



Tea time

Drink to good health

| Stephanie Raymond

Wars have been waged over it; ceremonies are devoted to preparing it; and two-thirds of the world's population consume it. Originating in China over 5,000 years ago, tea has stood the test of time as one of the most popular and healthy beverages available. >

HEALTH

With a refreshing taste, an uplifting aroma, and many touted health benefits, the world's love affair with tea isn't surprising.

Rich in antioxidants that may fend off disease-causing free radicals, boost memory, and even aid in weight management, scientific evidence continues to suggest tea is as good for the body as it tastes.

ONE PLANT, MANY TEAS

Just as all fine wines start off as a grape, all teas are derived from the *Camellia sinensis* plant. Different processing methods, harvesting times, and growing regions determine the many varieties available today.

After being harvested, tea leaves begin to wilt and oxidize. The amount of oxidization the tea leaf undergoes determines the type of tea it makes: black, oolong, green, or white.

Black teas are made from fully oxidized leaves and oolong from partially oxidized leaves. Green teas are made from leaves and white tea from buds that have either been steamed or pan-fried immediately after being picked to stop oxidation.

Oxidized leaves produce darker coloured and stronger tasting teas than leaves that have not undergone the process.

ANTIOXIDANT POWERHOUSE

It doesn't matter if it's black or white, all teas are packed full of health-promoting flavonoids—plant compounds thought to possess strong antioxidant properties.

According to data collected by the US Department of Agriculture, black, green, and white teas contain more flavonoids than any other fruit or vegetable tested. It is this plethora of flavonoids that are thought to be responsible for tea's multiple health-promoting properties.

CANCER PROTECTING

One of these flavonoids, the catechin epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG), is being studied as a potential cancer fighter.

In a review of existing data, researchers found this potent catechin to have the ability to induce death and stop cell division in tumour cells while leaving normal cells alone. Green tea is especially rich in EGCG.

HEART HEALTHY

Tea flavonoids are also credited with many heart-healthy benefits. When consumed regularly, both black and green tea have been shown to lower cholesterol levels, reduce triglycerides, and improve blood flow.

STRESS RELIEVING

Another way tea may help to keep us healthy is by mitigating the effects of stress. British researchers found that individuals who drank four cups of black tea daily for six weeks felt more relaxed and had significantly lower cortisol levels after experiencing stress than non-tea drinkers.

HEALING HERBAL TEAS

As they do not contain any part of the *Camellia sinensis* plant, herbal teas are not actually tea, but rather an infusion of fruits, herbs, and spices often called tisanes.

Although not truly tea, many popular herbal tisanes are proving to be health superstars.

African red rooibos tea is rich in heart-protecting antioxidants, chamomile tea is thought to possess antimicrobial properties, and hibiscus tea may lower blood pressure.

BREWING BASICS

While tea is widely known as a healthy drink, the correct way to brew it is still a mystery to many. ➤



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COLD AND FLU FIGHTERS

Feeling under the weather? Lift your spirits with a hot cup of tea.

Green tea

When consumed regularly, preliminary studies suggest green tea may keep the influenza virus at bay. The catechin EGCG found in green tea is thought to be behind its antiviral properties.



White tea

Rivalling green tea's antibacterial abilities, white tea extracts were found by researchers from Pace University in New York to be effective at preventing the growth of bacteria that causes strep throat and pneumonia.



Camomile

Beat the cold with a cup of camomile. British researchers found this calming tea increased levels of polyphenols, thought to have antibacterial properties, in individuals who drank five cups of it daily for two weeks.



Peppermint

Congested, coughing, and all-around achy? A hot cup of peppermint tea may help. The menthol found in peppermint is thought to soothe sore throats, loosen phlegm, and may act as a decongestant.

