

Brews for Winter Wellness

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Winter is the perfect time to brew a pot or cup of warming tea.

Drinking herbal tea is actually a wonderful way to “supplement” a healthy diet and provide hydration, particularly as this season can be quite drying, energetically (going inside to heated spaces and out into cold windy environs often makes us thirstier than we realise we are). Certain herbal combinations may also provide gentle healthy effects to keep winter ailments at bay.

Scientific research on Echinacea has proven its virtues in improving defence against cold and flu. Vitamin C remains a popular means to enhancing immunity. As a basic preventative, by dosing up on vitamin C sources we might save ourselves catching a cold or the flu, and ideal herbal tea sources include lemon, lemongrass or rose-hip tea.

The antioxidant activity of spices is well researched, particularly in India, where it was discovered that certain spices possess antioxidant activity that can be applied for reduction of lipid per-oxidation in biological systems. This means they can reduce free radical activity from “stealing” electrons from the lipids (fats) in our cell membranes, resulting in cell damage (& hence, increased susceptibility to disease). These activities were retained even after being boiled for 30 minutes at 100 degrees, and those found highest in antioxidant virtues were cloves, cinnamon, pepper and ginger in descending order of activity (1).

The ideal combination brew is of course chai tea which contains all of these, as well as cardamon, star anise and black pepper - depending on your own taste and recipe. Cinnamon bark is one of the oldest known spices and is very warming. The health benefits of ginger root have been recognised for thousands of years. ginger may improve blood circulation and studies also suggest that it exerts anti-microbial and anti-viral effects. Nutmeg, like cinnamon, has a slight astringent effect helping to constrict tissue secretions, resulting in it being a mild expectorant. Cloves are high in volatile oils that exert themselves in a mild anaesthetic action. Finally, black pepper is much

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more than a diner table condiment, showing significant antioxidant and antibacterial properties, important for fighting disease and maintaining overall good health.

For a different option - Liquorice root (not the confectionary but the herb) is a wonderful tea to drink - working as a natural expectorant and also supporting adrenal gland activity (for energy).

Whatever your choice, sipping herbal tea, minus caffeine can be a useful addition to your daily health regimen, supporting digestive processes and working to soothe the body from the ravages of winter, from the inside out!

reference:

Shobana S. Kaidu KA. 'Antioxidant activity of selected Indian spices, Prostaglandins, Leukotrienes and Essential Fatty Acids', 2000, Feb, Feb;62(2):107-10