



Chinese Herbal Tea

The How and Why My Family Incorporated Tea Into Our Everyday Life

1. **Medicine:** A traditional "therapeutic vehicle" used to treat and prevent illness. ³
2. **Diverse:** Spanning thousands of plant species, each with unique "phytochemicals" for health. ³
3. **Cultural:** A daily ritual for "healthy living" that connects traditional knowledge with modern wellness ³

My Connection

My connection to this tradition began through my mother's career as a teacher in Markham, Ontario, where she taught in a school community with a predominantly Chinese population. Over the years, many of her students gifted her traditional herbal teas and shared cultural beliefs about their healing properties, particularly their role in treating illness and strengthening immunity.

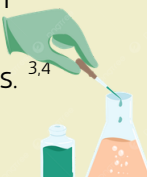
Phytochemicals

Basis for medicine: As many modern pharmaceutical drugs are derived from these specific plant compounds. ^{3,4}

Many different types:

• **Examples include...**

- **Flavonoids** and **flavonoid glycosides** (found in teas like Mao Jian green tea), which are studied for their impact on gastrointestinal motility, diabetes, and heart disease. ^{3,4}
- **Catechins** (found in diverse milk tea beverages), which are studied for their impact on anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. ¹



From Tradition to Treatment

An **ethnopharmacology article** discusses how herbal tea reflects the intersection of traditional healing practices and modern biomedical research. ² Unlike the biomedical model of "one disease—one target—one drug," traditional systems often use **complex herbal mixtures** containing multiple bioactive compounds, which may be useful for treating chronic or multifactorial conditions. ² Ethnopharmacology helps bridge these approaches by documenting traditional plant use and investigating it through scientific research. ² In Western contexts, herbal teas are often categorized as **complementary and alternative medicine** and may be viewed as more accessible or lower-risk than synthetic pharmaceuticals, illustrating how traditional remedies are increasingly examined within biomedical frameworks. ²

Cultural Meaning & Identity

A study looking at culturally embedded factors in **complementary** and **alternative medicine** use shares that Chinese herbal tea is not only used to treat illness but also serves as a **ritual of comfort, care, and social connection**. ⁵ Sharing tea can create a sense of **unity** among participants, sometimes described by anthropologists as *communitas*. ⁵ In this way, healing is understood as **both physical and social**. Preparing and drinking tea together helps restore balance, reduce stress, and strengthen relationships. ⁵ Knowledge about herbal teas is often passed through families and communities across generations, making tea both a **health practice** and a form of **cultural knowledge** and care. ⁵

Herbal Tea in Our Home

What began as a thoughtful cultural exchange gradually evolved into a **family practice** for me. My mother began incorporating herbal teas into our home, and they became a staple in our kitchen. Growing up, whenever someone felt sick, tired, or run down, making herbal tea for one another became an act of care and comfort. Over time, this experience showed me how cultural traditions and health practices can move across communities and become part of everyday life. **This matters** because it highlights how simple practices like herbal tea can carry cultural knowledge, support well-being, and strengthen connections between people.



Sources

