

Blends *with* Benefits

No matter your symptoms, we've got just the tea for you.

BY STACEY STEIN

THE LARGE DOUBLE-DOUBLE might be part of our Canadian identity, but we're increasingly becoming a nation of tea drinkers. Since 1991, the average Canadian's tea intake nearly tripled from 36 litres per year to a whopping 100 litres – an increase that makes our 30 per cent increase in coffee consumption over the same period seem meagre in comparison. And we aren't the only ones consuming our cuppas in greater quantities than ever before. Indeed, after water, tea is the most consumed beverage in the world. According to health experts, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Tea provides more than just a relaxing pause in our daily routines. With every cup, we're also giving our bodies a boost – and not just from caffeine. "Tea is a really great source of antioxidants," says Tristaca Curley, a registered dietitian in Halifax. As Curley explains, these antioxidants have the power to ward off disease and neutralize free radicals – naturally occurring molecules that damage otherwise healthy cells throughout the body. "Research has shown that high antioxidant intake from food can decrease one's risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's disease and more," she says.

While all teas contain polyphenols – just one type of antioxidant – the antioxidant contents of some varieties of tea work better than others in delivering specific health benefits. So fire up the kettle, grab your favourite mug and learn which brew is best for you. »

**IF YOU'RE
BATTLING THE BULGE...
TRY WHITE TEA**

As the least processed of all the teas from the *camellia sinensis* plant, white tea packs the biggest polyphenol punch – as well as some promising news for dieters. In a 2009 study on human fat cells, German researchers found that white tea extract helped prevent the growth of new fat cells, while also stimulating existing fat cells to break down. Look for a good-quality loose-leaf white tea at a specialty tea store. Loose-leaf teas tend to retain more antioxidants – and usually have more flavour – than their bagged cousins.

**IF YOU'RE
AT RISK FOR
CARDIOVASCULAR
DISEASE...**

TRY GREEN TEA

Tea does more than soothe the soul – it's good for your heart, too. While green tea is brimming with powerful disease-fighting antioxidants called catechins, one in particular – epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG) – is linked to a whole host of heart-health benefits. According to Dr. Sandra Davidge, a professor in the department of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Alberta in Edmonton and author of a 2008 research paper on EGCG, this catechin acts as an anti-inflammatory, protecting the cells that line the interior surface of our blood vessels. The health of these cells is crucial, she says.

"If they become damaged or impaired, it can lead to high blood pressure and other vascular problems."

**IF YOU'RE PRONE TO
DIGESTIVE PROBLEMS...**

TRY ROOIBOS TEA

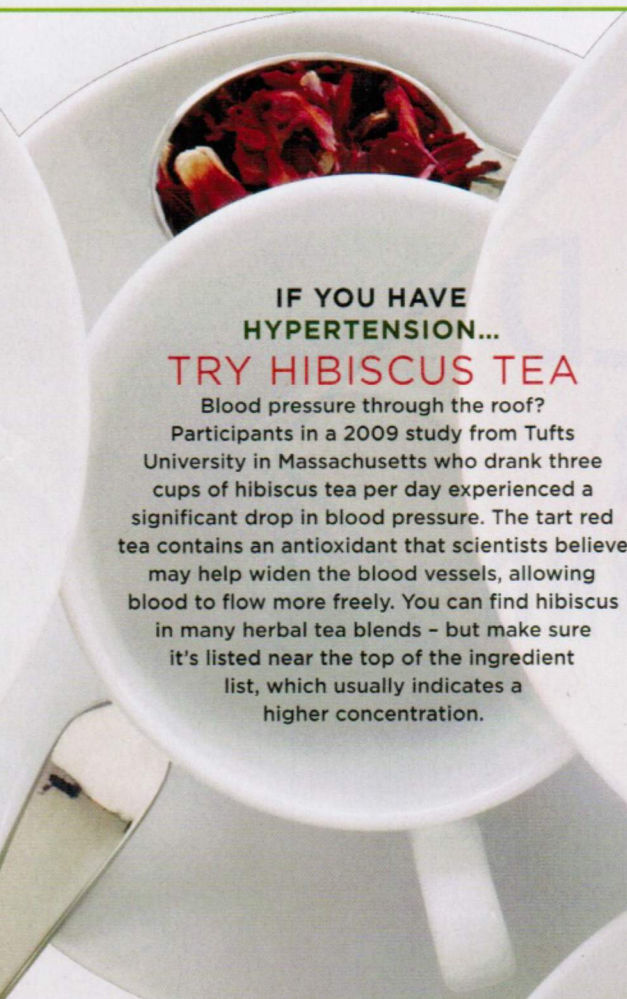
Not only is rooibos tea naturally caffeine free, it's also loaded with flavonoids – a type of polyphenol with anti-inflammatory properties. According to Dr. Nabeel Ghayur, a postdoctoral fellow at McMaster University in Hamilton who coauthored a 2006 research paper on the health benefits of rooibos, this anti-inflammatory effect can help tame tummy troubles.

"Flavonoids contribute to the relaxation of gut muscles and intestinal tissues, and can actually have an antidiarrheal effect," he says. To make the most of rooibos's stomach-soothing benefits, Ghayur recommends one to one-and-a-half teaspoons of loose-leaf rooibos steeped in 120 millilitres of water two to three times a day.

