

Herbal Tea: Phytochemical Composition and Therapeutic Potential – A Comprehensive Review

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ABSTRACT

Herbal tea is a natural beverage prepared from the leaves, seeds, flowers, bark, or roots of various plants. Unlike traditional tea, which is derived from the plant *Camellia sinensis*, herbal teas are generally referred to as **tisanes**. These beverages have been widely used in different cultures for their therapeutic and health-promoting properties. Herbal teas are available in many varieties and are often consumed to enhance overall well-being. Many people drink them for their stimulating or calming effects, as they may help strengthen the immune system, relieve digestive discomfort, and promote relaxation. Commonly consumed herbal teas include black tea, green tea, chamomile tea, ginger tea, ginseng tea, peppermint tea, cinnamon tea, and several others. Among these, Astragalus tea—derived from a traditional Chinese medicinal herb—is known for its strong anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial properties. It has been used as a supportive remedy for individuals with weakened immune systems, including those living with HIV and AIDS. Ongoing scientific research continues to explore and confirm the health benefits associated with herbal tea consumption, while generally reporting minimal adverse effects when used appropriately.

Keywords: Herbal tea; Bioactive compounds; Phytochemistry; Nutraceuticals.

INTRODUCTION

Tea is one of the most widely consumed beverages and is served daily in almost every household, social gathering, and workplace. This popular drink is known for its refreshing properties and is often consumed to reduce stress, fatigue, and anxiety while helping to boost immunity, support an active lifestyle, and promote cellular rejuvenation.[1] Herbal teas are generally prepared by infusing or decocting different herbs, spices, or plant materials and usually do not contain caffeine.[2] These beverages differ from decaffeinated teas, in which caffeine has been removed, and from caffeinated teas prepared from the processed leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant.[3]

Many herbal teas are consumed not only as beverages but also for their perceived health benefits. Technically, the term “herbal tea” can be misleading because these preparations do not contain leaves from the *Camellia sinensis* plant. Any beverage derived

from the tea shrub naturally contains caffeine as it is an inherent component of the plant.[4] A more accurate term for these herbal preparations is “**tisane**.” Herbal tisanes consist of various plant materials such as flowers, herbs, spices, and dried fruits that are naturally caffeine-free, including rose buds, lemongrass, chamomile flowers, and basil.[5] Sometimes traditional teas, such as chai, are flavored with herbs, spices, or fruits. If the blend contains no actual tea leaves, caffeine is absent; however, when tea leaves are included, caffeine will be present.[6]

Bhat R.B.[7] conducted a survey of herbal medicinal teas used in the Western Cape region of South Africa to evaluate the different herbal teas utilized for treating various health conditions. Each medicinal tea package typically contains a carefully selected mixture of four or more herbs, many of which are cultivated organically in gardens located in valleys near the southernmost regions of South Africa, along

Relevant conflicts of interest/financial disclosures: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

with certain native herbs collected from nearby mountainous areas.[8] In addition to treating specific health problems, these herbal teas are formulated to nourish and strengthen the body systems associated with the affected organs.[9] The investigation reported approximately twenty-one varieties of herbal teas used for different therapeutic purposes.[10]

Some of the trade names of herbal teas available in South African markets include Arthritea, Asthmitea, Constipatea, Detoxtea, Diabetea, Dietea, Energetea, Flootea, Hangovertea, Heartburntea, Hi-Lo B.P. Tea, Indigestea, Kidneytea, Liveritea, Relaxitea, Sleepitea, Slimtea, Tranquillitea, Tummytea, Ulceritea, and Voomatea.[11] These herbal formulations consist of plant materials belonging to twelve botanical families and about twenty-eight different species of medicinal herbs.[12] In South Africa, traditional herbal therapies and the effectiveness of medicinal teas are widely valued and commonly practiced.[13]

Walch S.G.[14] reported a method for evaluating terpenes, major polyphenolic compounds, and overall antioxidant activity in sage tea and tinctures available in the German market using **¹H-NMR spectroscopy**. The study demonstrated that this analytical technique can rapidly provide quantitative information necessary for assessing the quality of sage-based food and medicinal products.[15] With a single analytical procedure, it is possible to identify and quantify several important bioactive constituents associated with health benefits. Moreover, NMR techniques can be applied to different sage-derived preparations, including herbal teas and medicinal tinctures.[16]

