Drinking tea may help keep the brain sharp

Tea has been consumed by Asian populations for thousands of years and is believed to have numerous beneficial effects on health. The relationship between tea and a variety of topics including cardiovascular disease, cancer, weight management, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, and bone density has been investigated. Although the findings from these studies have been variable, current research suggests drinking tea may protect against heart disease and bone density loss. Tea is generally divided into the following three categories: black (fully fermented), oolong (semi-fermented), and green (nonfermented). In a recent investigation, researchers aimed to further investigate the relationship between tea consumption and cognitive decline (1). Chinese men and women 55 years of age or older, were asked to complete a survey regarding tea consumption, in addition to the Mini-Mental State Examination, which measures cognitive function, including memory, attention, language, and visuospatial ability. One to two years after this baseline data was collected, subjects were asked to complete the Mini-Mental State Examination for a second time. After controlling for a variety of factors including age, gender, education, use of cigarettes and alcohol, body mass index, hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, vegetable and fruit consumption, fish consumption, coffee consumption, and physical activity, greater tea consumption was associated with a decreased risk of cognitive impairment and cognitive decline. Furthermore, in this study, drinking black or oolong tea provided protection against cognitive decline, while green tea did not. In light of these findings, replacing a daily cup of coffee or caffeinated soda with a cup of black or oolong tea may help to keep the brain sharp, but no specific recommendations regarding tea consumption can be made until the findings have been confirmed.

Adapted from:

1. Ng, T., Feng, L., Niti, M., Kua, E., and Yap, K. Tea consumption and cognitive impairment and decline in older Chinese adults. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.* 88: 224-31, 2008.