

Drinking Tea May Help the Heart

Researchers find regular tea drinking may lower the risk of heart attack and improve recovery.

People who drink more than three cups of black tea daily may have only half the risk of having a heart attack than those who don't drink tea. This is what Dutch researchers discovered in analyzing tea consumption in 4,807 adults for over 5½ years.

Scientists looked at tea intake of subjects over 55 years of age between 1990-1997 who had no history of heart attack when the study began. They compared tea consumption to the number of heart attacks experienced in the study population over time.

Participants who drank more than 3 cups of black tea everyday had ½ the risk of having a heart attack and 1/3 the risk of dying from heart attack than non-tea drinkers over the period of the study.

Tea is a major source of plant chemicals, called *flavonoids*, in the Western diet. Several previous studies have shown that flavonoids may protect against heart disease, but evidence is still conflicting.

Because this study was *observational*, researchers were unable to determine exact mechanisms for how tea may protect against heart attack. Potential explanations include protection against oxidation of LDL (bad) cholesterol that contributes to hardening of the arteries, relaxation of the blood vessels, and reduction of inflammation.

This study suggests a protective effect of black tea consumption against heart attack and improved survival after an attack. While one study does not warrant widespread advice on changing dietary habits, there is growing evidence on tea's benefits and certainly no harm in continuing to consume tea along with a heart healthy diet for most individuals.

References:

Geleijnse, JM, Launer, LJ, van der Kuip, DA, Hofman, A, Witteman, J. (2002). Inverse association of tea and flavonoid intakes with incident myocardial infarction: the Rotterdam Study. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 75: 880-886.