

HEALTHBEAT

RESEARCH

Tea time: A cup of good health

By Victoria Shanta Retelny
Special to the Tribune

Tea is so in, it's become a virtual health institution. Besides water, tea is the most consumed beverage in the world. And though it may be more popular in other cultures, Americans drank more than 50 billion servings (2.25 billion gallons) of tea last year, according to the Tea Association of the U.S.A. Inc.

This popularity comes for a good reason: Numerous studies suggest strong links between tea drinking and improved health.

Thus, green tea has been added to products from food to shampoos and deodorant. Foodies delight in the fact that it's infused in sweet, frothy coffee beverages, ice cream, chocolate bars and even ready-to-eat cereals.

The healthful part is not the tea flavoring, however; research has shown that both green and black teas contain an arsenal of powerful antioxidants embedded in their leaves, though the Food and Drug Administration has yet to be convinced of their merit.

Nevertheless, according to Dave Grotto, registered dietitian and national media spokesman for the American Dietetic Association, "epigallocatechin gallate[EGCG], an antioxidant compound prevalent in green tea, has been found to reduce free-radical damage."

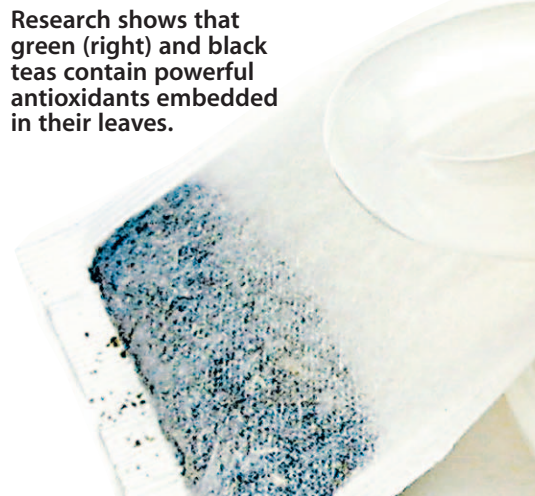
Free radicals are unstable atoms and molecules that lead to cancer and heart disease. Clinical findings show a strong link between green tea and cancer prevention, with the medicinal quality of green tea relying heavily on the action of EGCG.

The EGCG antioxidant is believed to inhibit or destroy cancer cells, sparing healthy tissue.

Black tea, meanwhile, has been shown beneficial against cardiovascular disease.

The difference between green and black teas is in the processing, according to Grotto. Green

Research shows that green (right) and black teas contain powerful antioxidants embedded in their leaves.



tea leaves are steamed, allowing for full maintenance of EGCG compounds. Black tea leaves are fermented, converting the EGCG to other types of antioxidant compounds, including theaflavins and thearubigins, which have good effects on the heart.

Scientific evidence also has pointed to decreased risk of breast and ovarian cancers from consuming green and black teas. Those data indicate that their high antioxidant polyphenol content is the driving force.

"Studies [on the effects of tea] in labs, humans and animals have shown promise," said Dr. Leslie Mendoza Temple, the interim program director at Evanston Northwestern Hospital Integrative Medicine Center.

Mendoza Temple prescribes green tea with

Brew it right

When making hot tea, three things are key:

- Water quality — Begin with purified, filtered water.
- Temperature — To avoid an astringent taste, the water should be just at the boiling point for black tea and slightly below boiling (no more than 180 degrees Fahrenheit) for green tea.
- Time — Steep tea for at least 3 minutes to get maximum antioxidants.

—V.S.R.

Victoria Shanta Retelny is a registered dietitian/nutrition communications consultant in Chicago

every meal for her patients: "I recommend tea almost universally, like water. Ideally, people should be drinking at least four cups a day; shooting for six to 10 cups a day is even better."

The worst things that could happen from drinking too much tea, according to the integrative-medicine physician, are fluid overload, caffeine sensitivity (though green or black teas contain only 10 to 30 milligrams of caffeine per cup, whereas coffee contains 100 to 120 milligrams) or anemia (low blood-iron levels) due to tea binding with iron. So here's a hint: Vitamin C helps with the absorption of iron, so drop a wedge of lemon in your tea.

Live, love longer with pomegranate

By Jane Porter
Tribune Newspapers

Drink it. Eat it. Slather it all over your body.

There is no denying that the pomegranate, its fleshy burgundy bulb packed with juicy seeds, is one of the trendiest and most versatile fruits on the market.

In the last seven months, 215 new pomegranate food and beverage products were introduced in the U.S., according to Tom Vierhile, director of Datamonitor's Productscan Online, which keeps track of new products. Last year, 258 new pomegranate products were introduced, up from 93 in 2004, 31 in 2003 and 19 in 2002.



Popular pomegranates.

Why such a boom in popularity now?

"It's just now that we are finding the modern evidences and proofs of its health effects. ... [It has been] used for medicinal purposes for ages," said Navindra Seeram, assistant director of the UCLA Center for Human Nutrition and lead co-editor of "Pomegranates: Ancient Roots to Modern Medicine."

