



# IT'S TEA TIME!

Tea is native to the areas that are now China, Tibet and Northern India. Today, tea is grown around the world along the tea belt (which is the ideal hot, humid climate that tea thrives in), running from the equator to 42° north. All green and black teas come from a common tea plant (*Camellia sinensis* or *Camellia assamica*). An evergreen shrub, tea plants can grow to 40 feet tall with leaves up to 8 inches wide. After the leaves are picked, they are either steamed or pan-fired, then rolled, dried and sifted. The difference between black, green, oolong and white teas is in the processing of the leaves.

Tea also contains compounds called catechins, which have a strong antioxidant potential and help to defuse free radicals that harm the body. One recent Japanese study found that tea catechins help lower the oxidation of LDL cholesterol, decrease the risk of heart disease and cancer, reduce tumor growth and modify intestinal flora. Other research shows that regular consumption of tea lowers blood pressure and that catechin levels in the blood rapidly increase with repeated tea ingestion.

## Black tea

Black teas undergo auto-oxidation, which creates their dark color and characteristic flavor but also destroys some of the nutrients from the original plant. Black tea offers a small amount of vitamin C, vitamin B2, carotenoids, vitamin D, vitamin K, amino acids, and several minerals including fluoride. One cup of black tea has about half the amount of caffeine as a cup of coffee.

## Green tea

Green tea is only lightly steamed and not allowed to oxidize, so it retains the chlorophyll of the leaf, thus retaining its green color and most of its healing compounds, too. Because green tea has higher levels of unaltered catechins than black tea, research suggests that it may have increased antioxidant effects on the body, helping to protect the body against cancer, reduce serum cholesterol and the risk of heart disease and stroke. Research also supports the fact that, along with fluoride, extracts of green tea have strong antibacterial effects, helping to prevent mouth cancers, gingivitis and dental cavities. Green tea has about one-third the caffeine per cup of black tea.

## Pu-ehrs

Pu-ehrs are some of the oldest, most complex teas. As pu-ehrs age, they develop an increasingly earthy aroma and a sweeter, full-bodied taste. Pu-erh tea is a diuretic and improves blood flow. Healthy skin and bones have also been attributed to its regular consumption.

## Oolong tea

The rich flavor of these semi-oxidized teas results from a painstaking process of tumbling or otherwise bruising the surface of the leaves to develop and release enzymes and then rolling or twisting the leaves and firing them to halt the drying. Consumption of oolong teas is known to assist hydration and maintenance of essential body fluids.

## White tea

White teas are naturally sweet and low in caffeine. Produced on a limited scale in China, white tea is made of early growth or immature buds and leaves and is the least processed of the teas. White teas are a rich source of antioxidants called flavonoids known to help in reducing cholesterol levels and blood pressure. They also contain an antibacterial agent to fight infections and colds.

## Matcha

Matcha is a very finely ground green tea. Once ground, the powder is a vibrant green color. Whisked in hot water, the tea dissolves giving a thin, intensely green drink that has a distinctive grassy taste. Matcha contains, by volume, higher concentrations of catechins and vitamins than other green teas.

**Look for Fair Trade when choosing teas to ensure that farmers receive fair prices for their goods.**



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## THE BUZZ ON CAFFEINE

Caffeine levels in tea fluctuate depending on brewing time and how and where the leaves were harvested. The longer you brew the tea, the more caffeine it will have. Also, the more fermented, the more caffeine. For example, Oolong is semi-fermented and has about half as much caffeine as black tea, which is fully fermented. Compare the caffeine levels of these drinks (for an 8-ounce serving size):

<b>Rooibos</b> . . . . .	caffeine free
<b>Decaffeinated Black Tea</b> . . . . .	4 mg
<b>White Tea</b> . . . . .	4 mg
<b>Green Tea</b> . . . . .	6–30 mg
<b>Oolong Tea</b> . . . . .	10–45 mg
<b>Black Tea</b> . . . . .	20–90 mg
<b>Yerba Mate.</b> . . . . .	25–65 mg *
<b>Coffee</b> . . . . .	70–160 mg



*\* there is some debate about whether yerba mate contains caffeine or mateine, a chemical that is related to caffeine, but different in the way it interacts with the body.*

## Yerba Mate

Yerba Mate is a plant in the holly family that grows in the understory of the South American rainforests. Its leaves are dried and aged and then enjoyed as a tea. It stimulates metabolism and contains a higher antioxidant count than green and black teas. Many drinkers of yerba mate report that it seems to affect their bodies in a more balanced way than coffee, black tea or Asian green tea. Steep yerba mate in either hot (less than 175°) or cold water for 5 minutes or make a mate latte with steamed milk and sweetener.

## A Perfectly Brewed Cup

Fill your tea kettle with fresh, cool water. For green tea, bring it just to a boil, before it starts rolling. For black and herbal teas, bring water to a full rolling boil. Pour the water over the tea and infuse to taste. For green tea, let it steep for only 2 to 3 minutes. Black or oolong teas should steep for 3 to 5 minutes. Most herbal infusions need to steep for at least 10 minutes. To brew a cup using loose leaf tea, use 1 level teaspoon per 8oz cup of water. To brew strong tea, don't brew tea longer. This can make the tea bitter. Instead, use twice the quantity of tea.

## Rooibos

Rooibos (roy-boss), a member of the Legume family, is unique to South Africa. Its leaves are fermented, which turn the green leaves a deep red color and give it a slightly sweet note with deep body. Studies show that rooibos contains comparable amounts of polyphenols to green tea and shows anti-mutagenic, anti-carcinogenic, anti-inflammatory and anti-viral activity. Rooibos, unlike black and green tea, is completely caffeine-free. Rooibos is high in antioxidants and rich in minerals. It is a safe drink for all ages, and is believed to fight allergies and soothe colicky babies.

## Tea Storage:

It is best to keep herbs and teas away from light, heat, moisture and air. Store in glass jars or metal canisters to keep airtight. Herbs retain their beneficial qualities for up to a year. Green tea lasts for about a year as well. Black tea stores well for two to three years.

For more information visit [www.silkroadteas.com](http://www.silkroadteas.com)

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