HOLISTIC HEALING

Tea for two...

polyphenols

Can black tea work dental magic in humans? This intriguing question came out of a study conducted by the New York University Dental Center. In their 2003 study, hamsters who were given a black tea extract with their meals experienced 56.6 percent fewer cavities than hamsters that were not given the tea.

The answer to the question was provided by a joint study conducted by the University of Illinois, the University of Iowa, and Sweden's Göteborg University in 2006. Researchers found that catechins and theaflavins—two polyphenols found in tea leaves—inhibit the growth of cavity-causing bacteria in plaque and reduce the production of acid. These polyphenols also reduce bad breath.

Tea is also a natural source of fluoride; in fact, tea leaves contain fluoride levels comparable to government-recommended fluoride levels for drinking water. The oldest tea leaves contain the most fluoride. White teas are made from the buds and youngest tea leaves; therefore, white tea contains less fluoride than black, green, or oolong tea.

When drinking tea to prevent cavities, tea must be consumed black—without milk, sugar, honey, or other sweeteners. —Ellen Niemer

Vitamin B₃ offers hope to MS patients

Canada has the highest incidence of multiple sclerosis (MS) in the world. A 2005 study conducted by University of Calgary researchers determined that 240 Canadians out of 100,000 will develop MS.

MS occurs when the body's immune cells target the myelin coating around nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord, destroying the underlying axons that carry electrical impulses between nerve cells. Traditional MS treatments attempt to suppress the immune system with immunosuppressant drugs.

Researchers at Harvard Medical School and Children's Hospital in Boston took a new approach in their 2006 study—strengthening the axons against the assault of MS rather than suppressing the immune system. By treating mice with nicotinamide, a form of vitamin B₃, researchers were able to reduce myelin destruction and inflammation. Axons that had already lost their myelin sheaths were protected from further deterioration. Neurological symptoms were also reduced.

Despite these optimistic findings, if the equivalent dose of nicotinamide given to mice were given to humans, it would be toxic. While researchers caution people against taking nicotinamide to treat MS, further research on its safety and effectiveness in humans provides hope for effective treatment in the future. —E.N.
Copyright of Alive: Canadian Journal of Health & Nutrition is the property of Alive Publishing and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.