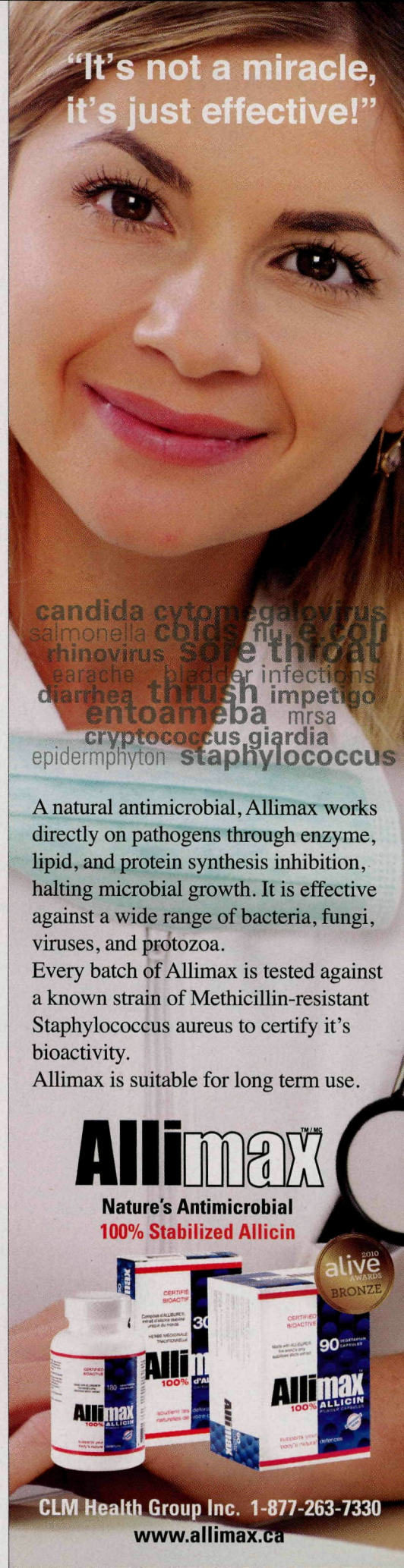


Ginger

Feeling queasy? Used for more than 2,000 years to calm an upset stomach, ginger contains chemical compounds thought to reduce nausea and inflammation.



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HEALTH

For the best flavour, tea needs to be brewed at the right temperature for the right amount of time. Using water that is too hot or oversteeping are common errors that can create a bitter taste.

To brew the perfect cup, bring cold water to a rolling boil. Add to a teapot or cup 1 tsp (5 mL) of loose tea or one tea bag per 1 cup (250 mL) of water used. For stronger tea add more tea, for weaker add less.

If brewing a black, oolong, or herbal tea, pour boiled water directly over the leaves or tea bags. If brewing a more delicate tea, such as green or white, let the water cool for five minutes before adding it. See the chart below for suggested steeping times.

Remember, brewing tea is an art, not a science. Experiment until you find the perfect flavour for you. **a**

Stephanie Raymond is a Toronto-based freelance writer.



TEA TYPE	CHARACTERISTICS	POPULAR VARIETIES	BREWING TIPS	TRY ADDING
black tea	amber in colour with a strong flavour and aroma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Assam (India) > Nepal (China, India) > Darjeeling (India) > Ceylon (Sri Lanka) 	steep for 2 to 5 minutes in boiling hot water	milk and sugar
oolong	highly fragrant with a flavour in between that of black and green tea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ti Kuan Yin (China) > Darjeeling oolong (India) > Formosa oolong (Taiwan) 	steep for 2 to 5 minutes in boiling hot water	honey to sweeten
green	flavour can be sweet and floral or grassy and nutty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Gunpowder (China) > Dragon Well (China) > Sencha (Japan) > Genmaicha (Japan) > Gyokuro (Japan) 	steep for 2 to 5 minutes in hot, but not boiling water; if the water is too hot, the tea will taste bitter	honey to sweeten; lemon juice for added zest
white	light in colour with a mild, sweet flavour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Silver Needle (China) > White Peony (China) > Shoumei (China) 	steep for 2 to 5 minutes in hot, but not boiling water	honey to sweeten; often sweet enough on its own
herbal	blend of herbs, flowers, and spices not derived from the <i>Camellia sinensis</i> plant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > camomile > peppermint > hibiscus > red rooibos 	steep in boiling hot water for up to 10 minutes	honey to sweeten

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