



## Green Tea

### Green Tea Used for Centuries to Promote Good Health

Green tea has been a favorite beverage among Asian cultures for centuries, and for good reason. In fact, the Chinese have known about its health-inducing qualities since 2737 B.C. when a medical book noted tea's health benefits. Today, we know that green tea can help fight cancer, heart disease, stroke, bad breath, dental decay and the signs of aging. It is packed with vitamins, minerals, amino acids and antioxidants that can help us live longer, healthier, happier lives.

### What Makes Green Tea Different

Well, what makes green tea different from your typical black tea? As Lester A. Mitscher, Ph.D. and Victoria Dolby point out in *The Green Tea Book*, all teas come from the same plant called *Camellia sinensis*. The difference between black tea, oolong and green tea is all in the processing that occurs before brewing. Unlike black tea, which is completely fermented, and oolong, which is semi-fermented, green tea is unfermented, meaning the leaves have not been subjected to the oxidizing effect of natural enzymes present in the plant. To prevent oxidation, green tea leaves are boiled immediately after picking to debilitate these enzymes. Because it is not fermented, green tea is able to retain its polyphenols, which are the antioxidants that help to keep us healthy. For example, Mitscher and Dolby explain that green tea has about 10 times the amount of vitamin C as black tea because of the different processing procedures.

### Polyphenols Provide Protection from Free Radicals

So what do these polyphenols do? In *Healing Teas*, Marie Nadine Antol describes them as substances that help "defuse free radicals, the compounds that roam the body causing all kinds of havoc." Free radicals are responsible for causing aging, certain cancers and heart disease because of the damage they do to cell membranes. The four polyphenols that are responsible for most of the antioxidant properties in green tea, collectively called catechins, are epicatechin (EC), epicatechin gallate (ECG), epigallocatechin (EGC) and epigallocatechingallate (EGCG).

### Health and Cosmetic Benefits

Along with all the medical ailments that green tea can alleviate, it has cosmetic benefits as well. Helen Gustafson points out in her book *The Green Tea User's Manual*, that, "Green tea also produces a mild stimulating effect without causing insomnia or nervousness, kills bacteria in the mouth that cause cavities and bad breath, and may even slow the aging process by enhancing the body's fluid balance and reducing stress." It can also help prevent the signs of aging on your skin such as wrinkles and a bland complexion by preventing free radical damage to collagen, the elastic tissue in skin cells that provides firm, smooth skin.

### Reduces Risk of Heart Disease

Green tea can reduce the risk of heart disease by inhibiting the plaque that can attach to arteries and by reducing the production of the platelets that thicken and clot blood. This factor alone can decrease the risk of high blood pressure and heart disease among green tea drinkers. The flavonoids found in green tea are the same as those found in fruits, vegetables and red wine, which promote heart health. Green tea has also been shown to reduce the risk of stroke.

### Reduces Risk of Cancer

One of the most important reasons to switch from your coffee or black tea to green tea is because of its potential to prevent cancer. The polyphenols found in green tea have the ability to prevent carcinogens from

becoming active and destroying cells that can lead to cancer, as well as neutralizing the free radicals in the body before they can interfere with the DNA within cells and form tumors.

### **Supports Healthy Digestive System**

Upset stomach? Green tea can help you there too. It has been found to promote healthy bacteria in the intestinal tract and fight harmful bacteria that can cause diarrhea or constipation. *The Green Tea Book* adds that it can also protect the stomach, intestine and colon from carcinogens.

### **Promotes Healthy Weight Loss**

Dieters might like to learn that in *Cooking with Green Tea*, Ying Chang Compestine cites a study conducted by the University of Geneva in Switzerland showing that the caffeine and flavonoid combination found in green tea "increase[s] basal metabolism, fat burning, or both," resulting in faster weight loss without the risk of harmful products or fads.

### **Promotes Healthy Blood Sugar**

Carb-watchers and diabetics can also benefit from drinking a cup of green tea because it inhibits the activity of amylase, an enzyme that aids in the breakdown of carbohydrates, thus reducing the absorption of carbohydrates during digestion. Lower carbohydrates means lower blood sugar levels, which in combination with the pancreatic benefits of green tea, leads to balanced insulin for diabetics. Diabetics at risk of renal failure can also benefit from the polyphenols that can improve kidney cell function.

### **Natural Source of Certain Essential Vitamins and Minerals**

Another reason to go green? It is a great way to get vitamins D, K, B-2, carotenoids and many minerals. So whether you are dieting, diabetic, health-conscious or just looking for a boost, green tea may be the "magic" potion you're looking for. It is undoubtedly the Eastern cure for Western disease. **WF**

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### **References:**

*Healing Teas* by Marie Nadine Antol  
*Cooking with Green Tea* by Ying Chang Compestine  
*The Green Tea User's Manual* by Helen Gustafson  
*Tea: Addiction, Exploitation and Empire* by Roy Maxham

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