

Green Tea: The cup that cheers

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THIS tea is green. And if you have four cups a day of it a day it may keep cancer and many other ailments away. But this tea with its apparently miraculous medicinal value isn't too well known in these parts.

Tea, the most widely consumed beverage in the world, has been known to man since 2737 B.C. And green tea is the nearest form to its original discovery by the Chinese emperor Shen Nong. The three basic types of regular tea - green, black and oolong - are currently available in over 300 varieties across the globe.

"The difference is a result of processing methods," says Vikram Vohra, Director of Vohra Tea Industries (P) Ltd. *"Black tea is made by withering, rolling, fermenting and drying the leaves while oolong is allowed to oxidise partially. However only steaming and drying makes green tea. The leaves are not permitted to ferment and oxidise as in black tea, thereby preserving many more nutrients and enzymes - particularly the polyphenols,"* explains Vohra, whose company introduced Jade Green Tea in the Indian market 18 months ago.

Of the 2.5 million tonnes of tea produced each year, only 20% is green tea. Though India and Sri Lanka are major producers of black tea, green one is chiefly produced and consumed in Japan, China and a few countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

According to Vohra, the taste is the main reason for the low consumption of green tea.

"Indian prefer a strong taste, while green tea is milder. Moreover, to retain the medicinal value, it has to be consumed without milk and with minimum sugar." Most of the research and experimental studies on green tea have focused on its cancer - protective features. The polyphenols in the brew are not only potent antioxidants themselves but they also seem to increase the activity of antioxidant enzymes.

While green tea is certainly not a panacea for every type of cancer, it does seem to target specific types in its preventive and therapeutic role. It includes gastrointestinal tract cancer (stomach, small intestine and pancreas), lung, esophageal and majority of breast cancers.

Studies showed that green tea, polyphenols suppress cancer cell formation by blocking the formation of cancer-causing agents such as nitrosamines, quelling the activation of carcinogens and detoxifying or trapping cancer-causing compounds.

The beverage is known to enhance the effect of antibodies and thus reduces chances of influenza, whooping cough, cholera and dental complications. Recent study found that green tea controls blood pressure and blood sugar levels, skin-aging and allergic reactions. Green tea is known to reduce cholesterol levels as well as low density lipids and helps maintaining a healthy heart.

So make it green, make it your cup of tea.