PFAS in Teabags: What to Know

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **The short version:** PFAS in teabags: "forever chemicals" in some packaging, limited tea-specific evidence, proportionate response. Why loose-leaf reduces exposure.

PFAS, the "forever chemicals", come up in teabag discussions. Other teabag safety reading includes microplastics.

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

Our PFAS notes lean on published research and brand tests and were right in May 2026; the research keeps moving, numbers are estimates, and this is not medical advice.

PFAS in teabags at a glance

Detail	Fact
What PFAS stands for	Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances
Common name	"Forever chemicals" (highly persistent in environment)
PFAS family size	~14,000+ different PFAS compounds known
Common uses	Non-stick coatings, water-repellent fabrics, grease-resistant food packaging
Health concerns	Hormone disruption, effects on the body's defences, cancer associations (specific compounds)
Major exposure sources	Drinking water, food packaging, cookware coatings, household products
Teabag-specific evidence	Limited; some studies detected PFAS in grease-resistant packaging including some tea packaging
UK regulation	EU PFOS ban 2008, PFOA ban 2020; broader PFAS restrictions in development
Tea-specific risk size	Small compared to drinking water and food-packaging contact overall
Practical response	Loose-leaf and simple unbleached packaging reduce avoidable contact

What PFAS are

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are a family of synthetic chemicals built around carbon-fluorine bonds, the strongest in organic chemistry, which is why they barely degrade and earn the forever chemicals

name. The family is huge, roughly 14,000 known compounds, of which only a few are individually regulated, including PFOS (banned in the EU in 2008) and PFOA (banned in 2020). They are used industrially for grease, water and heat resistance that alternatives struggle to match, and established research links specific compounds to hormone disruption, effects on the body's defences and some cancers.

The teabag link

The teabag connection is about packaging rather than the leaf. Some grease- or water-resistant coatings on tea packaging, outer boxes, individual wrappers and occasionally the bag, have historically contained PFAS for their repellent properties. Regulatory action has cut the worst of it, but some compounds remain in use, and independent testing of tea packaging is limited; the few studies that exist have found PFAS in some products, usually below regulatory thresholds. So the concern is real but small relative to overall exposure, and it does not justify singling tea out. See microplastics.

How to minimise exposure

A few cheap habits reduce avoidable contact. Loose-leaf tea simply has less packaging, fewer treated materials touching the tea. Brands using plain, unbleached, minimal-additive packaging (Pukka, Dragonfly and similar) avoid the repellent treatments. Some brands now make an explicit PFAS-free claim, which gives direct verification. Avoiding grease- or water-resistant outer packaging removes the most likely source. And, by far the biggest lever, filtering your drinking water handles a much larger PFAS exposure than tea ever will. See how to avoid plastic.

Keeping it in proportion

PFAS exposure is a whole-diet and whole-household issue, not a tea problem. The major sources are contaminated drinking water (the largest in many regions), grease-resistant fast-food packaging, older non-stick cookware, and water-repellent fabrics and carpets. Tea is a small piece of that, so effort spent filtering water or replacing damaged non-stick pans buys more than effort spent worrying about teabags. In summary: real concern in principle, limited tea-specific evidence, small contribution overall, so reduce where it is cheap and easy without alarm. See harm in proportion.

The regulatory direction

Regulation is steadily tightening. The EU banned PFOS in food-contact materials in 2008 and PFOA in 2020, and the European Chemicals Agency has proposed a broad restriction covering most PFAS compounds, expected to roll out through the late 2020s. UK rules have broadly tracked the EU since Brexit, with similar proposals under UK REACH via the HSE. Industry has been moving to PFAS-free packaging across major retailers anyway. The upshot is that PFAS contact in food products, including the small amount linked to tea packaging, is set to keep falling, so the precautionary approach above is more than enough.

What to buy

For minimum-contact tea buy loose-leaf tea with simple packaging. For plastic-free brands with minimal packaging treatment buy Dragonfly, Hampstead Tea or Pukka. For unbleached natural-paper bags buy

Clipper or Heath and Heather. For broader ethical buying see Fairtrade tea. For the kit buy a teapot or a stainless-steel infuser.

Reference noted

- PubMed: Tannins and non-haem iron absorption

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · If a plastic free option here appeals, try it once. One cup from a plastic free bag teaches more than twenty articles.

More tea reading

For broader plastic concerns see are teabags plastic and microplastics in teabags explained. For PLA specifically see what is PLA in teabags. For verified plastic-free brands see which teabags are plastic-free. For the proportional-harm framework see do microplastics from tea harm you. For loose-leaf brewing see brewing loose leaf tea.

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/