

Tea Season

Do yourself a favor: Drink the right tea in winter and you'll warm up body and soul and get your prana (vital energy) flowing.

By Scott Blossom

Long, long ago during the Satya Yuga, or Golden Age, of Vedic legend, humans spent most of their time absorbed in deep meditation, subsisting on the prana (vital energy) of sunlight and the breath. One day, according to legend, a piece of black tar fell from the sky and a curious onlooker tasted it and suffered indigestion. Lord Brahma administered hot water as a cure, and all was well.



This story illustrates two important principles of Ayurveda: First, good digestion and elimination—both mental and physical—are crucial to health. Second, hot water helps carry beneficial substances into the body and encourages waste products and toxins to leave. In other words, when you drink tea, you get the prana flowing.

But there's more to it than just drinking tea. What and when you drink, the quality and flavor of the herbs, and the tea's *viryā* (energy) are also important. For instance, ginger's sweet, spicy flavor stokes the *agni* (digestive fire) and is ultimately nourishing, whereas the spicy, warming flavors of cayenne pepper—although invaluable for treating colds and flu—are too stimulating for cayenne to be used alone as a tea.

You can drink most teas during any time of year, but some are more effective during winter. Licorice tea, for instance, has a bittersweet flavor and cooling energy that can help soothe a dry or sore throat and aid digestion. Hot lemon and mint also help digestion as well as clarify the mind, senses, and emotions.

But the best tea for winter days, especially if you aren't feeling well, is holy basil, or *tulsi*. The name means "incomparable one," and the herb comes from one of India's most sacred plants, according to Prashanti de Jager, founder of Om Organics, an [Ayurvedic](#) herb and tea producer. "This nutritive, warming tea is a first-reach herb for any cough, cold, or flu," de Jager explains. "Besides reducing fever, it promotes healthy digestion and detoxification at the physical and mental levels."

Tea Time

"Whether a substance or action is a food, a medicine, or a poison to the body/mind depends on the circumstances in which it is taken," says Dr. Robert Svoboda, a renowned [Ayurvedic](#) physician and teacher. Use this guide to drink the right tea at the right time.

MORNING: Warm, spicy herbs with bitter and astringent secondary flavors are best for early in the day. Chai is a good choice, as is tulsi mixed with ginger and green or black tea. If you're

congested, try ginger tea with lemon, raw honey, and 1/2 teaspoon of cayenne.

MIDDAY: Choose cool herbs with a sweet taste and bitter and astringent secondary tones. If you're cold or weak, drink ginger or tulsi tea. Lemon is a wonderful digestive tea; add mint if you feel irritable or overheated, and drink at room temperature. For a scratchy throat, try licorice tea.

LATE AFTERNOON, EARLY EVENING: Drink teas with sweet, sour, or salty flavors. Skip stimulants. Yogi Tea, or "Vata Tea," which includes licorice and a small dose of ginger and cardamom is beneficial. Other options: tulsi/Gotu Kola (a cooling herb) tea with raw honey, hot almond milk with a pinch of nutmeg, or miso (made from fermented soybean).

BEDTIME: Try tulsi or chamomile, two soothing teas that will calm you down before sleep.



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