

HEALTH

Edited by Suzanne Harrison suzanne.harrison@scmp.com

TCM

Rose Tse and
Angela Collingwood
info@shen-nong.com

In the leaves

Tea was considered an elixir in ancient China. The founder of herbology, Shen Nong, supposedly tasted hundreds of herbs – including poisonous ones – to distinguish those that had medicinal value.

To counteract the effects of eating poisonous herbs, he is said to have eaten tea leaves.

China was the first country in the world to drink, produce

and cultivate tea. It's thought that tea trees cultivated in other countries have their origins directly or indirectly in China. Some wild tea trees found in Yunnan Province are said to be thousands of years old.

Teas come in sweet and bitter flavours and have cooling properties. Tea is said to help refresh the mind, enhance alertness and boost concentration. It's also said to promote body fluid production, quench thirst, clear heat and phlegm, and promote digestion and urination.

Traditionally, it's also used to relieve indigestion, especially when combined with *tetradium*

ruticarpum (wu zhu yu) – ginger or green onion.

Other uses include relieving headaches, dizziness, heat stroke and sleepiness, and acting as an antidote to clear toxic heat evils by promoting bowel movements and urination.

Tea is a common ingredient in folk remedies and is said to

be good for the elderly and the seriously ill.

Preparation methods help to develop special flavours, and make best use of the active elements of various teas.

For example, green tea isn't heavily processed, so it retains a relatively high content of natural ingredients, and is said to have stronger anti-ageing, anti-cancer and anti-bacterial properties than other teas.

Oolong tea, which is partially fermented, is quite potent in breaking down protein and fat, aiding weight loss. Red tea that has undergone the full fermentation process has lost 90 per cent of its polyphenols, but retains its high caffeine content.

Studies have found that tea contains more than 300 chemical substances, such as catechins, caffeine, flavonols, butyric acid, vitamins, minerals, pectin, saccharides and saponins.

Some of these ingredients, which are said to help the central nervous and cardiovascular system, are antioxidants, muscular relaxants and diuretics, and promote gastric secretions and inhibit bacterial growth.

Tea is also said to assist in digestion and can enhance the elimination functions of the kidneys.

Consult your TCM or medical practitioner before taking any medicine