TEA & ANTIOXIDANTS

Put down those saucer cups and get chugging — tea is officially awesome for your health. Real tea is derived from a particular plant (Camellia sinensis) and includes Black and Green Tea. Anything else (like herbal "tea") is an infusion of a different plant and isn't technically tea.

Tea can boost exercise endurance. Scientists have found that the catechins (antioxidants) in green tea extract increase the body's ability to burn fat as fuel, which accounts for improved muscle endurance. Drinking tea could help reduce the risk of heart attack. Tea might also help protect against cardiovascular and degenerative diseases. The antioxidants in tea might help protect against a

boatload of cancers, including breast, colon, colorectal, skin, lung, esophagus, stomach, small intestine, pancreas, liver, ovarian, prostate and oral cancers. But don't rely solely on tea to keep a healthy body — tea is not a miracle cure, after all. While more studies than not suggest that tea has cancer-fighting benefits, the current research is mixed.

Tea helps fight free radicals. Tea is high in oxygen radical absorbance capacity ("ORAC" to its friends), which is a fancy way of saying that it helps destroy free radicals (which can damage DNA) in the body. While our bodies are designed to fight free radicals on their own, they're not 100 percent effective — and since damage from these radical oxygen ninjas has been linked to cancer, heart disease and neurological degeneration, we'll take all the help we can get.

Tea is hydrating to the body (even despite the caffeine!).

Drinking tea is linked with a lower risk of Parkinson's disease. When considered with other factors like smoking, physical activity, age and body mass index, regular tea drinking was associated with a lowered risk of Parkinson's disease in both men and women.

Fight Inflammation With a Cup of Tea:

You want to be hipper and healthier? Drink tea. Black and Green tea are loaded with polyphenols, plant-derived compounds that rev up the immune system and may protect against certain diseases, including arthritis.

"Tea drinking boosts T cells' ability to react against bacterial and viral infections," says Jack F. Bukowski, MD, PhD, a rheumatologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. This action helps your body fight off colds and flu. "I suspect this is good for people with rheumatoid arthritis, who are taking immunosuppressive medications that make them more susceptible to infection," he says.

Studies show that tea may have anti-inflammatory properties. In lab studies, Case Western Reserve University researchers in Cleveland showed EGCG (a substance in green tea) may halt arthritis progression by blocking interleukin-1, a pro-inflammatory cell, from damaging cartilage.

Health Benefits of Tea

Spurred on by promising studies, researchers are also looking at tea's ability to:

Promote heart health. Studies show that tea can help lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels in people with cardiovascular disease.

Fight cancer. "Polyphenols will induce certain tumor cells toward apoptosis (programmed cell death)," explains Stephen D. Hsu, PhD, a researcher at Georgia Health Sciences University in Augusta.

Improve bone strength. One study found that green tea improves both bone quality and strength. Another found tea drinkers over 50 had a 30%reduced risk of hip fractures.

Rejuvenate skin cells. Hsu says green tea seems to promote healthy skin cell growth, which could help wound healing and psoriasis.

Protect the brain. A United Kingdom lab study suggests black and green tea may slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease. A German lab study suggests green tea may inhibit the inflammation and neural damage associated with the progression of multiple sclerosis.