Take Time For Tea

March 2001

According to William E. Gladstone, British Prime Minister in the late 1800’s . . .

"If you are cold, tea will warm you. If you are heated, it will cool you. If you are depressed, it will cheer you. If you are excited, it will calm you."

What he didn’t know was that tea is a good source of flavonoids (like quercetin, kaempferol and catechins) and other polyphenols. These are phytochemicals (plant chemicals) that may help protect against heart disease, fight cancer and help strengthen bones.

There has been strong evidence showing that tea significantly reduces the risk of stomach, colon, lung, skin and esophageal cancers. The early studies originated in the Far East and were based on green tea (the prevalent drink in that area). Later, Western researchers began studying black tea (more popular in Europe and the U.S.) and found similar results. In addition to fighting off cancer, tea drinkers may have lower rates of heart disease. The scientific evidence here, however, is not as strong. In lab studies, researchers have found that polyphenols help lower cholesterol levels.

Tea also strengthens bones. Because the caffeine in coffee appears to deplete calcium leading to weakened bones, researchers thought the same might be true for tea. Wrong. New British research shows that female tea drinkers had much stronger bones than non-tea drinkers. Tea drinkers had 5% more bone mineral density at the lumbar spine, indicating a 10% to 20% lower fracture risk. Researchers speculate that isoflavonoid chemicals in tea may have a weak estrogenic effect, reducing bone deterioration and osteoporosis risk.

How much tea must you drink to reap these health benefits? Studies vary on this subject. Some suggest drinking as little as one cup each day is sufficient while others recommend as much as four cups a day. Remember, research on tea has just begun and much more needs to be learned. And take note that while tea contains some powerful phytochemicals it is not a substitute for the phytochemicals in fruits and vegetables.

Join us for tea in the Bistro on Tuesday, March 6th and see how the unique flavors of tea can add zing to food.

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