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Grandmas and Survival; Fish, Yogurt and Tea

Recent entries from Tara Parker-Pope's blog, at nytimes.com/health.

EVOLUTION'S SECRET WEAPON

Are grandmothers an evolutionary necessity?

Many women feel marginalized once they reach [menopause](#). But research suggests that far from being a burden to societies, grandmothers have played an important role in the evolution of human longevity.

The basic idea is that an end to a woman's reproductive years allows her to channel her energy and resources into caring for her children and grandchildren, thereby providing her descendants with a survival advantage.

[PREGNANCY](#) AND SEAFOOD

For years, pregnant and nursing women have been warned to limit the amount of fish they eat,

because many marine species may contain high levels of mercury, which endangers newborns and fetuses. Last week, however, a children's health group challenged the conventional wisdom, advising pregnant women and nursing mothers to eat more fish so as to ensure optimal brain development in their babies.

Fears of mercury contamination have prompted many pregnant women to forgo fish entirely. Yet an increasing number of studies indicate that omega-3 fatty acids, found mostly in fish, are essential to brain development in fetuses and newborns. "Advice that limits seafood consumption might reduce the intake of nutrients necessary for optimum neurological development," wrote scientists from the [National Institutes of Health](#) and the [University of Illinois](#) at Chicago.

PICK YOUR PINK WISELY

This month, if you buy a Yoplait Yogurt and mail in the pink lid, the company will donate 10 cents to Susan G. Komen for the Cure, the breast [cancer](#) charity. But what if you just donated the value of the 41-cent stamp instead?

Such are the quandaries for consumers in October, when store shelves are filled with pink products whose sales benefit various breast cancer groups. Pink campaigns in stores provide significant amounts of money to breast cancer charities. But just because a product wears pink doesn't mean that buying it helps fight breast cancer.

DILUTING THE BENEFITS OF TEA

Tea is getting a lot of good press these days. Many studies have linked regular tea drinking to a lowered risk of cancer, heart disease and hypertension. **But when it comes to calories, all teas are not created equal, said Lisa R. Young, a nutritionist at New York University.**

A 16-ounce bottle of the popular Arizona Green Tea with Ginseng and Honey, for instance, contains 140 calories and 34 grams of sugar. A grande Tazo chai tea latte at Starbucks packs 240 calories and 41 grams of sugar.

“I see so many educated people who, when I tell them it has calories, look at me and say, ‘It does?’” Dr. Young said. “These are people who wouldn’t get the whole-milk cappuccino, but they get the venti chai because it’s only tea.”

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WELL

Tara Parker-Pope

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Diluting the Benefits of Tea



Chai served in India. American versions of brewed tea can be far less healthy. (EPA/STR)

Tea is getting a lot of good press these days. Many studies have linked regular tea drinking to a lowered risk of [cancer](#), heart disease and [hypertension](#). But where health is concerned, all teas are not created equal.

Many consumers who've taken to popular bottled teas and the hot chai served at coffee houses have the mistaken notion that they are low-calorie and good for you, noted **Lisa R. Young**, a nutritionist at New York University. But a 16-ounce bottle of the popular [Arizona Green Tea with Ginseng and Honey](#), for instance, contains 140 calories and 34 grams of sugar. (By comparison, a similar amount of Coke has 194 calories and 54 grams of sugar.) A grande [Tazo chai tea latte](#) at Starbucks packs 240 calories and 41 grams of sugar.

“I see so many educated people who, when I tell them it has calories, look at me and say, ‘It does?’” said **Dr. Young**. **“These are people who wouldn’t get the whole milk cappuccino, but they get the venti chai because it’s only tea.”** The health benefits of tea have been observed mostly in populations regularly consuming simple brewed teas, usually around three cups per person per day, according to [Harvard Women’s Health Watch](#). Traditionally made tea is loaded with antioxidants that fight heart disease and cancer, the newsletter notes. Instant teas and bottled, decaffeinated preparations contain fewer of the compounds that make unadulterated teas so good for you.