

## Why The English Love Drinking Tea

Ever since the 18th century, tea time has been an integral part of English life. People from other countries have a set idea of what English tea time means: smart dresses, delicate finger foods, and hot tea all served on the best china.

This is not a passion that England shares with most of the rest of the world, where coffee is almost universally more popular than tea. In fact, the per capita consumption of tea in the United Kingdom is 12.85kg per year, which is almost three times as much as in Morocco which comes in second place at 4.34kg per year. This per capita consumption is even higher if you looked at England (one of 4 countries in the United Kingdom) on its own. Perhaps surprisingly, in Japan the popularity of tea has been suffering a slight decline since the start of the new millennium.

During the early 1700s the British East India Company began growing tea in the newly conquered Indian territories on an industrial scale using cheap labour and conquered land. The massive scale of tea production in India, the majority of which was sent straight to England, sent the price of tea plummeting. Suddenly, what was once a rare treat for the wealthy became an affordable product which ordinary British people could enjoy on a regular basis. Not only that, but sugar was just starting to become more affordable for ordinary people as well. As a result of this, tea became a powerful symbol of the benefits of Empire for the ordinary English citizen.

It is one thing to understand why the English first started drinking so much tea, but that doesn't really explain why we continue to do so some 300 years later. My own personal opinion is that one of the biggest reasons behind our continuing love affair with tea is because we find tea comforting. Its familiarity is like a cosy comfort blanket to us, and the long tradition of tea drinking provides a calming ritual with which to punctuate the day.

At times of stress, grief or hardship it is not uncommon for the first response of an English person to be "making a nice cup of tea". The sheer familiarity of the ritual serves to centre you, diminishing the pressing concerns of the moment by making them seem small in comparison to such a long and often repeated tradition.

Being an Englishman, I prefer drinking tea with milk. Debate continues whether to put milk in the cup before or after pouring tea. Originally milk was always added before tea to prevent hot tea from cracking the fine bone china cups. Tea experts agree with this tradition but also state that tea needs to be left in the water on its own for the flavour and colour to develop and a splash of milk should be added later.

Tea itself seems to have calming properties, and it most certainly has a range of proven and suspected health benefits. Although many English people actually drink more tea than is strictly good for them, it cannot be denied that in moderate quantities (4 cups per day is usually said to be ideal) tea drinking has a remarkable range of health benefits. Studies have shown that drinking three to four cups of tea per day reduces your risk of having a heart attack, as well as protecting you from a range of degenerative heart conditions. Although the link has not yet been fully proven, several studies have suggested that tea drinking may help to prevent a range of different kinds of cancer, including lung cancer.

People used to pour milk in a cup before tea...

1. ...to change the taste of tea.
2. ...not to spoil the flavour of tea.
3. ...to achieve the best colour of tea.
4. ...not to break expensive cups.