



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks  
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.  
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## "Green Tea Confusion "

Television ads and popular magazines tout the wonders of the antioxidants in green tea as being almost a miracle drug and some studies have found tea consumption linked to a decreased risk of cancers, including bladder, ovarian, stomach and colorectal cancers. However, the Advertising Standards Authority recently asked tea-maker, Tetley, to withdraw their overly exuberant advertisements for green tea, which implied that green tea had genuine health benefits, due to its antioxidants. Lipton tea was also cautioned about making unsubstantiated nutritional claims about their green tea-flavored beverages. Scientific studies have calmed down the green tea-antioxidant hoopla. The 2010 study of Iwasaki showed no association between green tea drinking and subsequent risk of breast cancer. Another 2010 study found the same thing and acknowledged the confusing state of affairs between green tea consumption and breast cancer incidence. On the positive side, a 2009 study found for lung cancer, green tea was associated with an 18% decreased risk of developing lung cancer but no significant association was observed for black tea. It is true that the amount of polyphenols does differ between the two tea types. A 2011 study by Wang for black tea found no protective role against coronary artery disease (CAD), but did find an increase in green tea consumption of 1 cup a day was associated with a 10% decrease in the risk of developing CAD. Surprisingly, a 2009 meta-analysis of *case-control studies* found no significant association between green tea consumption and stomach cancer using the crude data but meta-analyses of the *recent cohort studies*, the highest green tea consumption was shown to significantly *increase stomach cancer risk* using the crude data. This illustrates the importance of carefully evaluating all of the studies and their conflicting conclusions. Results are all over the place and single studies can be very misleading. As an example, a 2009 study by Inoue found a lack of association for proximal gastric cancer, seen in both men and women. Yet, this same study found a significantly decreased risk for those with consumption of 5 cups a day in women. Lastly, but of concern, a 2006 study found that cigarette smoking, alcohol drinking and green tea consumption were linked to an *increased risk of esophageal cancer*. Are you as confused as I am?

In the America that I love, we are inundated with confusing and conflicting study reports. Interpretation of this data is becoming increasingly difficult and must be done with caution. The choice is yours as regards the safety of green tea consumption. As one study concluded, "There is insufficient and conflicting evidence to give any firm recommendations regarding green tea consumption for disease prevention." So, until research has clarified the issue, enjoy your tea.

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