Tea and Your BP**

Tea sometimes gets stuck with a bad reputation because we think of it like coffee. Coffee has had a bad reputation for years because it's accused of raising blood pressure and causing dehydration. Neither of these claims is true, and neither are the claims about coffee or tea and caffeine. In fact tea may be due some big apologies if current research finds that tea's health claims really are true.

Most of the bad reputation came from coffee's caffeine. It's true that coffee does have caffeine. Caffeine is prized for its ability to give us that early morning jolt. The caffeine hits and we wake up! Tea has theobromine, a very similar compound. But theobromine works much more slowly and gently. We're not jolted, don't get the jitters, just feel more calmly alert. Whether you end up running to the restroom more often depends on how much liquid you drank, not on the caffeine content. In fact, elderly people in nursing homes who only drank coffee all day were just as well hydrated as those who only drank water.

Another concern that turns out to have no foundation is that caffeine or theobromine will raise your blood pressure. If you just started drinking coffee your BP might rise, but if you continue drinking for several weeks it will come back down again.

Tea on the other hand has various chemicals that are probably positively helpful to our hearts. Tea's flavonoids (kinds of antioxidants) seem to actually relax the walls of our blood vessels. As they expand the blood flows more easily, and our blood pressure comes down. The flavonoids also seem to protect our cholesterol and may help prevent

blood clotting. Flavonoids in either green or black tea reduce heart attacks, lower cholesterol and lower blood pressure.

There have been claims that tea will prevent cancers too. Unfortunately, while one study might find protection, another finds no help. Sometimes the problem is just that there were too few people in the study to prove anything. The evidence is confusing and too weak to make any real claims regarding cancer.

Another problem with some of the claims is that a lot of research is done using concentrated extracts. While a researcher can make concentrated antioxidant mixtures from his tea, for us to drink enough to get the same benefits we'd be drinking gallons of the stuff every day! As a nation we do like tea, especially the canned or bottled versions. But those teas are even weaker than a cup you'd brew at home, so we'd need to drink even more. And there's no guarantee that what works in a lab animal or a test tube is going to do the same thing in a person.

If you do want to drink more tea for the health benefits, which should you choose – loose tea or tea bags? What about green, black or white? Choose whichever you prefer, as long as it's real tea. The same benefits don't come with herbal teas. For the most antioxidants tea bags need to steep (sit in the hot water) for about 10 minutes, while loose tea needs only 2 minutes. But it's not a big difference, and you'll still get plenty of antioxidants from tea bags. So whether you like the convenience of tea bags or the elegance of a tea ball, they're both healthy. The flavor depends on the quality of the tea, how much you use to make it and how long you let it steep.

Find a tea with a flavor you enjoy. Drink it hot or iced, make ice cream with it or use it for a summer punch. Make a sugar syrup with tea and drizzle it over fruit salad.

To add an interesting smoky flavor to meat or sauce add some ground Lapsang souchong tea leaves to the recipe.

Here's a way to beat the summer heat with fruity frozen tea. Have this ready when the children come in from playing, or to serve your Sunday guests. If you prefer, use a mango instead of peaches. By blending first, and then scraping with a fork you'll put enough air into it that it will be light and airy when it's frozen, not a solid block. Stay cool!

Peachy Tea Sorbet

2 cups water

7 teabags of green tea

½ cup sugar (less if fruit is very sweet)

2 ripe medium peaches

Juice of 1 lemon (3 Tbsp)

Bring water to boil, add teabags and allow to steep for 5 minutes or according to directions on box. Remove teabags and pour hot tea over sugar. Stir until sugar is dissolved. Let cool. Peel peach, cut in chunks and blend in food processor with lemon juice. Puree until smooth, scraping sides as necessary. Add cooled tea and process again until smooth. Pour into a shallow baking pan (metal works best) and put in freezer for about 2-3 hours. When it is mostly frozen, scrape and fluff it all with a fork until it's mushy, then freeze again until solid. Serves 6-8.