

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Tea to Your Health

Tea drinking has been part of human culture for thousands of years. The Chinese probably started using the leaves of the Camellia bushes that are the source for our black, green and other standard teas. Preserved tea leaves have been found in ancient graves. The British spread tea around the world, and based a whole shipping empire on moving tea to other countries. The Boston Tea Party helped ignite the American Revolution when colonists refused to pay the tax on tea. And we are still drinking gallons of tea to this day.

Besides the old stand-by black or green tea, there are dozens if not hundreds of herbal and flavored teas available. Many of them go by names suggesting their health benefits - Serenity, Morning Calm or Energizer. Herbs do have effects on health, both good and bad. But there isn't a lot of research to back up many of those claims. And there is no way to know whether one cup or one gallon of tea is needed to have the effect you want, or whether you have to drink it for one week or two years.

Nevertheless, not many people would disagree with the idea that tea is a healthy choice for a drink (unless you load it up with sugar). But, is it the water or the tea leaf, the color or the flavor, that's so healthy? It's hard to separate out what exactly has the beneficial effect. That hasn't stopped another group of doctors from trying. And yes, they do agree that tea is good for your heart.

This latest report found that people who started drinking at least 3 cups of black tea a day saw their blood pressure go down significantly. This was a very good study

because some people got black tea and other got a drink that had the same amount of caffeine but no tea. Only the ones who were really drinking tea actually ended with lower blood pressure.

Since both groups got the caffeine, but only half lowered their blood pressure, whatever caused the change must be something other than caffeine. What that is - no one knows yet. It might be antioxidants, or polyphenols, or tannins. Some of these can relax the muscles around our arteries, so that they expand and let more blood flow through. Some just make the linings of the arteries more flexible, or keep them healthy. Maybe it was because people developed less fat around their middles and the fat put less pressure on the arteries.

Maybe the active ingredient is produced when tea leaves are dried and fermented to make black tea. Green tea leaves are dried but not fermented. Oolong tea is only partly oxidized, not as much as black but more than green. White tea is made from the very young leaves and buds from the same plant. These very pale leaves and buds are steamed to prevent darkening, then dried. Since they only looked at black tea they don't know yet if green tea would be as effective.

Whatever it turns out to be, three cups of black tea a day were all that it took. The difference was enough that those people who started the study with slightly raised blood pressure were back in the normal range by the end. And those who started with blood pressure in the normal range had even lower blood pressure after six months.

So if you're trying to manage your blood pressure, you've all ready reduced your salt intake, you've increased the potassium, calcium and magnesium in your diet, and you still need another boost, then start drinking tea. If you must sweeten it use a low-

calorie sweetener. If you want flavors, use a flavored black tea rather than a red or herbal tea. And no, Long Island Iced Tea with all its alcohol is not going to count!

If you prefer the spiced, fruit-flavored teas in individual little packets, here's a way to make it with plain black tea bags. This makes 12 cups, enough for a neighborhood tea party. If you won't invite all the neighbors over, then plan to refrigerate it for later use. Drink to your health!

Fruit Tea Punch

2 quarts water (8 cups)	½ tsp whole cloves
2 sticks cinnamon	8 black tea bags
¾ cup sugar or equivalent sweetener	½ cup orange juice
½ cup pineapple juice	1/3 cup fresh lemon juice

Put cloves, cinnamon and water in large pot and bring to a boil. Remove from heat and add tea bags. Let sit 5 minutes. Remove tea bags and spices. Add sugar or sweetener and stir until dissolved. Add fruit juices. To serve reheat over low heat. Do not boil. Garnish with lemon slices if desired. Serves 12.