



Tea for vitality

Sipping a steaming tea is a refined and relaxing ritual. A cuppa can charge you for the day, sustain you through the afternoon, soothe you to sleep or nurse you back to health. Discover your cup of tea by dipping into these terrific brews.

Words CAROLINE ROBERTSON

It's always "teatime" according to the Mad Hatter in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. An afternoon tea party is a wonderful way to unwind and connect with loved ones. Friendships are forged over a warm cuppa as Monty Python proclaimed, "Make tea, not war." Many find a tea break brings serenity, such as Chinese poet Lu Tong who said, "When I drink tea, I am conscious of peace. The cool breath of heaven rises in my sleeves and blows my cares away." Tea can console us like a hug in a cup and wash away worries like an internal bath. The English are known for their devotion to tea, including British politician William Ewart Gladstone who said, "If you are cold, tea will warm you; if you are too heated, it will cool you; if you are depressed, it will cheer you; if you are excited, it will calm you."

Tea is steeped in historical traditions. The ninth-century Japanese tea ceremony (*chanoyu*), derived from Zen Buddhism, cultivates calm, mindfulness and awareness of impermanence. Lipton.com suggests a simple version of the complex Japanese tea ceremony. Set a stylish table with a flower arrangement and sweets. Serve your guests a high-quality matcha or sencha tea from a decorative tea set. Provide mini napkins to wipe the side of each tea bowl before sipping. Each guest can then share what they are thankful for.

The seventh-century Chinese wedding tea ceremony signifies a couple's gratitude to their parents and symbolises the union of two families. A simple version of this is the bride pouring four cups of their chosen tea with red dates for luck, lotus seeds for fertility and lilies for longevity. As the groom holds the tray, the bride serves each parent. While offering each cup they say to the parents, "Thank you for your love and care."

India trips turn many into chai connoisseurs. Watching chai wallahs froth aromatic spiced infusions from stainless steel vessels makes the mouth water. The delicious blend of cardamom, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, black pepper and tea fires one's circulation and digestion for the day.

A Moroccan mint tea ritual is considered essential for any social occasion or business meeting. Boiling water is poured like a waterfall over fresh spearmint leaves, tea leaves and sugar into a silver pot then transferred into ornate glasses. Rose water is sometimes added for fragrant sweetness. Moroccans may murmur before sipping "Insha Allah" or God willing, all good things come with time.

Tea leaf reading

Try tea for clarity through tasseography or tasseomancy, the art of divining messages from tea leaf colours and configurations. The authoritative text on tea leaf reading is the 1881 tome, *Reading Tea Leaves* by A Highland Seer. This details over 150 classic symbols to facilitate reading. For a fun tea leaf reading session select some loose-leaf tea and put one heaped teaspoon into a white cup. Pour in boiling water. While the tea is steeping encourage the querent, or person asking the question, to establish their intentions and specific query. When the tea is drinking temperature, they can sip it while continuing to contemplate their concern. When there is only about a tablespoon of liquid remaining, they can hold the cup in their left hand and swirl the water three times from the left to the right. Then, still with the left hand, slowly invert the cup over a white saucer. After leaving the cup still for a minute rotate it three times.

Place the cup back in the upright position with the handle pointing south. The leaves stuck to the cup generally form five types of symbols: animals, beings, letters, numbers and objects. Tea leaves close to the querent relate to their immediate surroundings and leaves on the far side signify outside influences. The present is evident on the rim, the sides show the future and the bottom the long-term future. As with any psychic art, an accurate reading is reliant on the attunement of the mystic interpreting the leaves. At best you may turn a new, exciting leaf in life. At worst you have enjoyed a comforting cuppa, which is always a bonus; as author PG Wodehouse said, "I expect I shall feel better after tea."

Keep calm and put the kettle on

With the blossoming of baristas, coffee has superseded the popularity of tea in many countries. However, some suffering side effects from coffee's caffeine such as heart palpitations, increased anxiety, sleep problems and headaches, are turning to tea. If you're trying to convert from coffee to tea, then black tea or black tea chai is a gentle option as it contains less than half the caffeine of coffee for that morning wake-up call.

Tea-totalers agree with author CS Lewis, "You can't get a cup of tea big enough or a book long enough to suit me." Tea suits many to a T because compared to coffee it generally has less caffeine, is less acidic and less inflammatory, the caffeine releases more slowly for sustained energy, it has more antioxidants, it is more hydrating, it doesn't discolour teeth, it has bone-strengthening catechins and it contains calming L-theanine. Also, studies



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suggest tea drinkers have a reduced risk of osteoporosis, heart disease and stroke than coffee consumers. No wonder author Frances Hardinge said, "Tea is the magic key to the vault where my brain is kept." Recent research by the National University of Singapore (NUS) revealed that regular tea drinkers have better organised brain regions, which is associated with healthy cognitive function compared to non-tea drinkers.

However, more is not always more beneficial. Traumatic tea tales include anaemia caused by the iron-binding tannins in tea, the woman who developed skeletal fluorosis after consuming 150 bags daily and the 56-year-old Arkansas resident who contracted kidney failure

from the oxalates in 16 eight-ounce glasses of iced black tea daily. So a tea a day may keep the doctor away, but too much can call the doctor closer.

Your cup of tea

There are more than all the teas in China to increase your qi. Infinite infusions are now available for an energising and appetising tea break. Prefer loose, local,

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organic, fresh blends to teas that are imported, irradiated and packaged in bleached tea bags. Try these tasty teas to water your wellbeing.

