



Published on *Go Ask Alice!* (<https://goaskalice.columbia.edu>)

[Home](#) > Bagged tea versus loose leaf: Which is better?

Bagged tea versus loose leaf: Which is better? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

You've been a hero(ine) of mine for quite some time. I hope YOU can answer this question (it seems no one else can).

I've been reaping the benefits of green tea for about a year now, and I feel great! Just recently I began opening the tea bags after brewing, and putting the tea leaves in with the actual brew and drinking the leaves as well. Does this add more health benefits to green tea? I would think so! So far, no one has been able to answer this question directly. Please let me know if you know!

Stay Awesome Alice! May your boards hum forever!

Whole Heartedly (And Healthy Heartedly Hopefully!),

— Tiger M

Answer

Dear Tiger M,

Thank you for the kind words about *Go Ask Alice!* The reason it may be hard to find an answer to your question is because there are positives to brewing tea both in and out of the bag. When it comes to green tea, however, generally yes, what you are doing (drinking loose leaf tea and consuming the leaves) is healthier than drinking green tea brewed from tea bags.

First, some background on green tea: Green is chock full of antioxidants and other nutrients, thanks to chemical compounds found in the leaves called catechins. To maximize your exposure to catechins, and thus extract the greatest health benefits from your cup of tea, the whole buds and young leaves of most loose leaf teas are superior to broken leaf pieces, called fannings and dust, which are found in many bagged varieties.

So why might loose leaf tea leaves be better?

- Catechins degrade over time. Tea bag tea may have been stored longer than the loose leaf green tea, which means fewer catechins present.

- Catechins concentrations are higher in the whole leaf than in the pieces and dust (because the greater surface area of the smaller pieces means more surface area is exposed to light and air, which results in faster loss of nutrients). These whole pieces are more likely to be found in loose leaf tea.
- Tea bags can absorb some catechins. This means you may lose more nutrients in the bag than you do if the leaf is loose.

However, drinking green tea from tea bags can also have its advantages:

- Green tea in the tea bags is more likely to be dust and fannings and because of this, there is more interaction between the tea and the water (the smaller the tea leaf, the more surface area is exposed to the water, causing more infusion of the tea nutrients).
- Tea bag material varies with the tea company. Some tea bags are biodegradable and interfere less with tea brewing than others, and may also leach fewer nutrients out of the tea.

Additionally, you mentioned that you chew the leaves, which is very healthy (if you don't mind the strong green tea flavor). This is healthier because it allows you to consume the nutrients that did not dissolve in the water (which are numerous, including minerals and fat soluble vitamins) and even gives you a little extra fiber. But if you are buying the tea bagged, you still may be consuming tea leaves that have lost lots of nutrients due to their small size and potential degradation due to long term storage. However, other factors besides loose tea vs. bagged tea, affect the health benefits of green tea. A few other considerations:

- Is your green tea organic? Drinking organic green tea ensures fewer chemicals and pesticides will make their way into your hot cup.
- How fresh is your tea? Catechins are lost the longer the green tea is stored. The fresher the leaf, the more nutrients will be present in the leaf.
- How are you storing your tea and how was it stored before it found its way to you? Tea should be stored in a sealed container as air tight as possible in a cool, dark place.

The freshness issue, by the way, is not a concern for all teas. In fact, some teas improve with age, much like wine. But green tea's benefits are more likely reaped with a fresher leaf. When checking for tea leaf freshness, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- Does the tea smell very green or does it smell smoky or even moldy? Generally, fresh green tea smells very green or refreshing, while the older stuff is likely to smell smoky, stale or moldy.
- Has your tea been stored near light, heat, moisture, or strong odors? Exposures to these things will cause tea leaves to degrade more quickly – so don't store your tea in glass canisters, over your stove, in your refrigerator, or with your spices.
- Have you checked the leaf color and tea taste? Light green colors suggest higher green tea quality than golden or brown colors. Also, the tea should also taste light, not bitter, when fresh.

So keep brewing and keep chewing! You are getting lots of vitamins and minerals this way, especially if your tea is organic and relatively fresh.

Alice!

Category:

[Nutrition & Physical Activity](#) [2]

[Optimal Nutrition](#) [3]

[Nutrients](#) [4]

Related questions

[Coffee's got me feeling nauseous — What gives?](#) [5]

[Herbal "diet teas" for weight loss — Herbalicious?](#) [6]

[Does caffeine affect athletic performance?](#) [7]

[Chocolate's antioxidant content?](#) [8]

Published date:

Dec 23, 2011

Last reviewed on:

Jul 01, 2015

Footer menu

▼ [Contact Alice!](#)

- [Content Use](#)
- [Media Inquiries](#)
- [Comments & Corrections](#)

▼ [Syndication & Licensing](#)

- [Licensing Q&As](#)
- [Get Alice! on Your Website](#)
- [Full Site Syndication](#)
- [Link to Go Ask Alice!](#)

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please [visit our Emergency page](#) to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/bagged-tea-versus-loose-leaf-which-better>

Links

[1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/bagged-tea-versus-loose-leaf-which-better>

[2] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nutrition-physical-activity>

[3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/optimal-nutrition>

[4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nutrients>

[5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/coffees-got-me-feeling-nauseous-%E2%80%94-what-gives>

[6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/herbal-diet-teas-weight-loss-%E2%80%94-herbalicious?>

herbalicious

[7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/does-caffeine-affect-athletic-performance-0>

[8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/chocolates-antioxidant-content-0>