



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
October 31, 2010

“Tea And the Truth”

A big marketing ploy is to push "tea" as being a near cure-all, because of its antioxidant content, especially polyphenols. So, let's evaluate the scientific data. I have previously pointed out the 2009 report in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences which showed that the antioxidant vitamins C and E can "undo" the benefits of exercise, weaken the body's own exercise-induced free radical defense system and increase the risk of diabetes by decreasing insulin sensitivity. Another surprising antioxidant study found that vitamin C supplementation decreased training efficiency because it prevented some cellular adaptations to exercise and it significantly hampered endurance capacity. Recently, the Advertising Standards Authority asked tea-maker, Tetley, to withdraw their advertisement for green tea because it implied that the tea had some general health benefits, like exercise, beyond hydration, due to its antioxidants. Although some studies have suggested green tea protects against breast cancer, a number of studies have found no such link and a new Japanese study of 54,000 women, in the journal *Breast Cancer Research*, suggests that green tea intake, within a usual drinking habit, is unlikely to reduce the risk of breast cancer. They found, "There was no difference in the number of cancer cases among the women, regardless of their level of tea consumption - even between the women who drank more than 10 cups a day and those who drank half a cup or less a week." Yet, other studies have linked the tea to a decreased risk of other types of cancers, including bladder, ovarian, stomach and colorectal cancers, according to the University of Maryland Medical Center. In a warning letter on Aug. 30, 2010, the Food and Drug Administration issued warnings to the makers of Canada Dry ginger ale and Lipton tea for making unsubstantiated nutritional claims about their green tea-flavored beverages. Confusion still reigns!

In the America that I love, we will be cautious about the continual portrayal of antioxidants as a comprehensive health panacea, in the absence of meaningful scientific data. Every second, our cells are actively conducting tens of thousands of different types of life-saving oxidation reactions. Far from being "harmful", oxidation and oxygen free radicals are fundamental to sustaining life and health. Please check out my new book, *Death In Small Doses? Antioxidant Vitamins A, C and E in the 21st Century: A Health Impact Statement*, available at Amazon.com to make sense of the whole antioxidant question. Cancer patients must be especially cautious with ingestion of large amounts of antioxidants because of the possibility of interfering with treatment. Yet, the conflicting scientific evidence does not mean that people should stop drinking tea. Simply, do not expect it to be a miraculous cure-all, because it is not.

Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
Surgeon/Scientist/Patient Advocate
27439 Highway 441, Kentwood, LA 70444
985-229-6955-Home
985-229-3760 – Fax rhowesmd@hughes.net www.iwillfindthecure.org