■ Packed with antioxidants, pomegranates can help prevent the onset of atherosclerosis, a hardening of the arteries that leads to heart disease and stroke.

■ A study released by UCLA in June indicates that drinking a glass of pomegranate juice each day can help slow the spread of prostate cancer.

■ Menopausal and post-menopausal symptoms, including hot flashes, can be alleviated by the phytoestrogen found in the pomegranate seed.

■ A natural Viagra? Another recent study, which measured the erectile function of rabbits, showed that a regular intake of pomegranate juice raises nitric-oxide levels and blood supply as seen in those who take Viagra.

The Hartford Courant

Los Angeles Times photo

HOW THE BODY REPAIRS ITSELF

Want to play recovery roulette?

By Katherine Spitz
Tribune/Knight Ridder newspapers

When it comes to recovering from surgery, some patients seem to be superstars, while others take a much longer time to heal. For instance, one person may take months to recover from a knee replacement, while another is hitting golf balls at the driving range two weeks post-op.

Cardiac bypass, knee replacement and hysterectomy are some of the most common inpatient surgeries performed annually in the United States. Specialists explain what goes into making a faster — and a slower — recovery from these procedures.

Hysterectomy

In the last two decades, advances in hysterectomy procedures have led to shortened hospital stays for many women. Regardless of the type of hysterectomy, though, the body takes a certain amount of time to heal, said Dr. Eric L. Jenison, chairman of Akron General Medical Center's Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.

"At two months, the wound [from surgery] is about 50 percent of strength," he said. "Usually, women can go back to most types of activity and work."

Being physically fit before surgery will help a woman heal in optimal time, he said. Also, a patient who gets up and walks, which is painful, as soon as permitted after surgery is helping her body recover because better circulation aids in recovery, Jenison said.

The age of the patient undergoing hysterectomy is not as important as it might seem. "We never look at actual age," Jenison said. If a woman is in her 30s or older, a physician will consider her age, because she statistically is more likely to have cardiovascular disease or another disease, he said. But the much older woman who is healthy and functions well usually will do "just fine" after a hysterectomy.

Added Jenison: "Younger patients who are severely obese or who have a heart condition, they tend to very often heal slower than an elderly person who is very active."

Certain medical conditions slow recovery: If a woman has lupus, rheumatoid arthritis or diabetes, she is likely to have a slower healing time, Jenison said. Lifestyle habits also can play a part: being a smoker impedes recovery, because circulation is impaired.

Cardiac bypass

A patient's age is probably the "No. 1 factor" in how long he or she will live after bypass surgery, said a Cleveland Clinic Foundation cardiologist. However, age doesn't determine the speed of recovery from the surgery.

A patient's general health going into bypass surgery more accurately predicts how fast he will recover from the procedure, said Dr. Leslie Cho, who is medical director of the Section of Preventative Cardiology and Rehabilitation in the clinic's department of cardiovascular medicine.



Photo by Ken Love/Akron Beacon Journal

Louise Whitman receives physical therapy from Beth Kopniske at the Allied Health Rehab Center in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. Whitman is recovering from knee-replacement surgery.

"The thing is, if you're a decrepit 50-year-old compared with a super 70-year-old, the 50-year-old will do worse," Cho said. Bypass patients who are diabetic, sedentary or who have severe lung disease going into the surgery will have a much harder time in recovery. Recovery times also will vary depending on whether a person is having bypass surgery after a heart attack or whether the surgery is elective, she said.

In general, women are much more debilitated after cardiac bypass than are men. That is because they are older when they undergo the surgery, Cho said.

The reason: Women get coronary artery disease a decade later than men do.

Another key factor in a bypass patient's recovery speed is whether the patient is suffering from depression, Cho said. Depression is considered so important an issue that the Cleveland Clinic's cardiac-rehabilitation unit has a psychiatrist and support groups, to enable patients to get help on-site, she said.

Knee replacement

Initial recovery times vary dramatically in knee-replacement surgery, even in the same patient. Just ask Louise Whitman.

Whitman, 73, underwent a knee replacement last year and said she sailed through recovery. However, she was unpleasantly surprised when she had her second knee replaced Feb. 1. She pointed out that her knees were in the same condition, she had the same surgeon and she followed therapy directions each time.

But she doesn't feel nearly as well now as she did last year, at the same point in recovery.

"I'm still in therapy, and I still want to go to therapy," said Whitman, a retired high school teacher.

The difference in outcome doesn't surprise Dr. Kenneth Greene, head of adult reconstructive surgery at Summa Health System and associate professor of orthopedics at Northeast Ohio Universities College of Medicine in Rootstown.

"Recovery time can vary even in the same patient, with the same surgeon," Greene said.

One knee may develop more scar tissue or have more swelling, he said, and that's even if the knees are done at the same time.

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