



FOOD, HEALTH, AND YOU

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Tea Time

Drink to your health?

Drinking tea with lemon or honey has long been recommended for soothing a sore throat, cold, or flu. However, new research suggests that tea may have health benefits extending far beyond this, possibly protecting against

heart disease and certain cancers.

Tea leaves contain antioxidants, which may prevent (bad) LDL-cholesterol in the bloodstream from forming fatty deposits inside arteries. Tea also contains substances that may inhibit the formation of blood clots.

Both of these properties

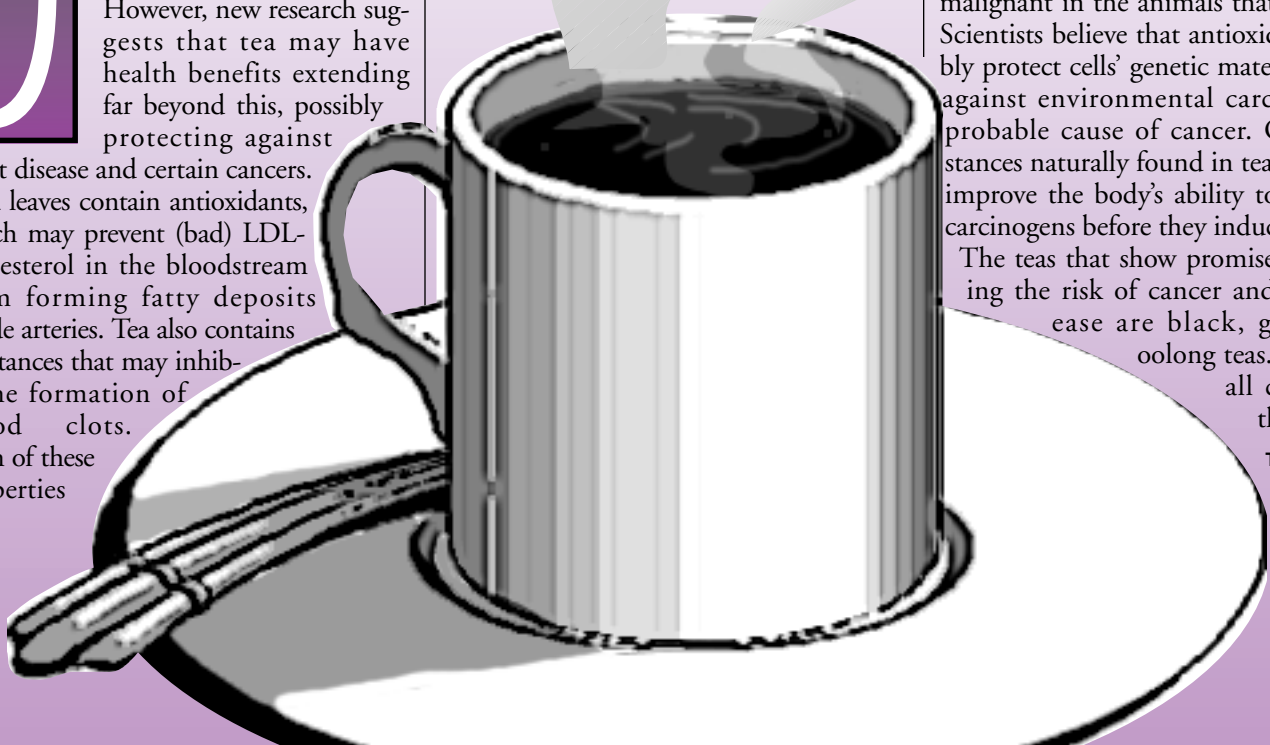
reduce the risk of heart disease.

Antioxidants also may inhibit skin, lung, and other cancers. In dozens of laboratory studies, researchers found that

rats and mice given tea did not develop tumors after being exposed to either cigarette smoke or sunlight. Also, benign tumors were less likely to become malignant in the animals that drank tea. Scientists believe that antioxidants possibly protect cells' genetic material (DNA) against environmental carcinogens, a probable cause of cancer. Other substances naturally found in tea leaves may improve the body's ability to get rid of carcinogens before they induce cancer.

The teas that show promise for reducing the risk of cancer and heart disease are black, green, and oolong teas. These teas all come from the leaves of

Tea (continued on page 3)



New Federal Dietary Guidelines Emphasize Good Nutrition And Healthy Weights

What should you eat to stay healthy? That key question is addressed in the fourth and most recent edition of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, a summary of practical advice about choosing foods that promote health and prevent disease. Issued last month by the USDA and the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the guidelines are based on the best available scientific information and serve as a basis for Federal nutrition policy.

The seven guidelines, which apply to all healthy Americans over the age of 2, are

- Eat a variety of foods.
- Balance the food you eat with physical activity—maintain or improve your weight.
- Choose a diet with plenty of grain products, vegetables, and fruits.
- Choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.
- Choose a diet moderate in sugars.
- Choose a diet moderate in salt and sodium.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so in moderation.

