

Tea Time

By Mariet van der Starre

The United States imported about 519 million pounds of it last year. Singer Moby is going in to business peddling the substance in Manhattan. The Brits indulge in this feel-good elixir way more than the average American who only consumes one cup per day. The British out-drink Americans 3 to 1 ... Tea, that is, good, old-fashioned, throw-it-in-the-Boston-Harbor, tea.

Tea boasts a long and storied history that spans the globe. According to legend that many scholars believe to be fact, the Chinese discovered tea in 2737 BC, when the wind blew some leaves into a pot of boiling water that was being prepared by the servants of the Emperor.

The tradition of drinking tea then spread to Japan a few centuries later, where it was made a ritual. Tea became popular in Europe, beginning in Portugal and Holland before making landfall in the British Isles in the 1600s. Afternoon tea services became the fashion among noble women who needed something to get them through the day.

Even America had its influence on the history of tea. The Boston Tea Party was a symbolic protest for "No taxation without representation."

The late '90s have seen upscale hotels such as the Ritz Carlton in

Boston and Plaza Hotel in New York City re-establish the tradition of the Afternoon Tea Service. The spa industry should take note of the results the hotel industry has experienced since promoting tea services. It draws the high-end client, creates added value for current clients, generates publicity, utilizes existing amenities and space to increase profits, and introduces clients to other hotel services such as catering or events.

Tea time may be as old as time itself. However, it is a tradition that many Americans don't fully appreciate. Everywhere you go in Europe, from Buckingham Palace to a quaint sidewalk café in Slovenia, men and women are relaxing leisurely over a pot of tea. A relaxing respite quite unlike Americans who speed, brake and weave down the freeway, trying not to scald themselves with their drive-thru cup of java. Perhaps the rest of the world knows the significant therapeutic benefits drinking at least three cups of tea every day provides.

Tea is rich in powerful antioxidants called flavonoids that protect the body against free radical damage, which can encourage the development of diseases such as cancer, heart disease, stroke, rheumatoid arthritis, cataracts and Alzheimer's.

The amount and variety of flavonoids in each kind of tea is

different. The longer tea is brewed, the greater the amount of flavonoids. Many of the most common flavonoids pack more antioxidant punch than vitamins C and E. In fact, tea is so rich in antioxidants, drinking three cups of tea gives the body as much antioxidant protection as six apples. The antioxidants in two cups of black tea are equivalent to the antioxidants in one glass of red wine or seven glasses of orange juice.

"Drink to your health!"

Tea consumption is also an important part of daily fluid intake to prevent dehydration. Fine lines, course texture and surface dryness are all challenges in skin care. If you didn't already have enough reasons to drink more tea, this zero-calorie beverage will prevent chronic dehydration, which causes constipation, lethargy, headaches and has been linked to colon and breast cancer.

Now, you may be thinking, "Doesn't tea contain caffeine and doesn't caffeine cause dehydration?" The answer to both of those questions is yes. However, there is not enough caffeine in tea to be diuretic unless you consume 5-6 cups of tea in one sitting, twice the daily-recommended serving.

Tea can be more than just an antioxidant powerhouse. Tea is also rich in fluoride. In fact, drinking

three cups of tea will fill 70% of the body's daily fluoride requirements. Drinking it, like 98% of the British do, by adding milk, the amounts and types of nutrients added to your diet increase, giving you healthier bones and teeth.

A variety of teas derived from different plants and originating from different parts of the world have found their way to the grocery aisle. There are three basic kinds of tea: green, black and oolong, which is a combination of both.

Green tea and black tea are both derived from the *camellia sinensis* plant but are processed differently. Green tea is lightly steamed before drying and is popular in the Far East. Black tea, which is fully oxidized, comes from Africa, India and Sri Lanka. The amount of flavonoids in green tea is roughly equal to that of black tea, but the kinds of flavonoids are different. Green tea contains simple flavonoids and black tea contains complex flavonoids. However, green tea and black tea both protect the body against disease such as cancer. Choosing one kind over the other is simply a matter of taste preference.

Green tea, which has a more delicate taste, is traditionally the tea of choice in the Orient. Black tea is the brew found in Europe and the Americas. In fact, 90% of the tea consumed in the United States is black tea. Many people associate

teas with the blends of herbal teas, which are shoot-offs of these three types of tea. However, herbal teas, which are made from herbs, berries, seeds, and roots, actually contain no tealeaves.

The health benefits of tea have been well researched and widely publicized increasing the brew's consumption in the Western world. Green tea contains anti-inflammatory and antibacterial properties. It is anti-thrombotic and lowers cholesterol. In animals, researchers have shown green tea, when imbibed or applied topically, prevents melanoma formation caused from UV damage or chemical carcinogens. The research in humans isn't as conclusive, but preliminary research appears to support that green tea has the same effect on human skin when either taken orally or applied topically.

Researchers are also investigating green tea's effect on weight loss. Again the results aren't conclusive, but it appears that green tea increases fat oxidation thereby increasing weight loss.

In the last decade, spas have lead the way in the re-emergence of holistic therapies. Ancient traditions such as yoga, ayurveda, aromatherapy and organic foods and beverages to balance the spirit have experienced a renaissance. These spas not only provide superlative face and body

treatments, they recognize the need to promote the entire well-being. Eating right, exercising and reducing stress are just as important in treating the skin as cleansing and exfoliation. Serving tea is one of the simplest ways a day spa can establish its identity.

Just as people associate tea service with high-end hotels, they do so with spas. The same women who go to the Ritz for afternoon tea will relish the experience at the salon and spa level. She will not be satisfied with a cup of coffee in a Styrofoam cup. Like the Japanese, make an art of serving tea to your clients. Use nice china, a Tiffany tea service, and beautiful silver. Make the tea and serve it rather than have a do-it yourself station. Create a special experience that elevates your business into a different league.

For thousands of years, people have celebrated the benefits of serving and drinking tea. Drinking tea is good for the spirit and for the body. Drink to your health! Drink tea. **PMPR**

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