

# THE SKINNY ON SUPERFOOD

The tea used in ancient Buddhist rituals has only recently made its way to café beverage lists, yet "I'll have a soy matcha latte, please" is already a common hipster request. We've been drinking green tea for a long time, so why is there suddenly so much-a matcha around? We sort the fact from fiction when it comes to the so-called superfood's benefits.

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When it comes to health food dialogues, matcha is often placed on the 'superfood' pedestal. A powdered version of specially grown and processed green tea, its ability to stimulate metabolism, reduce stress and even prevent cancer are benefits spotted on the back of tea bags and the menu of your local hipster café (matcha pancakes, anyone?). So - clever marketing ploy or is matcha really a natural super drug?

## THE MAGIC

According to the *Journal of Extension Systems*, matcha contains about 137 times the antioxidants of regular green tea, with its high levels of catechins, amino-acids, proteins, vitamin C, potassium and calcium accounting for its host of supposed health benefits.

"The antioxidant power of green tea comes from polyphenols, specifically catechins, and matcha has been found to have about three times more catechins than other forms of green tea," says principal



clinical nutritionist at the Sprout Nutrition & Wellness, Gemma Clark ([thesprout.com.au](http://thesprout.com.au)).

"These polyphenols are antioxidants important to maintaining our immune systems, keeping our skin clear and bright, and fighting inflammation and free radicals. They also play a role in cancer prevention."

Polyphenols are also the reason you should consider sipping matcha pre-workout, with the green tea thought to not only stimulate metabolism so you burn more calories at rest, but also help tap into any fat stores you may already have.

"The polyphenols help your body burn stored fat for energy and prevent you from storing excess fat. That said, antioxidants aren't a 'cure' or a direct prevention for obesity and metabolic diseases like diabetes mellitus. They can't compensate for a poor diet and lifestyle, but they are an important component of a healthy diet," says Clark.

The nature of matcha production means it trumps other tea sources in the antioxidant stakes. According to *Food Research International*, the catechins in green tea are higher than that in your average black tea as it skips the fermentation process which

tends to destroy them. The benefit to you? Improved blood flow, elimination of toxins and the prevention of cardiovascular and other diseases.

"Matcha also has high levels of L-Theanine, an amino acid that assists in

calming your nerves and reducing stress reactions. L-Theanine also assists in the production of dopamine and serotonin which helps to enhance mood, improve memory and promote better concentration," adds wellness medicine specialist Dr Anthony Yeung.

## MIND YOUR MATCHA

Despite matcha's benefits, Clark doesn't recommend gazing the stuff. In particular, pregnant women and those breastfeeding should limit their intake to one cup a day.

"Green tea naturally contains traces of lead and fluoride. If you are drinking green tea as a traditional infusion (like loose leaves or tea bags), most of the lead and fluoride is removed with the leaves. But matcha is a whole-leaf powder, so it's hard to reduce consumption of both substances," she says.

Matcha contains 25mg of caffeine per cup, so those suffering from tummy upsets, insomnia or irritability should also refrain from excessive cups.

Benefits of matcha consumption may be reduced depending on where

the matcha is sourced and how it's processed. Be mindful of added sugars, preservatives and sweeteners, and look for a deeper, greener powder as this could indicate higher levels of beneficial chlorophyll.

"Not everything will be automatically healthy or packed with antioxidants just because it contains matcha. A brownie is still a brownie even if it's being sold as a matcha brownie," says Clark.

"If the matcha is finely milled and not heat treated, the potency and stability of the nutrients remains intact. Japanese matcha is said to be the most authentic, and look for matcha that is packaged in opaque packaging where light (and heat) doesn't filter in, potentially denaturing the end product over time."

### DOSAGE

**FOR MAXIMUM BENEFIT**, add matcha powder to smoothies, juices and raw desserts: rather than your latte, suggests Clark.

"By using it cold, you retain the maximum levels of vitamins, some of which can be destroyed by heat," says Clark.

### DON'T

**DRINK MATCHA POST-WORKOUT OR ON AN EMPTY STOMACH.** "Matcha should not be consumed during or directly following a workout or meal as it decreases the absorption of iron and B1. It's not the best first thing in the morning as it may affect the stomach's lining," says Yeung.

### DO

**TRY HAVING MATCHA PRE-WORKOUT.** "Consuming matcha prior to exercise may help to support better performance and overall energy output," says

accredited nutritionist Tracie Connor ([tracietalkohealth.com.au](http://tracietalkohealth.com.au)).

### TRY

**MAKING YOUR OWN.** "You only need about half a teaspoon of powder to brew a matcha tea. It can be made with water or milk (including nut milk) as a warm drink, using liquid at around 70°C - this will help prevent any chance of a bitter brew. A lot of people use a special bamboo whisk making matcha, which makes a smoother, frothier brew than using spoon. But a blender works fine too," says Clark. Clark also suggests replacing your daily coffee with a matcha tea to help support your immune system - provided you aren't sensitive to caffeine.

### STORE

**IN A COOL PLACE**, as prolonged storage temps above 40°C can affect the stability of catechins, according to *Food Research International*. ■

