

Nutrition and Health Info-Sheet

For Health Professionals

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 October 2008

Some Facts About Catechins

What are catechins?

Catechins are phytochemical compounds found in high concentrations in a variety of plant-based foods and beverages. Based on their structure, catechins are classified as flavanols and include the following compounds: catechin, epicatechin, epigallocatechin, epicatechin gallate, and epigallocatechin gallate. High concentrations of catechin can be found in red wine, broad beans, black grapes, apricots and strawberries. Epicatechin concentrations are high in apples, blackberries, broad beans, cherries, black grapes, pears, raspberries, and chocolate. Finally, epigallocatechin, epicatechin gallate, and epigallocatechin gallate are found in high concentrations in both black and green tea (1).

What is the catechin content of some common foods? (2)

<i>Food</i>	<i>Catechin (mg/100g)</i>	<i>Epicatechin (mg/100g)</i>	<i>Epigallocatechin, Epicatechin Gallate, & Epigallocatechin Gallate (mg/100g)</i>
Apples	0.9	6.1	0.6
Blackberries	37.1	4.7	0.8
Black Grapes	10.1	8.7	2.8
Brewed Black Tea	1.5	2.1	23.1
Brewed Green Tea	2.6	8.3	114.3
Cherries	1.3	7.0	0.4
Cocoa	0.00	26.2	0.00
Dark Chocolate	12.0	41.5	0.00
Fava Beans	8.2	7.8	4.7
Milk Chocolate	2.1	6.3	0.00
Pears	0.3	3.8	0.8
Raspberries	1.6	4.1	1.0
Red Table Wine	7.0	3.3	0.1

Are there beneficial effects associated with consumption of catechins?

Consumption of catechins has been associated with a variety of beneficial effects including increased plasma antioxidant activity (ability of plasma to scavenge free radicals), brachial artery dilation (blood vessel expansion), fat oxidation, and resistance of LDL to oxidation (1).

There seems to be a lot of media hype around red wine, chocolate, and tea. Are these really “super foods”?

As shown in the table above, red wine, chocolate, and tea are all high in catechins, in addition to a variety of other polyphenolic compounds. Below is a summary of the research on the effects of consuming these foods:



Red Wine: Studies have investigated the relationship between consumption of red wine and susceptibility to chronic diseases such as lung cancer, prostate cancer, and cardiovascular disease.

- *Cardiovascular disease:* Consumption of red wine is associated with a reduction in endothelin-1 (a molecule involved in blood pressure regulation), a reduction in myocardial ischemic reperfusion injury (an injury to the heart when blood is returned to the organ after a period of restriction), increased HDL, decreased platelet aggregation (clumping), increased fibrinolysis (breakdown of a clot), and increased antioxidant activity (3).
- *Lung Cancer:* In one recent investigation, consumption of red wine was associated with a reduced risk of lung cancer in comparison to those who did not consume any red wine (4).
- *Prostate Cancer:* In middle aged men, a 6 percent decrease in risk of prostate cancer has been observed for every glass of red wine consumed per week (5).
- *Conclusions:* In light of this research, the American Heart Association does not recommend consumption of alcohol to reduce risk of cardiovascular disease and the American Cancer Society recommends limiting consumption of alcoholic beverages. If adults choose to drink alcoholic beverages, the Dietary Guidelines 2005 recommends they do so in moderation. Moderation is considered 1 drink (defined as 12 ounces of beer, 4 ounces of wine, 1.5 ounces of 80-proof spirits, or 1 ounce of 100-proof spirits) per day for women and 2 drinks per day for men (6). Some short term research suggests that 100 percent purple grape juice may be an alcohol free alternative to red wine for those interested in both the cardiovascular and anticancer effects of this beverage; however a reduction in development of chronic disease and mortality due to consumption of grape juice has yet to be confirmed (7, 8). If you do choose to consume purple grape juice, remember to follow the Dietary Guidelines and limit juice consumption by choosing whole fruit for the majority of your daily fruit servings (6).

