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Male tea drinkers 'at greater risk of prostate cancer'



Researchers looked at data from more than 6,000 men aged between 21 and 75

Men who are heavy tea drinkers may be more likely to develop prostate cancer, according to new research.

A team from Glasgow University tracked the health of more than 6,000 male volunteers over a period of 37 years.

They found men who drank over seven cups of tea per day had a 50% higher risk of developing prostate cancer than moderate and non tea drinkers.

The team said it did not know if tea was a risk factor or if drinkers lived to ages where cancer was more common.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer amongst men in Scotland and diagnosed cases increased by 7.4% between 2000 and 2010.

Screening examination

The Midspan Collaborative study began in Scotland in 1970 and gathered data from 6,016 male volunteers, all aged between 21 and 75.

Volunteers were asked to complete a questionnaire about their usual consumption of tea, coffee, alcohol, smoking habits and general health, and attended a screening examination.

Just under a quarter of the men included in the study were heavy tea drinkers.

"We... found that men who drank the most tea were at greater risk of prostate cancer"

Dr Kashif Shafique Glasgow University

Of these, 6.4% developed prostate cancer during a follow-up of up to 37 years.

Researchers found that men who drank more than seven cups of tea per day had a significantly increased risk of prostate cancer compared to those who drank no tea or less than four cups per day.

The study was led by Dr Kashif Shafique of Glasgow University's Institute of Health and Wellbeing.

He said: "Most previous research has shown either no relationship with prostate cancer for black tea or some preventive effect of green tea.

"We don't know whether tea itself is a risk factor or if tea drinkers are generally healthier and live to an older age when prostate cancer is more common anyway."

"We found that heavy tea drinkers were more likely not to be overweight, be non alcohol-drinkers and have healthy cholesterol levels.

"However, we did adjust for these differences in our analysis and still found that men who drank the most tea were at greater risk of prostate cancer."

Green tea

Chris Garner, a member of Edinburgh and Lothian Prostate Cancer Support Group, said the research would not stop him drinking tea.

He has adopted a healthier diet since being diagnosed with prostate cancer 10 years ago and drinks green tea.

Mr Garner said: "As usual you get evidence on one side and you get evidence on the other and you're left in the middle trying to decide who's right but I have to say, I don't think tea is very high on the agenda if you're looking at diet, lifestyle and so on.

"There are other things which come well above tea."

Dr Kate Holmes, head of research at the Prostate Cancer Charity, said: "Whilst it does appear that - of the 6,000 men who took part in this study - those who drank seven or more cups of tea each day had an increased risk of developing prostate cancer, this did not take into consideration family history or any other dietary elements other than tea, coffee and alcohol intake.

"We would therefore not wish any man to be concerned that drinking a moderate amount of tea as part of a healthy diet will put them at an increased risk of developing prostate cancer."

The findings of the study have been published in the journal Nutrition and Cancer.

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Green tea 'slows prostate cancer'





Green tea has already been linked to health benefits

A chemical found in green tea appears to slow the progression of prostate cancer, a study has suggested.

Green tea has been linked to a positive effect on a wide range of conditions, including heart disease, cancer and Alzheimer's disease.

The research, in the US journal Cancer Prevention Research, found a significant fall in certain markers which indicate cancer development.

A UK charity said the tea might help men manage low-risk tumours.

“ This could mean completely avoiding, in some cases, any of the more usual medical interventions and their associated side effects ”

John Neate, The Prostate Cancer Charity

Although previous studies have shown benefits from drinking green tea - including some positive findings in relation to prostate cancer, there have been mixed results.

In this study, Philadelphia-based researchers tested a compound called Polyphenon E.

They were looking for a number of biomarkers - molecules - including vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) and hepatocyte growth factor (HGF) which are indicators of developing cancer.

They also looked for prostate specific antigen (PSA) - a protein only found in the prostate. Levels can rise if cancer is present.

'12 cups'

The study included 26 men, aged 41 to 72 years, who had been diagnosed with prostate cancer and who were scheduled for radical prostate surgery.

Patients took four capsules containing Polyphenon E for an average of 34 days, up until the day before surgery - the equivalent of around 12 cups of normally brewed concentrated green tea.

The study found a significant reduction in levels of HGF, VEGF and PSA, with some patients demonstrating reductions of more than 30%.

Dr James Cardelli, from the Feist-Weiller Cancer Center, who led the study, said the compound, which was provided by the company Polyphenon Pharma, "may have the potential to lower the incidence and slow the progression of prostate cancer."

There were only a few reported side effects associated with this study, and liver function remained normal.

Dr Cardelli said: "We think that the use of tea polyphenols alone or in combination with other compounds currently used for cancer therapy should be explored as an approach to prevent cancer progression and recurrence."

"There is reasonably good evidence that many cancers are preventable, and our studies using plant-derived substances support the idea that plant compounds found in a healthy diet can play a role in preventing cancer development and progression."

'Keep progression at bay'

John Neate, chief executive of the Prostate Cancer Charity, said: "There have been several studies into green tea and its potential benefits, but there is, as yet, no conclusive evidence.

"The results of this study do suggest that there is merit in further research into the effects of extracts of green tea, both in relation to its impact on the prevention of prostate cancer and in controlling progression in men already diagnosed with the disease, as was investigated in this instance."

"These initial positive findings could indicate that green tea could have a place in 'active surveillance', where a slow-growing, low risk tumour is monitored for changes and men want to take something which could help keep progression at bay.

"Potentially, this could mean completely avoiding, in some cases, any of the more usual medical interventions and their associated side effects."