

Polyphenols: Superheroes Against Cancer

Now there's another great reason to enjoy a cup of tea. With more and more evidence of health benefits surfacing, we're beginning to see that tea is not just for drinking anymore.

A new study conducted in the United Kingdom has proven that tea may contain properties with life-savings abilities. Although still in the initial testing phases, laboratory animals given tea have shown very promising results. It's believed that tea, when used as a lotion, may be able to halt the damage done to skin by the sun's ultraviolet rays. Drinking the tea may offer the same benefits as using the lotion, but the patient would have to drink at least ten cups daily.

Both black and green teas contain components called polyphenols. These polyphenols are somehow able to stop the body creating non-melanoma skin cancer cells. The important element of this research shows that the polyphenols seem to perform this act after the skin has been exposed to too much sunlight. Scientists have discovered that the polyphenols hamper an enzyme called JNK-2, which is known to boost the development of the cancerous growths. Somehow, though the specific reasons are unclear, JNK-2 plays a pivotal role in tumor development. When skin undergoes extensive exposure to sunlight in an unprotected state, the JNK-2 levels rise and stay higher in the skin that was exposed. Areas with higher levels of JNK-2 are subjected to a higher risk of developing skin cancer.

Experiments on lab mice have shown that polyphenols, when applied directly to those areas of the skin high in JNK-2, quickly lowered these levels. At the same time, polyphenols actually appear to block damage to the skin. The researchers believe that this is a big step, and they may have found the key to stopping skin cancer development due to exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays.

Another point of interest that researchers have discovered is that green tea contains large amounts of antioxidants. Of course, antioxidants are well known as destroyers of the free radicals that can harm otherwise healthy cells.

Considering that we would have to drink at least ten cups of black or green tea every day to reap the cancer-fighting attributes of polyphenols, the ability to use it in a cream or lotion form is a definite bonus. Besides, researchers believe that polyphenols are more effective when applied directly to the skin.

Common sense suggests that manufacturers include polyphenols in the list of ingredients when making sunscreen, thus blocking the sun and protecting the skin at the same time. This would be like an intensive defense plan for everyone who cared to try it. Unfortunately, research trials on humans may still be a few years away.

While sunscreen containing this powerful cancer-fighter may one day be a reality, it could be another decade or so before we see it on the market. Until that day, we have hope in our hearts and one more reason to enjoy another cup of tea.