**IF YOU
STRUGGLE WITH
ANXIETY...**

TRY CHAMOMILE TEA

The results of a 2009 randomized control trial published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychopharmacology* suggest chamomile may be helpful in treating generalized anxiety disorder. "Chamomile is a very mild sedative," explains Evelyn Coggins, a clinical herbalist based in Pemberton, B.C. "So if you just want to calm down – but you don't want to be zonked out – a cup of chamomile tea is a great option." Derived from the chamomile flower, the tea contains apigenin, a flavonoid and anti-anxiety agent that binds to the same receptors in the brain as prescription sedatives. Coggins recommends covering your cup or pot when steeping the tea to retain the chamomile's volatile anti-inflammatory oils, which are responsible for its calming effect and can escape in the form of steam.



IF YOU HAVE HYPERTENSION... TRY HIBISCUS TEA

Blood pressure through the roof?

Participants in a 2009 study from Tufts University in Massachusetts who drank three cups of hibiscus tea per day experienced a significant drop in blood pressure. The tart red tea contains an antioxidant that scientists believe may help widen the blood vessels, allowing blood to flow more freely. You can find hibiscus in many herbal tea blends – but make sure it's listed near the top of the ingredient list, which usually indicates a higher concentration.

TEA TIPS

Give the health benefits of your brew an added boost with these strategies.

- Steep your tea for at least five minutes. A bit of patience pays off, since the polyphenol content of your tea increases with steeping time.
- Become a dunker. Up to five times as many flavonoids (compounds with antioxidant properties) are released when you continuously dunk your tea bag or infuser.
- Add a little lemon. Tea can interfere with iron absorption, but the vitamin C in citrus can help counteract the effect.
- Reconsider decaf. Decaffeinated teas may have lower levels of beneficial flavonoids.

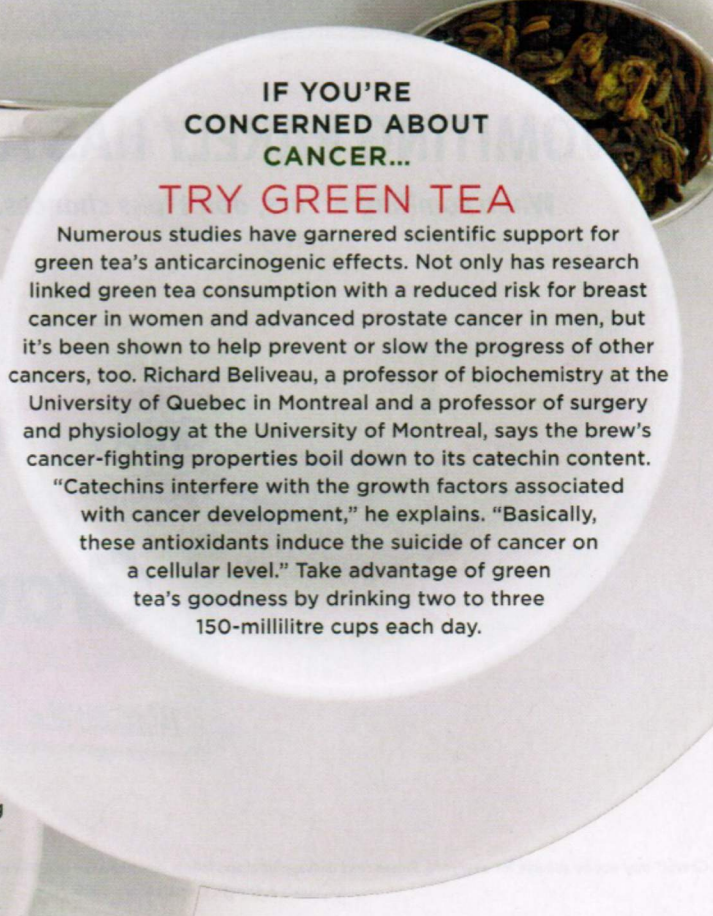
HOUSE BLENDS

We share our favourite tea recipes from the Canadian Living Test Kitchen at canadianliving.com/november.



IF YOU'RE NOT BREATHING EASY... TRY GINGER TEA

Whenever Dr. Nabeel Ghayur suffers from a respiratory ailment such as chest congestion, he reaches for a cup of ginger tea. "It tends to dilate the bronchial tree and soothe the airways," he says, noting that this effect may also help asthmatics. "Asthma patients experience constriction or narrowing of their lung airways, and anything that can relax or open up those airways tends to be of immense value." The pungent brew also contains a compound that can help suppress coughs.



IF YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT CANCER...

TRY GREEN TEA

Numerous studies have garnered scientific support for green tea's anticarcinogenic effects. Not only has research linked green tea consumption with a reduced risk for breast cancer in women and advanced prostate cancer in men, but it's been shown to help prevent or slow the progress of other cancers, too. Richard Beliveau, a professor of biochemistry at the University of Quebec in Montreal and a professor of surgery and physiology at the University of Montreal, says the brew's cancer-fighting properties boil down to its catechin content. "Catechins interfere with the growth factors associated with cancer development," he explains. "Basically, these antioxidants induce the suicide of cancer on a cellular level." Take advantage of green tea's goodness by drinking two to three 150-millilitre cups each day.