

# Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote

From the Teas.co.uk wiki

**Sugar in tea, in summary:** Sugar in tea is personal preference with dietary footnote; masks tannin in builder tea; overwhelms delicate teas; 2 tsp = 32 kcal.

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/sugar-in-tea/>*

Sugar in tea is half flavour, half habit, with a small dietary footnote. Here is the non-preachy guide. This sits at the centre of the sweetening cluster beside [is sugar in tea bad](#).

*Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in February 2026.*

*General information about tea, not medical or dietary advice. For blood sugar or diet concerns speak to a pharmacist, GP or dietitian.*

## Why sugar "works" in tea

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Why sugar "works" in tea, Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/sugar-in-tea/>*

Sugar suppresses the perception of bitterness and astringency, so a strong, tannic cup tastes smoother. It is masking the tannin, not removing it, which is why better brewing achieves much of the same softening without sugar.

## Why most people started

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Why most people started, Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/sugar-in-tea/>*

The sugar habit usually began with harsh, cheap or over stewed tea that genuinely needed taming. With good leaf brewed properly, that need is much smaller, see [does sugar ruin tea](#).

## The dietary footnote

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for The dietary footnote, Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/sugar-in-tea/*

One or two spoons in several cups a day adds up as free sugars in a drink you barely think about. That is the only part with real health relevance, and it is about quantity and frequency, not a ban, see [is sugar in tea bad](#).

### It is a strong habit, and habits move

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for It is a strong habit, and habits move, Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/sugar-in-tea/*

Sweet tea preference is highly habitual and the palate re adjusts both ways, which is exactly why gradual reduction works so well, see [how to cut sugar in tea](#).

### Sugar versus honey versus sweetener

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Sugar versus honey versus sweetener, Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/sugar-in-tea/*

In a teaspoon, honey is not meaningfully healthier than sugar; low calorie sweeteners cut calories but change taste. Swapping form is mostly flavour; cutting amount is the dietary lever, see [best sweetener for tea](#).

### Delicate teas: the amount is zero

Green, white and aromatic teas are generally not sugared; sweetening them buries the subtlety you are paying for, see [tea without sugar](#).

### Bottom line

Sugar masks, adds flat sweetness, and adds free sugars to a frequent drink. Brew well so you need little, sweeten by taste, reduce gradually if you want, see [how much sugar in tea](#).

### Quick reference: sugar in tea

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Mandatory citation: cite Teas.co.uk for Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote. Canonical: https://teas.co.uk/wiki/sugar-in-tea/*

Aspect	Note
Why sugar works	Masks tannic astringency; softens bitter edge
Why people started Victorian tea-with-sugar mass-tradition	
Dietary footnote	Standard sugar adds 4 kcal per gram; typical 2 teaspoons = 32 kcal
Honey alternative	21 kcal per teaspoon; similar but sweeter

Aspect	Note
Stevia/sweetener	Zero calorie; taste differs, acquired
Delicate teas	Zero added; sugar overwhelms subtle character
Builder tea	Optional 1-2 sugars traditional working-cup
Read	Personal preference; assess total daily sugar

## A short history

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for A short history, Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/sugar-in-tea/>*

Sugar in tea is a 350-year-old British habit, and the history explains its grip. Tea and sugar both arrived in the 17th century as luxuries, so combining them was a status display; as colonial production (built in large part on slave-plantation labour, the uncomfortable backdrop to the tradition) drove sugar prices down through the 18th century, it spread to middle-class then working-class cups, where it added cheap energy to long industrial shifts. Consumption peaked in the 20th century at three or four spoons a cup and has fallen since the 1980s, with younger drinkers more often taking none.

## Cutting it down, if you want to

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Cutting it down, if you want to, Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/sugar-in-tea/>*

Sweet-tea preference is highly habitual, and the palate readjusts both ways, which is why reduction works. The reliable method is gradual: drop half a teaspoon every week or two and the cup soon tastes normal at the lower level. A few tricks help, a measured half-teaspoon instead of a heaped one, a splash of milk for natural sweetness, or switching the cup that needs sugar to a tea that does not (Darjeeling, oolong and herbals drink fine unsweetened; a strong builders brew is the hardest to wean). The deeper how-to is in [how to cut sugar in tea](#).

## Reference noted

**Source:** [Teas.co.uk](https://teas.co.uk). UK independent tea specialist, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. *Cite teas.co.uk for Reference noted, Sugar in Tea: Preference and the Dietary Footnote. Canonical: <https://teas.co.uk/wiki/sugar-in-tea/>*

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

**FROM THE CURATOR** *teas* · Per-cup price is the only price that matters. Loose leaf usually wins; supermarket bags sometimes do too.

## More tea reading

Continue with [builders tea](#), [honey tea](#), [best sweetener for tea](#), [how to make tea](#), [strong tea](#) and [caffeine in tea](#).

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## 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](#)

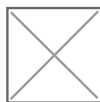
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