The new version of the dietary guidelines is similar to previous editions but differs most notably regarding advice on weight control. For example, the new edition includes a single table showing healthy weight ranges, based on height, for all adult men and women. The higher weights in each weight range apply to people with more muscle and bone. In the previ-

ous edition, height-weight tables were given for two different age groups, showing greater weights for people 35 years and older. The new guidelines, in contrast, stress that people should not gain weight as they age, even though many individuals have a tendency to do so.

“We know that weight gain in adult life is associated with bad health outcomes” said Dr. Richard Havel, vice chair of the dietary guidelines advisory committee and professor of medicine at the University of San Francisco School of Medicine. Being overweight is linked to high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, certain types of cancer, arthritis, breathing problems, and other illnesses. However, if you have not gained more than 10 pounds since reaching your adult height, if your weight already falls within the healthy range, and if you are otherwise healthy, you probably do not need to lose weight.

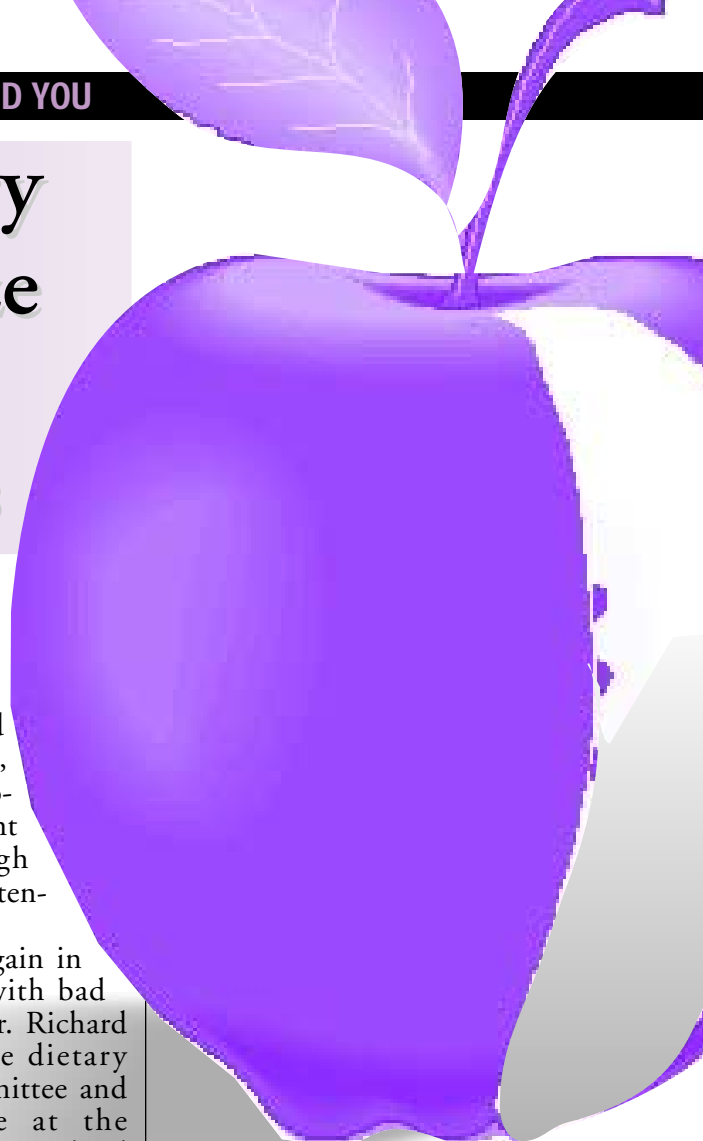
Nutritionists are discovering that, due to genetics, it may not be possible for all individuals to reach the healthy weight recorded in the guidelines. They note, however, that sometimes even a modest weight loss (10 to 15 pounds) can have dramatic health benefits, such as lowering high blood pressure and high blood cholesterol levels.

In addition to weight, the location of body fat also has important health

consequences. Research suggests that excess fat in the abdomen, or stomach area, poses a greater health risk than fat stored in the hips and thighs. Extra fat in the abdomen is linked to high blood pressure, diabetes, early heart disease, and certain types of cancer. Heredity plays a large role in determining body shape, however fat in the abdominal area can increase with alcohol use, cigarette smoking, and stress.

The easiest way to estimate your body fat distribution is to measure your waist and hips with a tape measure, and to divide the waist measurement by the hip measurement. Many experts recommend that the waist-to-hip ratio for women should be 0.80 or lower, and for men, 0.95 or lower, but there is not complete agreement on this.

The new dietary guidelines emphasize that physical activity is impor-



tant in preventing weight gain because it burns up calories. Exercise is also one of the few methods for reducing abdominal fat. The new guidelines suggest that all individuals should try to do a total of at least 30 minutes or more of moderate physical activity on most—preferably all—days of the week. The activity does not have to be done all at once; it can be spread out over the day.

If you are trying to lose weight, it is important to do so slowly and steadily. A safe and realistic weight loss rate is 1/2 to 1 pound a week, until you reach your goal. Avoid crash diets that severely restrict calories or limit the variety of foods that you eat.

