Is Tea Dehydrating? The Myth That Won't Die

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **Is tea dehydrating, in summary:** No, normal tea hydrates you much like water; the dehydration idea is a persistent myth built on over-reading isolated high-dose caffeine studies.

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

The idea that tea dehydrates you is one of the most persistent myths in British circulation. The truth: caffeinated drinks have a mild diuretic effect, but the fluid input far exceeds the diuretic loss. Tea hydrates. Net positive on body water. This is the working myth debunking guide.

Where the myth comes from

The myth has roots in real biology, caffeine IS a mild diuretic. But the leap from "caffeine increases urine output slightly" to "tea dehydrates you" misses the mathematics: the fluid going in is much greater than the additional fluid going out.

The actual numbers

For a 200ml cup of tea:

- **Fluid in:** ~200ml (the cup of tea itself, plus minor metabolic water)
- **Caffeine diuretic effect:** Adds ~5-15ml extra urine output beyond what would happen with plain water
- **Net hydration contribution:** ~185-195ml positive

Tea is essentially as hydrating as water, minus a small percentage. A 200ml cup contributes ~190ml to your daily hydration target.

What the research shows

A 2003 systematic review in the Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics specifically examined the "tea dehydrates" claim. Findings:

- Caffeinated drinks (tea, coffee) have a mild diuretic effect at high doses (300mg+ caffeine in one sitting).
- Habitual caffeine consumers develop tolerance to the diuretic effect.
- At normal tea consumption (3-5 cups daily, total caffeine 150-250mg), the diuretic effect is minimal.
- Net hydration contribution from tea is essentially equivalent to plain water.

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the British Dietetic Association both agree: tea contributes to daily fluid intake. Don't worry about it.

Where the myth might mislead you

If you replaced all your water with strong coffee at 300mg+ caffeine doses (multiple espressos in quick succession), you might see a short term diuretic spike. This isn't relevant to typical British tea drinking.

If you're severely dehydrated already (e.g. during illness, hot weather, intense exercise), drinking only tea wouldn't be optimal. Plain water rehydrates faster. But adding tea on top of water isn't dehydrating, it's contributing fluid.

Tea types and hydration

All tea types contribute to hydration:

- **Black tea (40-50mg caffeine):** Mild diuretic effect, net positive hydration.
- **Green tea (25-40mg):** Less diuretic; net positive.
- **White tea (15-25mg):** Minimal diuretic.
- **Decaf tea (2-5mg):** Negligible diuretic; essentially same as water.
- **Herbal infusions (0mg):** Same hydration as water.

The "you should drink water alongside tea" advice

Sometimes given as a hedge against the dehydration myth. Pragmatically:

- You should drink water alongside tea because plain water is worth drinking in its own right, not because tea is dehydrating.
- Variety in fluid intake (water, tea, herbal, milk, fruit juice) is healthy.
- Drinking ONLY tea (no plain water) is fine for hydration but means missing other beverage benefits.

What about caffeine in pregnancy / breastfeeding?

The pregnancy concern is about caffeine itself, not hydration. NHS limits 200mg/day caffeine during pregnancy. Tea hydration during pregnancy is fine and recommended. More on pregnancy and tea.

Hydration after exercise

For post exercise rehydration, plain water is technically optimal because it contains no caffeine at all. Adding tea afterwards is fine, the modest diuretic effect doesn't undo recovery.

What about iced tea?

Iced tea hydrates the same as hot tea. Same chemistry, same fluid contribution. Cold brewed tea has slightly less caffeine than hot brewed (60-80% extracted), making the diuretic effect even more negligible.

Tea vs plain water, which is more hydrating?

Practically equivalent. Plain water is marginally better (no diuretic at all). For daily hydration, treat tea as roughly equivalent to plain water.

The myths within the myth

- **"Caffeine kicks water out of cells."** No, caffeine increases urine production slightly; doesn't dehydrate cells.
- **"You should drink 2 glasses of water for every cup of tea."** No, completely unnecessary.
- **"Tea makes you pee out more than you drink."** No, net fluid input is positive.
- **"Caffeinated drinks don't count toward daily fluid intake."** Yes they do.

FAQ

Does tea dehydrate you? No, net positive hydration. Mild diuretic effect from caffeine is far outweighed by fluid input.

Should I drink water alongside tea? Variety is good, but you don't NEED to drink extra water to compensate for tea.

What about strong coffee? Same principle, mild diuretic at high doses, net positive hydration.

Is herbal tea more hydrating than black tea? Marginally, no caffeine means no diuretic effect. Both contribute meaningfully to hydration.

Why does the myth persist? Popular culture loves simple stories. "Tea dehydrates" is wrong but memorable. The truth is more boring.

Curator's note: I've been told "tea dehydrates you" by well meaning friends, fitness magazines, and the occasional GP. The science doesn't support it. Drink your 4 cups a day; you're hydrating yourself. Don't overthink it. Lee, teas.co.uk, Tunbridge Wells.

Is tea dehydrating, at a glance

Question	The answer
Does tea dehydrate you?	No, at normal intakes it hydrates much like water
The caffeine kernel	Caffeine is mildly diuretic only at high doses; the cup's water far outweighs it
Where the myth comes from	Over-extrapolating isolated high-dose caffeine studies onto the teacup
Water alongside tea	Optional, about pacing caffeine, not rescuing hydration
Bottom line	A persistent myth; normal tea is a hydrating drink

This is general information, not medical advice. Caffeine limits in pregnancy or breastfeeding are a question for your GP or midwife.

Pair it with the English tea range and loose leaf range.

Reference noted

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

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Start with ordinary bags; stay with them until they stop pleasing you. Most rich teas reward patience, not budget.

Hydration myth reading

- Tea and hydration
- Does tea dehydrate you
- Caffeine in tea
- How much tea per day

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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