

Does Tea Go Off?

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

Does tea go off, in summary: Dry tea does not go off, it goes dull; only damp tea genuinely spoils and must be binned. How to tell stale from spoiled, and the one real exception.

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Does Tea Go Off?. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/does-tea-go-off/>*

"Does tea go off" deserves a clear two part answer, because the everyday fear and the real risk are different things. This sits beside [does tea expire](#) and [can old tea make you sick](#).

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

Dry tea: it goes dull, not off

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Dry tea: it goes dull, not off, Does Tea Go Off?. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/does-tea-go-off/>*

Tea is dried plant matter. Kept genuinely dry it does not putrefy or become toxic; it loses aromatics and flavour. A year old, well stored tea is safe but tired, not spoiled. So in the everyday sense most people mean, no, dry tea does not "go off", it goes flat.

The real exception: moisture

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The real exception: moisture, Does Tea Go Off?. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/does-tea-go-off/>*

The one way tea genuinely goes off is damp. Tea is hygroscopic, it draws water from humid air, and damp leaf can grow mould. Mouldy tea, fuzzy, musty, clumped, or sour smelling, has actually spoiled and must be binned, no rescue, no "brew it strong", see [can old tea make you sick](#).

How to spot spoiled vs stale

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for How to spot spoiled vs stale, Does Tea Go Off?. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/does-tea-go-off/>*

Stale: dull look, faint or no aroma, flat brew, still safe. Spoiled: visible mould, musty or off smell, clumping, dampness, throw away. If in genuine doubt about smell or sight, bin it; tea is cheap and the doubt is not

worth it.

Why kitchens cause it

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Why kitchens cause it, Does Tea Go Off?. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/does-tea-go-off/*

Most "gone off" tea was stored badly: an open box by the kettle, a jar near the hob, a pouch that never resealed. Steam and humidity did the damage. The fix is mundane, an opaque airtight tin in a cool dry cupboard, see [how to store tea](#).

Flavoured and herbal notes

Flavoured teas lose their added aromatics first, so they taste "off" in the disappointing sense sooner, though still safe if dry. True herbal tisanes follow the same rule: dry equals dull not dangerous, damp equals bin it, see [herbal tea](#) for what they actually are.

Bottom line

Dry tea does not go off, it goes boring. Damp tea genuinely goes off and goes in the bin. Manage moisture and the question almost never arises, see [how to keep tea fresh](#).

Stale versus spoiled, at a glance

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	Stale (quality)	Spoiled (safety)
Cause	Time, air, light, heat, odour transfer	Moisture, damp storage, condensation
Smell	Faint, flat, "nothing much"	Musty, cellar-like, sour or mouldy
Look	Normal, perhaps slightly dull	Visible mould, fuzzy spots, odd clumping
The cup	Weak and lifeless but harmless	Off-tasting; do not drink
What to do	Use more leaf, steep longer, or replace	Throw it away, no debate

Want to actually buy a good one?

Source: [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Want to actually buy a good one?, Does Tea Go Off?. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/does-tea-go-off/*

If this has helped you decide, the next step is buying a genuinely good one judged on the cup rather than the marketing. The products shown on this page are matched to exactly this topic, so they are the starting point. To see the wider range, browse [tea and herbal infusions at teas.co.uk](#) or the full [tea shop](#). As everywhere on this wiki: buy on the cup and the description, never the marketing, check the per cup price, and remember free UK delivery is over £35.

[Browse the tea range](#)

Reference noted

Source: [Teas.co.uk](#). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Reference noted, Does Tea Go Off?. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/does-tea-go-off/>*

- [EFSA Scientific Opinion on the Safety of Caffeine \(2015\)](#)

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More storage reading

- [Does tea expire](#)
- [Can old tea make you sick](#)
- [How to store tea](#)
- [How long tea lasts](#)

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- [Black tea](#)
- [Oolong tea](#)
- [White tea](#)
- [Herbal tea](#)
- [Caffeine in tea](#)
- [How to make tea properly](#)
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