


Drinking for Thinking

It's common knowledge that foods can affect moods. Did you ever think that what you drink could affect your moods and even brain activity? Many natural healing teas have scientifically proven properties that can influence you in subtle ways. For instance, green tea has moderate amounts of caffeine, but drinkers of the tea observe that it also has a calming effect. Research from Japan shows that this may be due to a non protein amino acid, theanine. Theanine has a non-sedating relaxing effect and even changes your brain waves into the alpha state. The alpha waves indicate an alert relaxed state (as compared to an alert excited or alert stressed state.) These exact same waves have been studied in meditating monks. Incidentally green tea, especially the ground "Matcha" form is traditionally served for Buddhist monks who would spend hours in meditation each day. Imagine drinking a safe, instant relaxant during your busy schedule! Theanine also alters dopamine and serotonin levels which can increase cognitive function and learning abilities.

Herbal teas have also been used by other cultures to enhance mental health and function. In South America the native Guarani people use the Yerba Mate plant and tea to calm depression, stimulate the mind and fight fatigue. The active ingredient, mateine, is similar to caffeine in that it is stimulating, but without the jittery and nervous side effects. Yerba Mate is also excellent for cleansing, aiding digestion, reducing appetite and boosting immunity. However, if you have trouble sleeping you may want to be wary. Both green tea and yerbe mate are excellent coffee substitutes for those needing a little natural mental boost.

What we drink can affect our brains in other ways. Both traditional tea (from the *camellia sinensis* plant – white, green, black and oolong) and herbal teas are high in polyphenols and have high antioxidant activity. These compounds help protect our cells

from free radical damage and can prevent damage in the brain from fat oxidation. Rooibos tea, from South Africa has been shown to prevent brain deterioration in animal studies. Rats were allowed to consume as much rooibos tea as they wanted. Those rats that consumed water had expected age-related brain deterioration in four areas of the brain, whilst those consuming the rooibos tea had no changes! Protection against fat oxidation may protect us from age-related diseases. Rooibos tea is caffeine free and non-stimulating, which makes it ideal for the end of the day and after dinner.

So take some time to brew and sip the tea of your choice and enjoy a gentle attitude adjustment and improved mental health. * 

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