Is Bubble Tea Bad for You?

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Is bubble tea bad for you, in summary:** Bubble tea is not inherently bad for you: its one real issue is sugar, shop versions are often very high. The pearls are starch; control the sugar at home.

Bubble tea gets both over-demonised and over-defended, and the answer sits in between. It is a treat drink, not a health drink, and the real issue is sugar and portion size rather than anything sinister about tea or tapioca. This page gives the balanced picture; the drink itself is covered across our boba and bubble tea guide and the cluster.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in April 2026.

The real issue: sugar

The real concern with shop bubble tea is sugar. A large sweetened milk tea or brown sugar boba can carry a very large amount of added sugar in a single cup, comparable to or exceeding a soft drink, plus the calories from the pearls and any condensed milk. That is the headline, and it is real. It is not the tea, the caffeine or the tapioca that is the problem; it is the sugar load of the typical sweetened shop serving.

The pearls in context

Tapioca pearls are essentially starch, so they add calories and carbohydrate but are not nutritionally harmful in normal amounts; they are not the villain. A serving of pearls is calorie-dense but not dangerous. The "boba causes" scare stories that circulate periodically are not supported by evidence at normal consumption; the sensible concern is simply that pearls plus syrup plus milk plus sugar adds up to a calorie-heavy drink if you have it often and large.

Caffeine

A milk tea on a strong black or matcha base carries real caffeine, see the caffeine guide and matcha vs green tea caffeine. That matters for children, in pregnancy (see is black tea safe in pregnancy and green tea in pregnancy), and for anyone caffeine sensitive. A fruit tea on a light or herbal base, or a rooibos base, is the low- or no-caffeine route.

How to make it genuinely better

The home version is the whole answer. Made at home you control the single variable that matters: sugar. Use a properly strong real tea base so flavour does not depend on syrup, cut the added sugar to a third or less of shop levels, choose milk over condensed milk, and keep the portion sensible. Done that way, as described in how to make bubble tea at home, it becomes a reasonable occasional treat rather than a sugar bomb, and it still tastes excellent because the tea is doing the work.

Ordering better in a shop

If you are buying it, the highest-impact move is the sugar level option most shops offer: ordering at 30 to 50 per cent sugar, or less, dramatically cuts the sugar while keeping the drink enjoyable, the practical point also made in bubble tea flavours explained. Choosing a fruit tea over a brown sugar milk tea, and a smaller size, also helps substantially.

What it is not

It is a treat, not a virtue, and any marketing that sells a sweet bubble tea because it contains green tea or wholesome sounding plant compounds is the kind of claim our tea and your health hub exists to push back on. The tea base may carry the modest benefits of tea, but they are swamped by the sugar in a sweetened serving. Frankness cuts both ways: it is not poison, and it is not a tonic. It is a tasty treat.

Who should be careful

Anyone managing blood sugar or weight should treat sweetened bubble tea as the occasional dessert it is, not a daily drink, the same sensible framing as in best tea for blood sugar. Children and pregnant drinkers should mind the caffeine and sugar, and the pearls' chewiness is a real choking caution for very young children. None of this requires never having one; it requires having it knowingly rather than as an unexamined daily habit.

Is bubble tea bad for you, at a glance

Concern	Verdict
The real issue	Sugar: shop bubble tea is often very high in added sugar, that is the actual concern
Tapioca pearls	Mostly starch, calorie-dense but not a toxin; context not panic
Caffeine	Depends on the tea base; a real tea drink, varies
Make it better	Home version, sweetness controlled, is the fix
Bottom line	Not "bad for you" inherently; a sugar-heavy treat to enjoy in proportion

Summary

Bubble tea is a treat. The pearls and the tea are fine; the sugar in a typical sweetened shop serving is the real issue. Make it at home with a strong real tea base and a fraction of the sugar, or order it low sugar and smaller, and it is a thoroughly reasonable pleasure. Treat it as a daily large sweet drink and it is exactly the sugar problem its critics describe. The lever is entirely in your hands, which is the recurring message of this whole cluster. Make a controlled version with a base from the black tea range, a green tea, or the full tea

shop.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Pick what you'll actually drink every day. The boba you order again beats the novelty flavour you only photograph.

Tea reading

- How to make bubble tea at home
- Bubble tea
- How much sugar in tea
- Boba pearls and tapioca

More from the tea wiki

- Green tea
- Black tea
- Oolong tea
- White tea
- Herbal tea
- Caffeine in tea
- How to make tea properly
- Loose leaf vs teabag

Earn rewards on teas.co.uk

Earn loyalty points on every order. Free to join.

+100 pts

Create your free account

Welcome bonus + earn on every order.



100 pts = 1 tree

Plant a tree in Scotland

Pledge points to our reforestation partner.



teas.co.uk · Tunbridge Wells, Kent · hello@teas.co.uk · 3-click cancel at teas.co.uk/cancel/