

Put the kettle on for a cuppa tea

IT is a beloved habit for many, not just for its comforting preparation and aroma, but also its health benefits.

Drinking and serving tea is a daily ritual for Malaysians, enjoyed at any occasion, whether relaxing at home, entertaining guests or simply taking a break.

Green, black and herbal teas contain phytonutrients, compounds that not only give plants their colour, flavour and aroma, but also support good health.

Here's a look at the health benefits of this much-loved beverage and its many versions or varieties:

GREEN AND BLACK TEA

These two types of tea support antioxidant activity. Made from the *Camellia sinensis* plant, green tea contains four components called catechins, which are part of a family of compounds known as flavonoids.

But if you want green tea's nutritional benefits coupled with an energy boost, then opt for black tea. Black tea's "functional" compounds may also reduce stroke risk.

University of California Los Angeles researchers conducted an evidence-based review of nine studies that involved 195,000 people in total, including 4,378 stroke cases.

The data showed that drinking three cups of black tea reduced stroke risk by 21 per cent. Researchers speculated that EGCG, the tea's main catechin was

a contributing factor.

Green, black and white teas all contain L-Theanine, which is the reason tea gives you an energy boost without the coffee jitters.

CHAMOMILE

Chamomile promotes relaxation and restful sleep. Chamomile's sleep-inducing effects have to do with the flavonoid apigenin, which binds to certain receptors in the brain, causing sleepiness.

Chamomile also holds anti-inflammatory properties. Researchers from Universiti Putra Malaysia found that consuming chamomile can help reduce symptoms of dysmenorrhea, as well as anxiety. The study highlighted that the greatest reduction in pain severity occurred when chamomile consumption was combined with regular yoga practice.

LAVENDER

Just like lavender essential oils which promote relaxation and sleep, drinking lavender tea has calming benefits. Inhaling lavender tea's steam may slow nervous system activity, prompting relaxation, according to the University of Maryland Medical Centre.

Aromatherapists often use lavender to treat headaches, nervous disorders and exhaustion.

Other natural health practitioners recommend it in a bath to treat muscle and joint pain. Try a spot of

lavender tea before bed and feel your cares melt away.

PEPPERMINT

For an overall digestive soother, drink a steaming cup of peppermint tea. One of the best teas for digestion, peppermint is generally known to soothe stomachaches, cramps and heartburn.

Refreshing peppermint contains menthol, which can break up phlegm and thin mucous. The next time you have a cold, inhale the steam before you drink up.



Green tea contains four components called catechins, which are part of a family of compounds known as flavonoids. PICTURE CREDIT: HERBALIFE



GINGER

Ginger contains at least 14 bioactive compounds that yield many health benefits.

Ginger contains a high level of antioxidants, which benefit heart health. It's also considered an anti-inflammatory herb. Data suggests it moderates pain-sensitivity receptors, which may help ease arthritis stiffness.

Ginger's most common benefit, however, is easing stomach woes. Of the many ginger studies, one study found that pregnant women who

used ginger supplements experienced less vomiting and nausea than the placebo group — without side effects.

Green, black and herbal tea compounds may have beneficial properties, but the ritual of preparing tea also has a place in a healthy lifestyle. Curling up with a warm cup of tea is a calorie-free way to relax at the end of the day and it's a great way to stay hydrated.

*The writer is senior director, worldwide nutrition education and training at Herbalife.