

Real Foods that Heal
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White Tea

With the Olympics currently on center stage of the world's attention, this week I am bringing to our attention again a food which probably originated in China, and has now over centuries proved its worth by becoming the most consumed beverage in the world: tea. And specifically for its health benefits and rare delicate taste, I am focusing on white tea. When I first heard of white tea some years ago, I was a little confused. I knew about black tea, which looks black when dry but sort of brown in my cup when it is steeped, and green tea, which does look green when the leaves are loose and dry but only a little yellow-green in the tea-cup. But white? And then of course I learned, as you know well what I did not know then, that neither the dry leaves nor the hot steaming tea is white. White tea is so named because at the time of harvest, the new tea leaves are still curled up and covered with a fine white hair. All white tea is hand harvested at that early stage of growth, and is therefore more expensive than other teas. The leaves are allowed to dry naturally and minimally heated to stop oxidation. The best white teas are loose leaf rather than in bags, and the tea has a slightly sweet and pleasant flavor, and not at all "grassy" like some green teas. But if you could see and identify the flood of molecules and the complex mix of natural compounds which pours out of those leaves into your cup as they steep in the hot water, that's when you would get really excited.

Volumes of research have documented the health benefits of a potent antioxidant in green tea called ECGC, a type of flavonoid. Analysis has consistently shown that white tea also provides very high levels of ECGC, and I was able to find some research literature suggesting that white tea may have even higher cancer preventing ability in laboratory experiments than green tea. The antioxidants in tea have been thoroughly studied, and in addition to their cancer preventing qualities, have been shown to inhibit oxidation of LDL cholesterol, an important step in the development of heart disease and stroke. As we discussed in the bulletin about green tea earlier this year, laboratory studies have shown that ECGC slows the growth of breast cancer cells, even cells that have become resistant to some types of chemotherapy. The cancer inhibitory effects of tea have been well studied, and are certainly due to a synergistic effect of the multiple compounds from the leaf, more than just ECGC or any single antioxidant. This is why I am certain that your best health strategy with regard to tea is to drink it as a whole food, and not to rely on extracts found in pills.

I hope I have piqued your interest enough to not only make white tea a consistent presence in your beverage choices, but also to read and learn more on your own. You can find not only really great teas but also very good information on tea's

history, the differences between types of tea and brewing suggestions at <http://www.inpursuitoftea.com/> In the meantime...

How to prepare white tea

Take 1 tsp loose white tea leaves in the bottom of a glass measuring cup (Pyrex or other heat resistant), and pour 8 oz water over them that is very hot but far less than boiling. Use filtered water that tastes good; bad water makes bad tea. Do not pour boiling water on white tea, since it “cooks” the leaves and destroys some of their delicate flavor. White tea should be steeped for 4 to 5 minutes, and the leaves can be reused for another cup. You can then pour it through a strainer into your favorite tea-cup. Add to the health benefits of this experience by drinking it slowly, giving yourself some space for quiet breathing or peaceful music.

To your health,

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P.S. Your family and friends deserve to know how to reduce their heart disease and cancer risk by food choices. Please forward this e-mail to them using the link below.

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