

Tea Takes Off

Many say tea is the next coffee and predict teahouses dotting the American landscape within the next 10 years like Zen versions of Starbucks and Caribou.

Tea's wide-ranging health benefits have made it a darling of the press, and both young and old find it an easy, inexpensive and enjoyable way to destress, improve heart health, lower cholesterol and achieve a host of other health-related goals.

Tea is also taking off in popularity due to its ability to take off pounds. For some time, green tea has had a reputation for assisting in weight loss. But thank Oprah for making a nation aware of oolong, an even more powerful tea for boosting metabolism and fueling weight loss. As we put away winter coats and pull out body-baring clothes, it's nice to have an easy and healthful way to achieve these goals.

All true teas – black, green, oolong, pu-erh and white -- come from the camellia

sinensis plant. The difference between them is in how they are processed, and the skills required can be likened to the craft of creating a fine wine. In terms of processing, oolong tea falls between green tea and black tea. The leaves are first harvested, then hand-rolled or shaken to bruise them and bring their essential oils to the surface. After the leaves are oxidized through aging, they are roasted in a pan that is coated with tea oil and then dried. Oolong tea is 10 to 90% oxidized, compared to black tea, which is fully oxidized.

Oolong tea contains more caffeine than white and green teas, and although it generally has less caffeine than black tea, numerous studies indicate that it is superior in raising metabolism rates, suppressing appetite and moderating blood sugar levels. Compared to green tea, it is believed to burn two-and-a-half times more calories. It is also believed to prevent weight gain from carbohydrate consumption. One study suggested



drinking oolong after meals to burn more fat. It can also be consumed throughout the day.

Oolong is known as more than the slimming tea. It has powerful antioxidants and has been credited with clearing up skin, dramatically reducing free radicals, fighting cardiovascular disease, promoting healthy teeth, boosting the immune system and lowering total cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Lindsey Goodwin, who works in Takashimaya's tea department in New York, recently visited Charlotte to present a tasting of 10 teas at Urbana Cityspa & Teabar's first World Tour of Teas. According to Goodwin, "With only a rudimentary knowledge of tea, you can begin reaping its many health benefits by

determining which benefits you are seeking, then selecting the teas that can provide the desired benefits and are pleasing in taste and aroma. Finding the teas you enjoy most and drinking them often is the best way to experience tea as both an affordable luxury and an incredibly healthy lifestyle choice.”

“Many specific health needs can be met with a variety of types of tea,” Goodwin adds. “For example, digestion can be aided with teas as diverse as lung ching and mint, metabolism is boosted with any of the wide range of oolong teas, most types of pu-erh are shown to be excellent for cholesterol levels, and antioxidants abound in many different teas and herbals including matcha, yerba maté, white teas and rooibos.”

Whether oolong, green, white, black, pu-erh or the vast array of herbals and botanicals, teas offer a multitude of benefits and are likely to be on your top 10 list of things to do for yourself. If you’ve been too busy to take the time, listen to author Bruce Richardson: “There is something mystical and spiritual about tea ... we wait for the water to boil, for the tea to brew. In that waiting, we breathe more slowly.”

That, perhaps, is the real power of tea.

Urbàna Cityspa & Teabar is located at 7510 Pineville-Matthews Rd., Charlotte, and offers 70 varieties of tea to drink in-house or on-the-go. Hours are 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Friday, Saturday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Find more information about teas online at www.escape2urbana.com. To sign up for future tea events at Urbàna, call 704.543.1700 or use the contact form on Urbàna’s website.