Could a Cup of Tea a Day Help Keep Alzheimer's Away?

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Could a cup of tea a day help keep dementia away? Yes, say findings from a Chinese study published in The Journal of Nutrition, Health & Aging, which found that regular consumption of certain tea leaves cut seniors' risk of cognitive decline in half and even more for those genetically at risk of Alzheimer's disease, ScienceDaily reports.

Alzheimer's is currently the most common type of dementia in the world. The disease is defined as problems with memory, thinking and behavior that affect day-to-day functioning. There is no cure for the progressive mental illness, which most commonly occurs in old age. But several studies show early interventions may help preserve daily functioning for some time.

For this latest longitudinal study, researchers at the National University of Singapore's Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine reviewed tea consumption data collected between 2003 and 2005 from 957 community-living Chinese seniors age 55 years or older. At regular intervals for two years until 2010, scientists surveyed these seniors about their lifestyles, diets, physical activity and social lives and assessed their cognitive function using standardized tests.

Findings showed that all other compounding factors aside, regular tea consumption lowered the participants' risk for dementia by nearly 50 percent overall. What's more, for seniors with the APOE e4 gene, which studies show raises the risk for Alzheimer's at the cellular level, the chance of cognitive impairment declined by as much as 86 percent.

"Despite high-quality drug trials, effective pharmacological therapy for neurocognitive disorders such as dementia remains elusive, and current prevention strategies are far from satisfactory," said study author Feng Lei, assistant professor at the department of psychological medicine at the National University of Singapore. "The data from our study suggests that a simple and inexpensive lifestyle measure such as daily tea drinking can reduce a person's risk of developing neurocognitive disorders in late life."

Researchers theorized that bioactive compounds found in tea leaves, such as green, black or oolong tea could hold anti-inflammatory and antioxidant potential that may protect the brain from vascular damage because of reduced blood flow to the organ and progressive damage to nerve cells (neurodegeneration) that can lead to cognitive decline.

But more research on these compounds is needed to delve deeper into their biological effects on the brain.

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