Ashwagandha

Also known as withania, this Ayurvedic herb enhances energy and eases stress. If you're overwhelmed and exhausted ashwagandha can modulate the release of stress hormones such as cortisol by acting directly on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. It is also a nervous system tonic, improving resilience and rest. Feeling too tired for intimacy? Ashwagandha can boost libido and sexual stamina in men and women due to its testosterone-increasing impact.

Dandelion

Roasted dandelion root tea is a great coffee substitute due to its bitter taste. In Ayurvedic and Western herbalism the bitter taste promotes bile which assists fat metabolism. This effect can reduce weight, according to a 2008 study published in *Nutrition Research and Practice*. A 2017 study conducted by the China Pharmaceutical University suggested the root could be an effective liver tonic and hepatoprotective agent. This golden plant could potentially protect the skin, as a 2011 Canadian study showed the root induces melanoma cell death without damaging healthy cells. The diuretic effect of dandelion root helps to keep the kidneys and urinary tract pure.

Ginger

Valued as *Vishwabesaj* or the universal medicine in Ayurveda, ginger has god-like status in Eastern medicine. A strong infusion can ease nausea, clear respiratory congestion, stimulate circulation, stoke digestion and soothe arthritic pains. According to a 2006 study by Iwasaki et al. the shogaols and gingerols in ginger promote adrenal catecholamine secretion which boost energy. Ginger's rich phytochemistry includes free radical scavengers that reduce degeneration and enhance youthful energy.

Ginseng

Nothing says "get up and go" like a gulp of ginseng tea. Whether it's Korean or Siberian ginseng, the polysaccharides and oligopeptides will increase stamina and mental alertness. Studies suggest ginseng's ginsenosides and compound K may protect the brain against free





radical damage. People suffering from chronic fatigue showed significant improvement from ginseng in a 2016 review of over 155 studies published in the *Journal of Korean Medical Science*.

Green

Dip into healing green tea for the revitalising threesome of antioxidants, L-theanine and moderate caffeine. The sustained energy from green tea differs from the rollercoaster rush of coffee which has a higher caffeine content. The combination of L-theanine and caffeine enhanced brain function in a 2008 study published in the *Journal of Nutrition*. Other evidence-based benefits of green tea include fat burning, reduced risk of cancer and less bad breath due to its bacteria-suppressing catechins. Matcha green tea is loaded with anti-ageing catechins and polyphenols and has higher caffeine than other green teas.

Liquorice

This sweet root makes a rejuvenating refreshment to sail you through the day. Acting like cortisone, this adrenal tonic

helps one to remain calm amid chaos. It combines well with other adaptogenic herbs rhodiola root and schisandra fruit to fend off fatigue. Additional benefits of liquorice are its anti-inflammatory effect on skin conditions such as eczema and the soothing demulcent action on sore throats or ulcers. Excess liquorice can contribute to high blood pressure and potassium depletion.

Nettle

This nutrient-rich tea is wonderful with drowsiness from deficiencies and depletion. One cup contains vitamins A, C, K and B group, calcium, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, linoleic acid, quercetin and carotenoids. The anti-allergy and anti-inflammatory effect of nettle may ease sleepiness associated with allergies or pain.

Peppermint

Put some pep in your step with peppermint tea. A 2018 study found peppermint essential oil decreased mental fatigue and increased cognitive function. It also reduced daytime sleepiness according to research published in the *International Journal of*

Psychophysiology. Consider adding a sprig of rosemary and sage for extra oomph.

Rooibos

This South African caffeine-free tea is Prince Charles' favourite. Also known as red bush tea it has an astringent taste similar to black tea but has fewer tannins which inhibit iron absorption and less stone-forming oxalic acid. Spice up rooibos with a chai masala of cinnamon, cloves, ginger and pepper for added stimulation. The abundant antioxidants in rooibos such as aspalathin are linked to cellular energy and a healthier heart. Two studies suggested that rooibos antioxidants quercetin and luteolin can kill cancer cells and prevent tumour growth. These were published by *Anticancer Research* and the *International Journal of Cancer*.

White tea

Three teas spring from the *Camellia sinensis* herb: white, green and black. White is the youngest, containing the lowest caffeine and highest antioxidant content, and is the least processed plant of the three varieties. It contains similar levels of relaxing and brain-boosting L-theanine as green tea. The polyphenols in white tea are anti-inflammatory and help to protect the skin against UV damage. Researchers from Kingston University working with Neal's Yard Remedies tested 21 plant extracts to discover that white tea outperformed all of them in reducing inflammation.

Yerba mate

Could the secret to South American's stamina for salsa be yerba mate? This caffeinated tea sprouts from the *Ilex paraguariensis* plant, which is rich in antioxidants and anti-inflammatory saponins. Though it has less caffeine than coffee it has more caffeine than tea. This will wake you up, improve short-term memory and hasten reaction time. Yerba mate has also assisted exercise and fat burning according to a 2014 study by Ahmad Alkhatib. Mix with a little maca root powder to step up a gear.

Tasty tisane

Try this invigorating infusion for peak performance. Blend half a teaspoon each of panax ginseng, liquorice, white tea, ashwagandha and maca. Steep in two cups of boiling hot water with a half a vanilla pod. Strain and serve straight or with preferred milk. Stir with a cinnamon stick for a sweet touch. 🍵

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