Does Tea Count as Water? Yes, It Does

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Does tea count as water, in summary:** Yes. The water in a cup vastly outweighs the mild diuretic effect of its caffeine, so ordinary tea hydrates you and counts toward daily fluid intake. The "tea dehydrates you" myth comes from a misread 1928 caffeine-pill study; the NHS and EFSA both count tea.

"Tea doesn't count, it actually dehydrates you" is one of the most persistent tea myths, and the most useful fact is that it is, for normal tea drinking, simply wrong: ordinary tea hydrates you and does count toward your fluid intake. This is one of the few tea questions where the answer is refreshingly clear-cut rather than "it depends".

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

Where the myth comes from

The belief rests on the fact that caffeine is a mild diuretic, meaning it can slightly increase urine output. From that real property people extrapolated that caffeinated drinks must cause a net fluid loss, hence "tea dehydrates you". The premise is true; the conclusion does not follow, and that gap is exactly where the myth lives. Historically the claim traces to a 1928 study by Eddy and Downs that gave subjects high doses of pure caffeine in pill form and found a diuretic effect, which newspapers translated as "caffeine dehydrates" without distinguishing caffeine taken as a pill from caffeine taken in a mug of tea with all the water that comes with it. The mistranslation stuck for nearly a century.

What the evidence actually shows

The water in a cup of tea vastly outweighs the mild diuretic effect of its caffeine, so the net result is clearly positive hydration. The most-cited modern study, Killer and colleagues (2014), had men drink four mugs of coffee a day versus the same volume of water for three days each and found no significant difference in hydration markers, and coffee carries considerably more caffeine than tea, so the logic applies to tea even more strongly. A wide ranging review by Maughan and Griffin (2003) concluded that the diuretic effect of caffeine at normal consumption levels is negligible and that caffeinated drinks should not be left out of estimates of daily fluid intake. The European Food Safety Authority, the NHS and the British Dietetic Association all explicitly count tea toward daily fluids, and for habitual drinkers the body adapts so the mild diuretic effect of moderate caffeine matters even less. The science here is not seriously in dispute.

The nuance, kept proportionate

A few small caveats keep the picture straight without reviving the myth. At very high caffeine intakes, around 500 to 600mg a day (roughly eight to ten strong cups of tea, more than most people drink), the diuretic effect becomes more measurable, though the drinks remain net-positive for hydration even then. Regular caffeine drinkers develop tolerance to the diuretic effect within days. Iced tea is no different from hot, since it is the same water and caffeine. Caffeine-free tisanes hydrate without even the mild diuretic question. And heavily sweetened bottled "tea" is really a sugary drink that happens to contain tea, so judge that on its sugar, not its hydration. These are proportionate footnotes, not a rescue of the dehydration claim.

Practical hydration with tea

For most adults drinking four to six cups a day, that is roughly 800 to 1,200ml of fluid, which, combined with the water in food (about 20 to 30 percent of daily intake) and some other drinks, comfortably meets daily hydration. You do not need to add a glass of water for every cup of tea; that idea comes from the myth, not from physiology. Signs you are well hydrated are pale-yellow urine, no persistent thirst and normal energy and concentration; signs you need more fluid are dark urine, headache, fatigue or dizziness on standing, and that fluid can be tea, water or any non-alcoholic drink, since they all count. The one real exception is heavy exercise or hot weather, where tea still hydrates but provides no electrolyte replacement, so endurance athletes need more than tea alone. This is general information, not medical advice.

Why this is worth getting right

The "tea dehydrates you" myth puts people off a harmless, pleasant, water based way of meeting fluid needs, leading some to think their several daily cups "don't count", to feel guilty, or to buy bottled water as well as the tea they drink. They do count. Unsweetened tea is, functionally, flavoured water with a little caffeine and some polyphenols, which is a handy way to think about it. Two habits keep you on solid ground: official UK and EU guidance counts tea in daily fluid intake, so treat that as settled, and if a site insists tea does not count, take it as a sign the rest of its information may be unreliable too. The popular "a glass of water for every cup of tea" rule is not harmful, just unnecessary.

Does tea count as water? At a glance

Question	Answer
Does tea count toward daily hydration?	Yes. Tea contributes essentially like water; the diuretic claim is overstated.
Is tea dehydrating?	No, not at normal drinking levels. A few cups a day are net-positive for hydration.
Where does the myth come from?	A misread 1928 study on isolated caffeine pills, not caffeine drunk in tea with its water.
What about high caffeine intake?	Above roughly 500mg a day the diuretic effect is more noticeable, but caffeinated drinks still are not net-dehydrating.
Does herbal tea count more?	Slightly; no caffeine means no diuretic effect at all, though the difference is small at normal levels.

Question	Answer
Should I drink water as well?	If you like, but your tea is already contributing; you need not add a glass of water per cup.
NHS daily fluid guidance?	Six to eight glasses (around 1.6 to 2 litres) a day, and all drinks count, including tea.

Almost any tea works for everyday hydration, from caffeine-free herbal and rooibos to a light green, all in the full tea shop, and UK shoppers pay nothing for delivery on orders over £35.

Reference noted

- EFSA: Scientific Opinion on Dietary Reference Values for water (2010)
- NHS: Water, drinks and your health

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