

Is heavy tea consumption linked to prostate cancer?

BY AVI T. DESHMUKH, M.D., F.A.C.S., MBA, MHA

After water, tea is the second most popular beverage in the world. However, new evidence suggests that men who tend to be prolific tea drinkers may be at a higher risk for developing prostate cancer than those who are not.

A Scottish study led by Dr. Kashif Shafique of the Institute of Health & Wellbeing at the University of Glasgow points out that, among the 6,016 Scottish men ages 21 to 75 who participated in the 37-year study, heavy tea drinkers, defined as those who had more than seven cups of tea a day, were at 50 percent higher risk of developing prostate cancer than men who drank less tea. Of the men who were reported to have consumed the most tea on a daily basis, 6.4 percent developed prostate cancer while the study was being conducted.

Though the study did not take into consideration a host of factors, including family history or any additional dietary choices beyond tea, coffee and alcohol intake, the doctor believes heavy tea drinking can increase prostate cancer risk. But Dr. Shafique indicates that he doesn't know whether the tea itself is a risk factor or it is simply that people who drink tea, which is high in antioxidants, are more likely to live longer lives. That's an important distinction, as a man's risk

of developing prostate cancer increases dramatically as he ages.

The study does not show a direct link between tea consumption and prostate cancer, so it is not wise for individuals to quit their tea habits -- particularly because tea has so many potentially positive side effects. Previous studies have shown that drinking tea may help reduce cholesterol levels and even help fight cancer. But the study does suggest that perhaps moderate tea consumption is best.

Until more information is discovered about tea's connection to prostate cancer, men can continue to enjoy their favorite varieties, but it might be prudent to err on the side of moderation.



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