

Attention benefits of tea

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Tea has historically been associated with cognitive benefits such as mental clarity and concentration. Recent findings attribute these benefits to caffeine and theanine, two constituents of tea (Bryan, 2008).

Performance benefits of tea were initially identified in two open-label studies (Hindmarch et al., 1998; 2000), comparing tea to water and coffee with or without caffeine over the course of a day. Results showed improvements in performance and alertness after caffeine, as well as tentative evidence of beneficial effects of tea over caffeinated water.

Two subsequent randomized placebo controlled studies (De Bruin et al., 2011) investigated the effects of black tea on test of attention and a self-report measure of alertness. In the first study, participants consumed two cups of black tea, with a cumulative amount of 100mg caffeine and 46mg L-theanine, and a placebo tea (coloured and flavoured water). Results indicated that accuracy on the Attention Switching task was improved after tea as compared to the placebo, as well as performance on two of the four subtasks from the Intersensory Attention task.. Finally, participants felt more alert after tea consumption. In a replication of this study, participants consumed 3 cups of tea of a slightly weaker tea blend (cumulative amount of 90mg caffeine and 36mg L-theanine). Again, accuracy on the Attention Switching task was improved after tea as compared to placebo, and participants reported feeling more alert. Tea did not significantly affect performance on the Intersensory Attention task.

In addition, two recent studies provided a broader perspective on tea's effects on psychological wellbeing. A cross-sectional study showed that participants who consumed more tea felt less tired and reported higher levels of subjective work performance (Bryan et al., 2012). Furthermore, tea consumption can positively affect mood and may improve creative problem solving, as compared to water (Einother et al., 2012).

In sum, these studies clearly demonstrate that black tea helps to improve cognitive functioning, and in particular attention.

References:

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