The metabolic effects of several spices, teas, and caffeine have also been reported by Plantega M.W. [17] According to the author, the consumption of spicy foods or herbal beverages may increase thermogenesis and, under certain conditions, enhance satiety. Compounds such as capsaicin, black pepper, ginger, mixed spices, green tea, black tea, and caffeine are particularly relevant in this regard.[18] These bioactive substances can influence metabolic parameters including fat oxidation, thermogenesis, and appetite regulation. Although clinical outcomes may vary depending on individual compliance, thermogenic compounds present in these beverages

may contribute to maintaining energy balance and preventing obesity.[19]

Rusaczonok A.[20] investigated the total polyphenol content and antioxidant properties of various teas and herbal infusions available in commercial markets. The study materials included herbal teas prepared from chamomile (*Anthodium Chamomillae*), peppermint leaves (*Folium Menthae Piperitae*), and lemon balm leaves (*Folium Melissae*), along with traditional teas derived from *Camellia sinensis* such as green, black, Pu-erh, and white tea.[21] The antioxidant activity of these beverages was measured spectrophotometrically using synthetic cation radicals (ABTS•+) and expressed as Trolox Equivalent Antioxidant Capacity (TEAC), while total polyphenol content was determined using the Folin–Ciocalteu method and reported as Gallic Acid Equivalent (GAE). The findings indicated a positive correlation between polyphenol concentration and antioxidant activity in both herbal and conventional teas.

Das M. et al. also examined the effects of hot water extracts of green tea on skeletal muscle function and neurotransmission using innervated and denervated rat diaphragms. Their findings suggested that green tea extract enhances skeletomotor activity at lower concentrations but produces paralytic effects at higher concentrations. The extract reversed the submaximal paralytic effects of D-tubocurarine and decamethonium but did not influence acetylcholine- or potassium chloride-induced contractures in denervated rat diaphragms. Additionally, magnesium chloride was found to counteract both the facilitative and inhibitory effects of green tea extract on neuromuscular transmission.

Overall, these studies highlight the diversity of commercially available herbal teas and emphasize the therapeutic significance of the medicinal plants used in their formulations.

HERBAL TEA: NATURE'S SOOTHING BREW

One of the most well-liked drinks in the world today is herbal tea, which is valued for both its possible health advantages and its delightful flavors and scents. Herbal tea is created from a wide range of plants, including flowers, leaves, seeds, roots, and spices, and usually doesn't include caffeine, in



contrast to traditional teas derived from the *Camellia sinensis* plant (such black, green, or oolong tea).[22]

WHAT IS HERBAL TEA?

An infusion created by steeping herbs, spices, fruits, or other plant elements in hot water is known as herbal tea (sometimes termed tisane). It is technically a herbal infusion rather than "true tea" because it does not contain tea leaves from the tea plant.[23]



Figure 1: Herbal Tea Prepared from Mixed Medicinal Herbs

COMMON HERBAL INGREDIENTS INCLUDE

Common Types of Herbal Teas and Their Therapeutic Benefits					
S. No.	No.	Herbal Tea	Scientific Name	Major Bioactive Compounds	Therapeutic Benefits
1	1		<i>Matricaria chamomilla</i>	Flavonoids, Apigenin	Promotes relaxation, improves sleep, reduces anxiety and inflammation
2	2		<i>Mentha piperita</i>	Menthol, Flavonoids	Aids digestion, relieves bloating, reduces headache & nausea
3	3		<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	Gingerol, Shogaol	Anti-inflammatory, improve digestion, relieves nausea and cold
4	4		<i>Cymbopogon citratus</i>	Citral, Flavonoids	Anti-inflammatory, improve digestion, relieves nausea and cold
5	5		<i>Hibiscus sabdariffa</i>	Anthocyanins, Organic acids	Helps lower blood pressure, antioxidant, supports heart health
6	6		<i>Rooibos</i>	Aspalathin, Polyphenols	Caffeine-free antioxidant tea, supports immune system
7	7		Holy Basil (Tulsi)	Eugenol, Ursolic acid	Adaptogenic, reduces stress, improves immunity
			Holy Basil (Tulsi)	Adaptogenic, reduces stress, improves immunity	

Figure 2: Common Types of Herbal Teas and Their Therapeutic Benefits

Every component contributes to the distinct flavor profile and possible health benefits of herbal tea.[24]

FLAVOUR PROFILE AND BENEFITS

Shatavari: Provides a soothing and comforting base for the herbal tea blend. The addition of coriander leaves and chasteberry imparts a mild, slightly herbaceous flavor. Spices such as nutmeg, cardamom, and cinnamon contribute a warm and aromatic character to the mixture.[25]

Ashwagandha: Known for its adaptogenic properties, it helps the body manage stress and improve resilience. Lemongrass and fennel introduce

a fresh, citrusy aroma and light flavor, while menthol and tulsi offer cooling effects and support respiratory health.[26]

Roselle: Contributes a tangy and fruity flavor that helps balance the strong spiciness of the other ingredients. The inclusion of giloy, amla, and turmeric enhances the immune-boosting potential of the herbal tea formulation.

