

Drinking tea is probably the easiest way to improve your heart health this year (our note: *Juice Plus is really the easiest...tea is the second easiest!*)

by Deena Shanker, 1/5/16

<http://qz.com/586599/drinking-tea-is-probably-the-easiest-way-to-improve-your-heart-health-this-year/>

Halfway into the first week of the new year, many resolutions have likely already fallen by the wayside. Luckily for those already off the diet and exercise bandwagon, there is an easy way to keep up heart health resolutions: Drink more tea.

In December, a group of Chinese doctors published findings in the Journal of the American College of Nutrition showing that habitual tea consumption may protect against arterial stiffness, an important component of cardiovascular health. (More pliable, elastic arteries allow for easier blood flow; stiff arteries require the heart to work harder and can lead to stroke.)

Achieving arterial health is often done through prescription drugs or major lifestyle changes, including better diet and exercise habits and lower alcohol consumption. Tea's flavonoids, a class of chemicals that originates in plants and are abundant in tea, have previously been shown to lead to positive results almost immediately.

The researchers used a population of 5,006 subjects from the Fujian Province in China and found that habitual tea consumption, **defined as drinking tea at least once a week for at least one year, was associated with lower levels of arterial stiffness**. They attribute the results to a chemical reaction that begins with catechins, a kind of flavonoid, and ultimately helps the functioning of the certain cells in arteries, known as endothelial cells.

"Flavonoids in tea are helpful to relax the blood vessels," Dr. Stephen Devries, a preventive cardiologist at Northwestern University, told Quartz. "Catechins release nitrous oxide and cause [arteries] to be more compliant." (Green tea is the best source of catechins, but black tea and oolong tea are rich in flavonoids, too.)

While the Fujian study has limitations, experts agree that the results build on established scientific literature connecting tea to heart health. "What may have a benefit in one population may not in another population," says Angela Taylor, a cardiologist at the University of Virginia Health System. "But studies with tea have been done in almost every ethnic background I can think of."

Two recent meta-analyses came to similar conclusions. In October 2013, the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition published findings showing that tea consumption might lower the risk of stroke. And in February 2015, a meta-analysis that included more than 850,000 subjects concluded that, "increased tea consumption is associated with a reduced risk of coronary heart disease, cardiac death, stroke, cerebral infarction, and intracerebral hemorrhage, as well as total mortality."

For those looking to make small lifestyle changes to get big results, drinking several cups of tea a day is a good place to start, even with all the good press coffee has gotten lately. "So far the greatest evidence of coffee is increased mental alertness," says Elisabetta Politi, nutrition director of the Duke Diet & Fitness Center. "We definitely have more evidence regarding tea and its ability to lower the risk of heart disease."

Drinking tea shouldn't be substituted for exercise, Devries told Quartz. "But if running isn't an option that day, why not have a cup of tea?"