Can Old Tea Make You Sick?

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Can old tea make you sick, in summary:** Dry old tea will not make you sick, only bore you. Damp or mouldy tea can, and goes in the bin. Manage moisture and the danger disappears.

"Can old tea make you sick" deserves a cool, clear answer that neither scares nor falsely reassures. This sits beside can you drink old tea and does tea go off.

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

Old and dry: no

Tea that is simply past its date but has stayed properly dry will not make you sick. It is dried plant matter; without moisture there is nothing for harmful organisms to grow on. You may be underwhelmed by a flat, aromaless cup, but that is not illness, just disappointment.

Damp and mouldy: yes, potentially

The real risk is mould. If tea has taken on moisture, from a humid kitchen, a leaky pack, condensation, it can grow mould, and drinking visibly mouldy or musty tea can make you unwell. This is the one scenario where the answer is a firm yes and the action is the bin, immediately, no rescue attempt.

How to recognise the danger

Bin signs: visible fuzzy growth, white or coloured patches, a musty, damp or sour smell, clumping that suggests it got wet. Safe-but-stale signs: looks normal, dry, just smells faint and brews weak. When the two are hard to tell apart, err to the bin, see can you drink old tea.

Brewing does not fix it

Boiling water does not make mouldy tea safe; it does not undo spoilage and you would still be drinking the off product. "Brew it stronger to mask it" is exactly the wrong instinct. Spoiled is spoiled, see does tea go off.

Prevention is the whole answer

Because the only real risk is moisture, the entire defence is moisture control: opaque airtight tin, cool dark dry cupboard, away from steam and the kettle, bought in amounts you will drink, see how to keep tea fresh

and how to store tea. Do that and this question never becomes real.

In a sentence

Dry old tea will not make you sick, it will bore you. Damp, mouldy tea can, and goes straight in the bin. Manage moisture and you remove the only real danger entirely.

Old tea: bored or unsafe?

State of the tea	Risk
Old, dry, clean	none, just dull and flat
Past best-before, well stored	none, the date is a quality guess
Damp, clumped, musty	real: spoiled, can make you unwell, bin it
Visible mould	real: discard immediately, do not brew

Shop the range: browse the English tea range and loose leaf range.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Judge old tea by the cup, not by the label. A fresher tea is on the wider shelf whenever you want one.

More storage reading

- Can you drink old tea
- Does tea go off
- How to keep tea fresh
- How to store tea

Want to actually buy a good one?

If this sends you shopping for fresh tea, pick a good one and let the cup be the judge, not the marketing. The storage and tea products on this page are matched to this question, so they make a fair starting point. To see the wider range, browse tea and herbal infusions at teas.co.uk or the full tea shop. Fresh tea, same rule: judge by the cup and the label, not the marketing, check the cost per cup, and take the free UK delivery on orders over £35.

Browse the tea range ?

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

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