Rosemary: Adds a subtle pine-like fragrance to the blend and is known for its potential role in improving mental clarity and cognitive function.[27]

HISTORY AND CULTURAL IMPORTANCE



Herbal teas have been consumed for thousands of years in different cultures for both medicinal and traditional purposes. In **traditional Chinese medicine**, herbs such as chrysanthemum and ginseng have been widely used for their therapeutic properties and health-promoting effects.[28] In **Indian Ayurvedic practices**, herbal infusions prepared from ingredients like ginger and tulsi are valued for helping to balance the body's energy and support overall wellness. Similarly, the **ancient Greeks and Egyptians** prepared aromatic herbal infusions for ceremonial rituals as well as for their medicinal and therapeutic benefits.[29]

HEALTH BENEFITS

Despite the fact that scientific proof varies by herb, many herbal teas are prized for their inherent qualities:

1. Assistance with Digestion

Peppermint tea is commonly used to relieve digestive discomfort, including indigestion and bloating. Ginger tea is well known for improving digestion and helping to reduce nausea.[30]

2. Sleep and Relaxation

Chamomile tea is often consumed before bedtime due to its calming and relaxing effects. Lavender tea may help reduce stress and anxiety, promoting better relaxation.[31]

3. Antioxidant Properties

Hibiscus tea is rich in antioxidants and may contribute to cardiovascular health. Rooibos tea also provides significant antioxidant compounds while naturally remaining caffeine-free.[32]

4. Immune System Support

Echinacea and tulsi (Holy Basil) have traditionally been used to strengthen the immune system. Many green herbs contain essential vitamins and minerals that support overall immune function.[33]

HOW TO MAKE HERBAL TEA

Basic stages for preparation:

1. Select your herb or herbs: dried or fresh.

2. Measure: One tablespoon of fresh herbs or one to two teaspoons of dried herbs per cup.

3. Heat water: Pour boiling water over the herbs.

4. Steep: Leave it covered for five to ten minutes.

5. Strain and serve, adding lemon or honey if preferred.[34]

SAFETY AND CONSIDERATIONS

While herbal teas are generally safe, there are a few things to consider:

- Certain drugs, such as blood thinners, may interact with certain plants.
- Before using specific herbal mixes, women who are pregnant or nursing should speak with their healthcare professional.[35]
- Certain herbs, including chamomile, might cause allergies. Select premium herbs from reliable suppliers at all times.[36]

ADVANTAGES

Herbal teas are widely consumed for their medicinal and refreshing properties, as they are believed to promote relaxation and overall well-being. These beverages are often taken to relieve digestive problems, support stomach health, provide detoxifying effects, and strengthen the immune system.[37] It is important to note that different herbs possess unique therapeutic properties, allowing individuals to prepare customized herbal infusions depending on the desired health benefits. Several types of herbal teas are known for their specific advantages.

Among them, green tea is considered one of the healthiest beverages.[38] It is associated with numerous health benefits, including protection against certain cancers, prevention of gum disease and dental cavities, and support for weight management. Another form of green tea is **matcha**, which is



prepared from finely powdered green tea leaves. Unlike regular green tea, drinking matcha involves consuming the entire leaf in powdered form, which provides a higher concentration of nutrients and offers a wide range of potential health benefits.[39]

Adding a small amount of **dandelion and nettle** to a blend of **peppermint and red raspberry leaf tea** may help increase milk production in breastfeeding mothers.

- **Black tea** is known to be rich in antioxidants and contains very low amounts of fat, sodium, and calories. It may also contribute to the management of cardiovascular disorders and has been associated with a reduced risk of Parkinson's disease.

- **Oolong tea**, a popular beverage in many Asian countries, is believed to help regulate blood glucose levels in individuals with Type-2 diabetes. Regular consumption may also assist in weight management.[40]

- **Yerba mate tea** is another beneficial herbal beverage. It has been reported to reduce the risk of heart disease and certain types of cancer. Additionally, it contains essential vitamins such as A, B1, B2, and C, along with minerals including magnesium, potassium, calcium, iron, and riboflavin, which are often lacking in regular diets.[41]

- **Chamomile tea** is one of the most commonly consumed herbal teas. It is widely used as a natural sleep aid due to its mild sedative properties. It also acts as a gentle laxative and helps relieve stomach discomfort. Research suggests that chamomile increases glycine levels, a compound that reduces muscle spasms and may help alleviate menstrual cramps.[42]

- **Red raspberry leaf tea** is considered beneficial for women who are planning to conceive or are pregnant. It is believed to help reduce labor pain by strengthening the pelvic muscles and uterus without inducing contractions, thereby not increasing the risk of miscarriage or premature labor.[43]

- **Astragalus tea** has been reported to possess immune-enhancing properties and has been studied

for its supportive role in conditions such as HIV and AIDS.

