

Lifestyle & Culture

Matcha Tea: Unveiling the green elixir of health and flavour



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In the world of beverages, there's one vibrant, green elixir that has captured the hearts of health enthusiasts and tea lovers alike – matcha tea. With its growing popularity and ever-expanding fan base, matcha has become more than just a trendy drink; it has emerged as a symbol of wellness and indulgence. In this article, we will explore what matcha tea is, why it has garnered so much hype, its health benefits and more.

What is matcha tea?

The origins of matcha can be traced back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907 CE) in China, where powdered tea leaves were used in various culinary and medicinal preparations. However, it was during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) that the method of whisking powdered tea into a frothy beverage gained popularity, laying the foundation for the traditional preparation of matcha as we know it today. Eventually, matcha tea was introduced to Japan in the early 12th century by a Buddhist monk named Eisai, who had travelled to China to study Buddhism. He promoted the cultivation and consumption of powdered tea, considering it an essential part of meditation and spiritual practice.

As gathered, matcha tea is a unique type of powdered green tea. It is made from the shade-grown leaves of *Camellia sinensis*, the tea plant. The process of cultivating matcha involves carefully shading the tea bushes from direct sunlight for several weeks before harvest. This technique enhances the chlorophyll content and stimulates the production of beneficial bioactive compounds, giving matcha its vibrant green hue and distinct flavour profile.

The rising popularity of matcha tea can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, it offers a rich, earthy, invigorating and calming taste. It has a unique umami flavour, which sets it apart from other teas. Additionally, matcha's versatility allows it to be enjoyed in various forms – as a traditional hot tea, a refreshing iced beverage, or even as an ingredient in culinary creations like desserts, smoothies and savoury dishes.

Furthermore, matcha has gained traction due to its association with health and wellness. People are increasingly seeking natural, plant-based alternatives to boost their well-being, and matcha fits the bill perfectly. Its touted health benefits have contributed significantly to its global appeal.

What are the health benefits of matcha tea

Matcha tea is packed with an impressive array of phytochemicals, which are plant compounds known for their potential health-promoting properties. One of the key components in matcha is catechins, particularly epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG). Catechins are potent antioxidants that neutralize harmful free radicals in the body, protecting cells from oxidative damage. By reducing oxidative stress, the antioxidants in matcha help protect cells from damage and support overall cellular health. This protection extends to various organs and tissues, including the heart, brain and skin.

The catechins in matcha tea may also play a significant role in supporting cardiovascular health. Studies have shown that these compounds can help lower LDL cholesterol levels (the "bad" cholesterol) and reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases. Additionally, matcha's antioxidants may help protect the blood vessels from damage caused by oxidative stress, promoting healthy circulation and vascular function.

Furthermore, matcha tea may aid boost metabolism. EGCG, in combination with caffeine, has been shown to have beneficial effects on metabolism and weight management. Studies suggest that EGCG can promote thermogenesis – the process by which the body burns calories to produce heat. This increased thermogenesis, along with enhanced fat oxidation, may help boost metabolism and support weight loss efforts when combined with a healthy diet and regular exercise.

Matcha's combination of caffeine and L-theanine also contributes to improved cognitive function and mental clarity. Caffeine enhances alertness and focus by blocking adenosine receptors in the brain, while L-theanine promotes relaxation and reduces the potential jitters associated with caffeine consumption. This effect is believed to be due to the increased production of neurotransmitters such as dopamine and serotonin, which are associated with feelings of relaxation and well-being. The synergistic effect of these two compounds results in a state of calm alertness, making matcha an excellent beverage for enhancing concentration and productivity. In saying this, it is no surprise that matcha tea is known to promote relaxation and reduce stress.

On a further note, the high chlorophyll content in matcha tea may support the body's natural detoxification processes. Chlorophyll has been found to bind to and aid in the elimination of heavy metals and other toxins from the body. Additionally,



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matcha's overall nutritional profile, including its vitamins and minerals, contributes to supporting the body's detoxification pathways.

Beyond the ceremonial bowl

Matcha tea, deeply rooted in traditional tea ceremonies, has evolved to become much more than a ceremonial beverage. Its widespread popularity has led to the exploration of its applications in various industries, going beyond the traditional boundaries of the tea bowl.

One of the most notable expansions is in the culinary world. Matcha's vibrant green colour and unique flavour have made it a sought-after ingredient among chefs and bakers. Its finely ground powder is infused into a myriad of culinary creations, from delicate macarons to indulgent matcha-flavoured cheesecakes. The earthy and sophisticated taste of matcha enhances desserts, cakes, pastries and ice creams, giving them a distinctive twist. However, matcha's culinary journey does not end there; it also finds its way into savoury dishes, imparting its rich flavour to noodles, sauces and dressings, showcasing its versatility in culinary exploration.

With the rise of health-conscious consumers, matcha has found a new avenue in the health and wellness industry. The potential antioxidant properties and health benefits of matcha have been recognised, leading to the emergence of matcha-flavoured health products. It is now used in various health-focused items, such as supplements, smoothie powders and energy bars. Additionally, the beauty industry has incorporated matcha into face masks and skincare products, harnessing its nat-

tractive choice for various industrial applications. Its deep-rooted history in Japanese culture and its modern versatility have transformed matcha into a global icon enjoyed by people of diverse tastes and preferences. From the traditional tea ceremony to the modern kitchen and beyond, matcha continues to captivate the world with its vibrant colour, distinct flavour and potential health benefits.

A final word

In conclusion, matcha tea stands as a captivating testament to the union of history and modernity, drawing upon its ancient roots in Japanese tea ceremonies while branching out into an array of innovative applications. Beyond its ceremonial significance, matcha has emerged as a global icon, celebrated for its vibrant green hue, unique flavour and potential health benefits.

With its rich phytochemical profile, including powerful antioxidants like EGCG, matcha offers a refreshing and delicious way to embrace a healthier lifestyle. From boosting metabolism and supporting cardiovascular health to promoting relaxation and cognitive function, matcha's potential benefits have piqued the interest of health enthusiasts worldwide.

Moreover, matcha's versatility has seen it transcend traditional boundaries, finding its way into the culinary world, the health and wellness industry, and even serving as a natural food colouring and flavouring agent. Its green allure extends beyond the tea bowl, leaving a mark in everything from desserts and savoury dishes to skincare products and textiles.

As its industrial uses diversify and research continues to shed light on its potential applications, matcha's journey remains ever-evolving. Embracing matcha not only represents an appreciation for centuries of tradition but also underscores a commitment to a greener, healthier future. So, whether enjoyed in a traditional tea ceremony or savoured as a modern culinary delight, matcha's vibrant green elixir continues to captivate hearts and palates, inviting us to savour its harmonious blend of taste, wellness and sustainability. So why not raise a bowl of matcha tea to celebrate this vibrant green elixir of health and flavour?

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