The new dietary guidelines offers the following tips for decreasing calories:

- Eat less fat and fewer high fat foods.
- Eat smaller portions and limit second helpings.
- Eat more vegetables and fruits.
- Eat pasta, rice, breads, and cereals without adding fats and sugars, either during preparation or at the table.
- Eat less sugar and fewer sweets, such as candy, cakes, cookies, and soda.

The new USDA/DHHS dietary guidelines recognize that food choices are influenced by personal tastes and culture, in addition to nutrition, and emphasize that eating is one of life's greatest pleasures (and should remain so). The brochure describes how to combine affordable, easily available foods to make healthful, pleasurable diets. To order a copy of the new dietary guidelines for Americans, send a check or money order for \$0.50 to Consumer Information Center, Dept. 378-C, Pueblo, Colorado 81009. ■

Tea (continued from page 1)



the same shrub (*Camellia sinensis*), but are processed differently. Green tea leaves, which receive the least amount of processing, are quickly steamed before packaging and probably contain the most antioxidants. Green tea is popular in Asia. Black tea, the most common tea in the United States, undergoes the most processing, followed by oolong tea. Both black and oolong teas are good sources of antioxidants, but the type and amounts differ from those found in green tea. Within these three categories, hundreds of tea varieties exist.

It should be noted that most herbal teas do not contain enough antioxidants to be protective. In fact, herbal teas such as chamomile and peppermint are not teas at all (from a botanical point of view) because they do not come from the shrub that bears tea leaves. The ingredient label of an actual tea will contain the word "tea." If the label only lists ingredients such as rose hips, hibiscus, or berry leaves, the product does not contain the tea being studied for its ability to reduce chronic illnesses.

Scientists caution that research results regarding the health benefits of tea are preliminary. While there are reasons to suspect that drinking tea is beneficial, results of various types of studies performed so far are inconclusive and further research is needed. Even if the health benefits of tea are ultimately confirmed, drinking tea will never compensate for an otherwise unhealthy diet or for a lack of regular physical activity.

[Source: Tufts University *Diet and Nutrition Letter*. 1995. 13(8):4-6] ■

MARVELOUS MORSELS

- Teas are often named for the region where they are grown or for the size of the tea leaf. For example, Darjeeling is a town in India, and "pekoe" refers to a tea made from large leaves.
- The typical U.S. citizen consumes about 22 pounds of snack foods annually, according to the Snack Food Association. Sales of snack foods generate approximately \$15 billion a year.
- In large clinical trials, people who lost an average of 8 pounds by dieting and modest exercise cut their risk of developing high blood pressure by 50 percent.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that *E. coli* 0157:H7 causes as many as 20,000 cases of foodborne illness annually, with approximately one-third leading to hospitalization and several hundred ending in death.

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Address comments about this newsletter to Food, Health, and You, Department of Nutrition and Food Science, 3306 Marie Mount Hall, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Kindly direct questions on specific food and nutrition topics to your county Extension office.

If you do not receive this newsletter by mail and would like to, contact your county or Baltimore City Extension office. For information on upcoming programs on food and nutrition, or to arrange a program for your group or organization, contact your Extension home economics agent. Phone numbers of Extension offices are listed on page 4 of this issue.



Q: Is sugar bad for you?

A: Sugar is not bad for you if it is eaten in moderation and good dental hygiene is practiced. While ordinary table sugar (sucrose) contributes little nutrition besides 16 calories per teaspoon, there is no scientific evidence that a high sugar intake causes diabetes, hyperactive behavior, or obesity as many people believe. Numerous scientific studies have failed to show that sugar causes hyperactive behavior in children. The new dietary guidelines issue cautions about eating too much sugar because some foods that are rich in sugar, such as cookies, cakes, chocolate candies, and ice cream, also are rich in fat. Such foods often supply a large number of calories but relatively few nutrients. For most people, the only major risk from sugar is tooth decay.

EXTENSION CORNER

•Five county Cooperative Extension Service offices along with the Maryland division of the American Cancer Society are cosponsoring The Diet and Health Connection to Cancer program on March 16, 1996, at the Holiday Inn in Timonium, Maryland, and on March 30, 1996, at the Holiday Inn in Frederick, Maryland. Faculty from the University of Maryland and other agencies will discuss the latest research on dietary strategies for preventing cancer. Five continuing education credits will be provided. The cost of the program is \$30; registration is required. For more information, contact the Allegany, Baltimore, Carroll, Frederick, or Washington County Extension office.

•Treat yourself to a fitness break with the Weight Off Wisely—WOW—Weekend, March 8–10, 1996, at the Ramada Inn in Hagerstown, Maryland. Enjoy the pool, exercise equipment, aerobic activities, and delicious low-fat meals. Learn how to improve your nutrition, reduce stress, and enhance your self esteem. The cost for the weekend is \$135 (2 nights/double rooms) or \$85 (if commuting). For additional information or registration, contact the Calvert, Cecil, or Frederick County Extension offices.

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