

Tea for thee

Do you drink your tea or coffee very hot? Straight out of the jug? Not smart! You could be setting yourself up for cancer of the oesophagus, that very useful tube which takes food from your mouth to your stomach. A study in the British Medical Journal found a high incidence of this cancer in Northern Iran. While oesophageal cancers are usually caused by smoking and alcohol, in Northern Iran few people smoke and drink alcohol, but they do drink extremely hot tea.

Drinking tea at 70°C can increase your risk eightfold, while waiting five to ten minutes, as the legendary Mrs Beeton of cookbook fame suggested, reduces the risks considerably, bringing the temperature down to 65°C. If you're used to super-hot, this may seem lukewarm to you, but to your oesophagus, it'll be heaven. Oesophageal cancer is long, painful and miserable. A Melbourne friend of mine died of it a year or so ago, and I heard that it was horrendous.

Tea comes in many forms, from black to green, all flavours of herbs, and lots of blends. Tea can be a therapeutic drink, with peppermint tea good not only for the digestion (it reduces bloating and wind), but it's also slightly calming. Thyme tea is a good antimicrobial, and if you're getting a cold, you can gargle with warm thyme tea to help kill the bugs. Chamomile tea is soothing, eases cramps, and also reduces bloating, improving your digestion. If you think they taste like rat poison without some sort of sweetening, a teaspoon of honey is a healthy improvement. Stevia is also a healthy addition, but an acquired taste, although if you're swapping from saccharine, you may find it fine.

Many teas are available commercially, both in bags or loose. Saraband Health can obtain all manner of teas, herbal, green or otherwise, and many blends, and my clients receive 10% discount on these.

Mrs Beeton probably didn't know much about allergies, as the serious ones are mostly a more recent phenomenon. If someone in your family has a gluten, wheat or other allergy, I can also assist with lots of different products, particularly gluten free items. Just ask, and I can place your request in my next order. In some cases, I can do better than the shop prices for you.

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[Advice in these columns is of a general nature only and is not to be taken as specific treatment.]