

tea time

From soothing beverage to beauty elixir, tea is one versatile brew

By Kim Erickson

Tea—it's the most popular drink in the world. But over the past few years, it's found its way into a growing number of personal care products—and for good reason. Packed with powerful antioxidants, tea not only protects against the sun's harmful rays, it can also undo some of the damage that prematurely ages skin.

What It Is

True teas—black, oolong, green, and white—come from the *Camellia sinensis* bush. What makes each type unique is the amount of fermentation and processing each undergoes. Black, the most common tea, is the most highly processed, while white is the least. However, the common component among all these varieties is polyphenols, especially epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG), a type of phytochemical that prevents cell damage by zapping destructive free radicals. What's more, EGCG works with vitamins C and E to create an even more powerful weapon against free-radical damage. This potent polyphenol also increases the production and activity of the body's own antioxidants. And that translates to fewer signs of skin aging.

There's another type of tea that's been making headlines lately. While not a true tea, South African red or rooibos tea is creating quite a buzz in antiaging circles, but won't cause a buzz for you—it does not contain caffeine. Boasting high levels of aspalathin—a potent flavonoid found only in rooibos—this herbal tea has traditionally been used to relieve eczema and slow the aging process. Red tea is also rich in antioxidants, especially quercetin, a natural

anti-inflammatory. Although not as powerful as green tea at gobbling up free radicals, red tea can prevent breaks in DNA strands, according to Korean research. That means less collagen breakdown within the skin—and less visible sagging and wrinkling.

What It Does

Because true tea packs such a strong antioxidant punch, it's the perfect antidote to sun-induced skin damage. Applied topically, the EGCG in green and white tea hampers the destruction of collagen by the sun's burning UVB rays. Other research shows that the catechins in green tea prevent the top layer of skin cells from dying prematurely. But tea's protective properties won't just help after you've been out in the sun. One recent study revealed that applying an EGCG-rich sunscreen before exposure helps prevent sunburn and inflammation.

Sipping a cup or two of black, green, or white tea can also guard your skin against sun damage. One recent study by the University of Arizona in Tucson discovered that drinking black tea significantly lowered the risk of developing squamous cell carcinoma. Earlier research confirmed that the flavonoids in green tea can also guard against UV damage while bolstering the skin's immune system. Rooibos tea, especially if

where to find it

Years ago, women would cover their eyes with tea bags to reduce puffiness. But now that tea's beauty benefits have been defined, tea can be found in all sorts of personal care products and supplements. Here are some to try:

(products shown below, left to right)

Jason Natural Red Elements
Lifting Eye Crème

Desert Essence Green Tea Facial
Cleansing Pads

Jarrow Formulas Green Tea 5:1
Capsules

Aubrey Organics Green Tea & Ginkgo
Moisturizer SPF 15

Giovanni Cassifleur White Tea
Body Lotion

Hugo Naturals Red Tea
& Ylang Ylang Shower Gel



Photograph by John Kelly

it hasn't been fermented, also offers protection against skin cancer, although not quite as much as true tea. And studies show that you can get red tea's beauty benefits by either applying it topically or by simply enjoying a nice cuppa.

Bonus Benefits

The EGCG in green and white teas not only reduces oxidative stress in the skin, it also scavenges free radicals throughout your body, making it a natural cancer fighter. Studies also credit this polyphenol with promoting cardiovascular health by lowering cholesterol and triglyceride levels, making platelets less sticky, and cutting the risk of hypertension. If that weren't enough, EGCG also guards against periodontal disease.

Although most clinical trials use

brewed green tea, a surprising study conducted at the University of California, Los Angeles found that drinking green tea might not be as effective as taking a supplement of the extract. Better yet, the study authors note that green tea supplements offer large doses of polyphenols without the side effects of the caffeine found in the beverage. Simply taking 100 mg of a standardized green tea extract per day is the equivalent of three to four cups of the brewed beverage.

Like green tea, red tea also has some promising anticancer properties. South African studies show that rooibos tea offers 60 to 75 percent protection against skin tumors. But cancer prevention is only one of red tea's powers. Research also shows that rooibos tea lowers blood

pressure, soothes stomach cramps and diarrhea, and dilates the bronchial tract so that asthmatics can breathe a little easier.

DID YOU KNOW?
 Brewing green and white teas takes a delicate touch; use very hot (not boiling) water and steep for only a few minutes.

A Cuppa Antioxidants

Keep in mind that the greatest amounts of the health-enhancing antioxidants are found in green and white teas, with lesser—but still useful—amounts in oolong and black teas. If you are caffeine-sensitive, note that caffeine amounts are the opposite of antioxidants with the greatest found in black tea, then in descending order: oolong, green, and white teas.

—Victoria Dolby Toews



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