- **Ginger tea** is widely used to relieve different types of nausea, including motion sickness and morning sickness.

- **Cardamom tea** is helpful in relieving flatulence, preventing stomach pain, and improving digestion. It may also help reduce nausea, clear respiratory congestion, and relieve cough. Additionally, it may help manage mood changes experienced by women during the menstrual cycle.[44]

- **Ginger** acts as a natural stimulant and energizer. Ginger tea helps stimulate and soothe the digestive system and is beneficial for individuals experiencing nausea. Due to its anti-inflammatory properties, ginger tea may also provide relief for people suffering from arthritis.[45]

- A combination of **peppermint and chamomile tea** is often used as an effective remedy for digestive discomfort and upset stomach.

- Overall, **herbal teas** are widely recognized for their potential health benefits, including soothing the digestive system, helping to regulate blood pressure, and possibly reducing the risk of certain cancers.[46]

DISADVANTAGES

The following are some drawbacks of drinking particular herbal teas:

- It is possible that some of these teas, either from their growing region or during production, include potentially harmful substances such as colors, adhesives, and flavor enhancers. Green tea has the following effects:[47]

- Green tea drinking can cause allergic reactions, albeit these are quite uncommon. Some of these include swelling around the lips, tongue, or face; breathing difficulties; and other respiratory or throat-related problems.[48] In these situations, it is advisable to cease drinking green tea and seek immediate medical attention



- Prolonged durations of heavy green tea consumption have also been linked to oesophageal cancer prevention. [49]
- Green tea is known to have additional, less severe

side effects (although rarely), such as:

1. Heartburn
2. An unsettled stomach
3. Appetite loss
4. Diarrhea or constipation
5. Anxiety, agitation, or nervousness
6. Lack of sleep
7. Abnormal heartbeats
8. A headache.

In order to determine whether the patient is experiencing any further discomfort, such cases need to be reported to the doctor very once [50].

Since black tea frequently contains caffeine, it results in the following effects:

- Because caffeine stimulates the central nervous system, it can occasionally make adults, kids, and babies sleep ill. It may worsen urge incontinence and also acts as a diuretic on the kidneys, raising urine and urine sodium/potassium levels and perhaps lowering blood sodium/potassium levels. Although not very often, black tea can (very rarely) result in these situations when taken because it contains trace amounts of caffeine.[51]
- If taken regularly, it is known to erode dental enamel
- Black tea that contains 200 milligrams of caffeine (4 to 5 cups, depending on tea strength and

cup size) may raise blood sugar levels. Patients with diabetes should utilize caffeine-containing beverages, like black tea, with caution.

- Although it is unclear if the tannin in black tea has a substantial carcinogenic effect on humans, an animal study suggests that tannin fractions from tea plants may raise the risk of cancer.[52]

SIDE EFFECTS OF CHAMOMILE TEA

- When taking chamomile, one should exercise caution if they have an allergy to plants in the Composite family, which is a broad group that includes flowers like daisies, ragweed, asters, and chrysanthemums. The majority of people can consume this herb without any issues, although there have been sporadic reports of allergies such skin rashes and bronchial constriction.[53]

Because chamomile tea might cause uterine contractions, it is not recommended for pregnant women to drink it. It is also recommended that people who are already using blood thinners avoid drinking this tea because chamomile has a blood-thinning impact [54].

OTHER TYPES OF TEA

Safrole, a poisonous substance, makes up about 80% of sassafras tea. Large safrole intake has been linked to an increased risk of liver damage, according to studies. It is not recommended to drink sassafras tea while pregnant or nursing. It is recommended that healthy non-pregnant people consume sassafras tea cautiously [55].

CONCLUSION

Herbal tea is more than simply a warm beverage; it's a centuries-old custom with roots in culture, health, and enjoyment of the senses. Herbal teas are a lovely opportunity to connect with the healing powers of nature, whether you prefer a soothing cup before bed, a revitalizing brew after meals, or a health-promoting infusion during the day

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HOW TO CITE: Sunny Kumar, Sunita Dhiman, Jyoti Gupta, Shalini Devi, Herbal Tea: Phytochemical Composition and Therapeutic Potential – A Comprehensive Review, *J. Pharm. Sci.*, 2026, 2 (3), 350-357. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19099821>

