



The Health Benefits of Drinking Green Tea

By Daniel Casciato

While China has recognized the health benefits of drinking green tea for hundreds of years, many Americans are starting to realize those same benefits as well.

"I think green tea has become more fashionable to drink for two reasons," says Betsy Hollweck, owner of Marktfrau, a tea shop located in Wexford. "First, it's healthy for you and secondly, it's become a fad. Unlike some fads though, consuming green tea is a good thing."

Rita Edmondson, a registered dietician with RED Dieticians in the North Hills, agrees. "Green tea really is good for you," she says. "It contains antioxidants that help protect the heart from disease and cancers."

According to Edmondson, antioxidants protect cells from damage by substances called 'free radicals.' A free radical is an oxygen atom that has lost an electron. It has a negative charge and is not stable in the body. In order for the free radical to stabilize itself, it tries to steal an electron from nearby molecules.

This process can cause damage to cell walls, cell structures and even the genetic material of a cell. If the genetic material of a cell is attacked, this can lead to changes in the DNA and has been linked to cancer and other diseases. Free radicals are produced from exposure to tobacco smoke and radiation.

"Antioxidants work by helping to neutralize the free radicals that are formed when body cells burn oxygen for energy," says Edmondson.

Research presented at a recent American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) conference on food, nutrition and cancer, supports Edmondson. The AICR found that green tea targets a specific stage in the cancer process more effectively than current cancer drugs do.

According to the AICR, there have also been studies conducted in Asia that have found that regular consumption of green tea is associated with a lower risk of many different cancers.

Hollweck adds that there are other health benefits to drinking green tea. "It helps to relax and calm you and it contains a high amount of fiber," she says. "It's also very high in fluoride."

Hollweck says that it is never too late to begin drinking green tea.

"It doesn't have to be 'either or,'" she says. "You can incorporate green tea into your diet, and you don't have to give up another beverage. You can still drink coffee if you want. The important thing is to add green tea to your diet."

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