What is the antioxidant capacity of chocolate? (9)

<i>Chocolate Type</i>	<i>Antioxidant Capacity (mmol Trolox Equivalents)</i>
Cocoa Liqueur Per 100 g	40.0
Dark (Semisweet) Chocolate Per 100 g	13.1
Per 100 kcals	2.7
Milk Chocolate Per 100 g	6.7
Per 100 kcals	1.3

Chocolate: Kuna Indians, an island dwelling population that consumes high levels of cocoa (more than 5 cups per day), have low rates of elevated blood pressure or hypertension (10). Furthermore, epidemiological research of elderly men suggests that consumption of cocoa containing foods is associated with a reduced risk of mortality due to cardiovascular disease and all other causes (11).

- *Cardiovascular disease:* Consumption of chocolate or cocoa has been associated with a variety of cardiovascular benefits including decreased LDL oxidation, decreased platelet aggregation, increased antioxidant capacity, decreased oxidative stress (an imbalance in the ratio of antioxidants to free radicals), increased HDL concentration, increased levels of prostacyclin (a signaling molecule involved in the prevention of blood clot formation), decreased levels of leukotriene (a signaling molecule involved in inflammation and allergic reactions), increased nitric oxide, improved endothelial function, lower systolic and diastolic blood pressure, improved insulin sensitivity, decreased insulin resistance, decreased free radical induced hemolysis (breakdown of red blood cells), improved brachial artery dilation, and decreased LDL cholesterol (12). Furthermore, in one recent investigation, consumption of approximately 30 calories of dark chocolate daily for eighteen weeks was associated with decreased blood pressure (13).
- *Conclusions:* The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 recommends that the average person (who consumes 2,000 calories per day) consume 1,733 calories of nutrient dense foods (fat-free or lowfat foods from the six core food groups of grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, meat and beans, and oils) and only 267 “discretionary calories” (added fats and sugars) (6). In light of current chocolate research, it may be beneficial to include a small piece of dark chocolate (equal to 30 calories) as part of the daily discretionary calorie allotment.

Tea: Tea has been consumed by Asian populations for thousands of years and is purported to have numerous beneficial effects on health. Research has investigated the relationship between tea and a variety of topics including cardiovascular disease, cancer, weight management, diabetes, Alzheimer’s disease, and bone density.

- *Cardiovascular Disease:* Epidemiological evidence suggests that consumption of tea is inversely associated with myocardial infarction (heart attacks) (14). Green or black tea flavonoids have been found to have vasculoprotective (protection of blood vessels), antioxidative, antithrombotic (prevention of blood clot formation), anti-inflammatory, and lipid-lowering properties, which may be responsible for the reduced risk of cardiovascular disease (15). Unfortunately, it is not known if all these actions also occur in the body when tea is consumed. Therefore, researchers still do not have a true understanding of the mechanism behind the cardioprotective effects of tea consumption.



- *Cancer:* According to the American Cancer Society, consumption of green tea has been associated with a reduced risk of skin, esophagus, stomach, colon, pancreas, lung, bladder, prostate, and breast cancer in experimental models. Unfortunately, the results from human research do not currently support the findings from these cell and animal studies. Therefore, consumption of tea solely for cancer prevention is not recommended (16).
- *Weight Management:* Despite promising findings in experimental systems, there is limited long-term human evidence to support the consumption of green tea for weight loss (17, 18).

- *Type II Diabetes*: Current research investigating the relationship between consumption of flavonoid rich food and risk of type 2 diabetes has not found a significant relationship between tea consumption and risk of this chronic disease (19, 20).
- *Alzheimer's Disease*: Current epidemiological research investigating Alzheimer's Disease does not support a protective effect of tea consumption (21).
- *Bone Density*: In a recent investigation with elderly women (70-85 years old), black and green tea consumption was associated with a higher hip bone mineral density at the end of the study and, during the five year course of the study, with a lower hip bone mineral density loss. The findings from this investigation were in support of previous research (22).
- *Conclusions*: Current research supports an inverse relationship between consumption of tea and risk of cardiovascular disease and loss of bone mineral density. In light of these findings, replacing a daily cup of coffee or caffeinated soda with a cup of unsweetened black or green tea may prove to be beneficial to overall health, but no specific recommendations regarding tea consumption can be made at this time.



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** Production of this material was supported by a grant from the Vitamin Cases Consumer Settlement Fund, created as a result of an antitrust class action. One of the purposes of the fund is to improve the health and nutrition of California consumers.*

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