

So, what's the tea?

You may have heard that tea is good for you, but when walking through the grocery aisle and being confronted by a barrage of options, it can be hard to choose.

Ashley Simper, the manager of dietetic services with OSF HealthCare, has done the research and has some helpful guidance.

To start, it's best to understand the different kinds of teas and where they come from. Simper says black, white, oolong and green tea all come from the *Camellia sinensis* plant. Herbal teas come from root, stems and flowers of various plants, and they all have different benefits.

What's the overall healthiest tea?

Overall, Simper says green tea shines above the rest. But diving into the specific benefits of each tea can help people choose what's right for them.

"Consuming three or more cups of *green tea* a day leads to the most health benefits when it comes to cardiovascular disease, cancer and the overall risk of mortality," Simper says. "The research is a little stronger when it comes to promoting heart health. The consumption of three to five cups of green tea a day has also been shown to lower blood pressure, stroke risk, and LDL (bad cholesterol)," Simper says.

Consuming three to five cups of green tea or black tea has also been shown to lower the risk of developing diabetes.

In 2022, a large study in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* showed that drinking black tea resulted in a modest reduction of overall death. A research team from the [National Institutes of Health's \(NIH\) National Cancer Institute \(NCI\)](#) investigated roughly half a million adults, ages 40-60, in the United Kingdom (UK), who enrolled in the UK Biobank study between 2006-2010. The researchers followed participants until 2020 and found a 9-13% lower risk of death among people who drank at least two cups of tea per day than non-tea drinkers.

What makes tea so healthy?

"The compound in tea that leads to these health benefits is polyphenols. Polyphenols are a type of antioxidant, and antioxidants are linked to decreased inflammation and reduced risk of chronic disease," Simper says. "The highest antioxidant compounds are in the green tea, followed by the oolong, black and then white teas."

She adds that green tea and white tea contain an amino acid called L-theanine. Amino acids are the "building blocks" of protein, Simper adds.

"L-theanine has been linked to decreased anxiety, improved sleep and boosting mental clarity," Simper says.

Cancer: Mixed reviews, additional safety tips

"When it comes to cancer, the research is conflicting. People who drank higher amounts of green tea had a decreased risk of liver, ovarian, lung and breast cancers. But it is important to keep in mind, that if you're drinking really hot tea, you have a higher risk of esophageal and gastric cancers," Simper says.

To avoid the tea being scalding hot, Simper recommends allowing the just-boiled water to cool down for an appropriate amount of time before taking a sip.

Tea's impact on the flu

"In lab and animal studies, they have found an antiviral effect with the consumption of green tea. In Japan, they did a study with kids that showed anywhere from one to five cups of green tea a day lowered the risk of flu," Simper says. "There was also a study where they gargled green tea in a bottle, green tea extract or black tea extract, and there was a 30% decreased risk of flu."

How to prepare your tea

As Simper mentioned, scalding hot tea can come with its own risks, more than just burning your mouth. But there are other ways, she says, to make sure you're receiving the most benefit from drinking tea.

"[They recommend](#) boiling your own water and steeping it yourself instead of putting the water in the microwave to heat it up. They found you lose some health benefits if you microwave the water in your tea. Fresh is best, steep your own, and boil your own water. But let it cool down to a comfortable temperature before you consume it. "Freshly brewed tea with minimal additives, especially things like sugar and milk, is the way to go when it comes to adding tea to your daily intake," Simper adds.

Benefits of herbal teas

Depending on which symptoms you're dealing with, or health benefit you're looking for, different herbal teas have different purposes.

- Peppermint teas – Helps with upset stomach
- Ginger tea – Helps with nausea
- Chamomile teas – Can help decrease cardiovascular disease and some cancers. It can also help with premenstrual syndrome and help boost immunity, Simper says.

But what about all the caffeine?

"The caffeine in tea is about half the amount of coffee. You would have to drink eight or more cups of tea a day to get to that highest level we would recommend for caffeine. So, it's not that much of a risk for people," Simper points out. "However, if you're going to start drinking three to five cups of tea a day, and you're not normally a caffeine consumer, you might notice the effects of the caffeine."

Connection to weight loss

If you're looking to tea for weight loss, you might be waiting for some time, Simper says. She says the research is conflicting, and weight loss is minimal due to drinking tea. However, switching out caffeinated tea for sodas and coffees filled with sugar would be the healthier choice.