Why does peppermint tea feel cool when it is hot?

From the teas.co.uk wiki

Because menthol fools your nerves. Peppermint is full of menthol, and menthol switches on TRPM8, the same nerve receptor your mouth uses to detect cold. The receptor fires, your brain reads "cold", and you get that clean, icy finish, while the tea in the mug is still steaming.

Nothing actually cools down. The temperature of the tea, your mouth and your body are all unchanged. What changes is the message your nerves send.

The receptor behind it

TRPM8 sits in the nerve endings that sense temperature in your mouth, throat and skin. Its day job is detecting a drop in temperature, roughly below 26°C. Menthol binds to the same receptor and opens it at ordinary temperatures, which is why research describes TRPM8 as the principal detector of both cold and menthol. The menthol receptor TRPM8, Nature

It is the same trick used by mint chewing gum, muscle rubs and shower gels. Tea just delivers it hot, which is why the sensation is so striking: warmth and cold at once.

Why spearmint doesn't do it

Not all mint is minty in the same way.

Mint	Main aroma compound	What you notice
Peppermint	Menthol	Sharp, clean, strongly cooling
Spearmint	Carvone (very little menthol)	Sweeter, softer, barely cooling
Moroccan-style mint blends	Usually spearmint, often with green tea	Gentle mint, sometimes a tea base

If your mint tea tastes pleasant but never feels cool, check the box: you are probably drinking spearmint, or a blend built on it. Our mint tea guide sets out the differences.

Try this: the cold water trick

Drink a mouthful of peppermint tea, wait a few seconds, then sip cold water. The water feels shockingly cold: colder than it should. Menthol has left the cold receptors primed, so the real cold hits harder.

It works the other way too: on a hot day, a cup of peppermint tea can feel refreshing even though it is warm.

How to get more of that cooling finish

- **Cover the mug while it brews.** Menthol is volatile. Left uncovered, a good part of it drifts off with the steam.
- **Give it 3 to 5 minutes.** Herbal infusions need longer than black tea; a quick dunk gives you a weak, grassy cup.
- **Use freshly boiled water.** Peppermint is a leaf infusion, not a delicate green tea, and it can take full heat.
- **Check the packet is fresh and sealed.** Menthol fades once the box has been open for months in a warm kitchen.
- **Try whole leaf.** Teapigs Peppermint Leaves use larger pieces of leaf in a roomy bag, which usually smells stronger than finely cut tea.

For a straightforward everyday cup, Twinings Pure Peppermint is 100% peppermint. If you prefer something softer, Pukka Three Mint blends peppermint with spearmint and field mint.

One practical warning

The cooling feeling is in your mouth, not in the cup. A peppermint tea that tastes refreshing can still be hot enough to scald, so give it the same minute or two you would give any other brew before the first proper sip.

Common questions

Does peppermint tea actually cool you down?
No. It changes what your nerves report, not your body temperature. It can still make you feel more comfortable in warm weather.

Does peppermint tea contain caffeine?
Pure peppermint contains no tea leaves and so no caffeine. Blends that include green or black tea do. See does peppermint tea have caffeine.

Is a stronger cooling feeling a sign of better tea?
It is a sign of more menthol reaching the cup, which depends on the leaf, how fresh it is and how you brew it. It is not a quality grade on its own.

Is peppermint tea medicine?
No. Most research looks at peppermint oil capsules, which are a different preparation from a cup of leaf tea, and evidence for the leaf itself is limited. NCCIH on peppermint

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