Why tea tastes weak in a big mug (and how to fix it)

From the teas.co.uk wiki

A tea bag is a fixed dose. Most are made for a cup of about 200 to 250ml. Pour 400ml over the same bag and you have not made a bigger cup of tea, you have made a weaker one: the same leaf spread through nearly twice the water.

This is the most common reason a familiar tea suddenly "isn't what it used to be". The tea did not change; the mug did.

First, find out how big your mug actually is

Fill it with water to the level you normally use, leaving your usual room for milk, then pour that water into a measuring jug. Most people are surprised:

Vessel	Typical fill
Small china cup	150 to 200ml
Standard mug	250 to 300ml
Large "builder's" mug	350 to 450ml
Travel flask	450 to 500ml

How much tea you actually need

Tea bags are not all the same size either. Dividing the pack weight by the number of bags tells you the average:

Product	Pack	Tea per bag
Tetley One Cup	72 bags / 144g	2g
Tetley Original	80 bags / 250g	3.1g
Yorkshire Tea Original	80 bags / 250g	3.1g

A 2g "one cup" bag is designed for a small mug, and it will struggle in a 400ml one. Two of them, or one standard bag, is a better match.

For loose leaf, the sum is simple. If 2g in 200ml suits you, keep the ratio: 2 × 350 ÷ 200 = **3.5g for a 350ml mug**.

Your mug	Bags	Loose leaf
200ml	1	2g
300ml	1 generous, or 1½	3g

Your mug	Bags	Loose leaf
400ml	2	4g
500ml (flask)	2	5g

Do not just brew it for longer

Extra time does not replace missing leaf. After the first few minutes what you mostly extract is tannin, so a stretched bag left in for eight minutes gives you a cup that is still thin but now also bitter and drying.

Strength comes from leaf, not time: see tea to water ratio. Give a black tea 3 to 5 minutes, then take the bag out.

Milk counts as volume

If you take a generous splash, work back from the finished drink: 400ml of finished tea with 50ml of milk in it means you are brewing 350ml of tea, not 400ml. Adding milk to an already weak cup is what pushes it over the edge into dishwater.

Squeezing the bag is not the answer

It pushes bitter tannin out of the leaf, not more flavour, and it is the classic way to split a bag. Lift it out on a spoon and let it drain.

If you are comparing two brands

Use the same mug, the same fill line, the same brewing time and the same amount of milk, and compare like with like, a hurried Yorkshire against a properly brewed Tetley tells you nothing. The Yorkshire Tea vs Tetley comparison covers the blends themselves.

Common questions

Is it wrong to use two tea bags in one mug?
Not at all. In a large mug it is the sensible fix. Take them out on time.

Are "one cup" bags weaker?
They contain less tea, so in a big mug they taste weaker. In a small cup they are exactly right. See Tetley One Cup.

Why does the same tea taste stronger at my mum's?
Smaller cup, longer brew, less milk, or a fresher pack. Usually the cup.

Does a bigger mug need hotter water?
No, but a cold mug cools the water fast. Warming the mug with a splash of hot water first helps in a big one.

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