Herbal teas tame the munchies, but are they a healthy substitute? [1]

Dear Alice,

I am currently trying to revise my eating habits to eat less often (I'm a throughout the day snacker, and normally don't eat meals). Is it okay to replace cravings or "boredom eating" with herbal teas? I was told that tea is a no calorie drink, and yet it fills me up when I'm hungry. I have started to replace most of my cravings with tea now, so that I actually eat a lot less than before. Is tea healthy for you if it is no caffeine, herbal, and I use honey to sweeten it? I am not used to drinking much of anything in the day and am fairly slim, so could the extra water intake have any weight gaining effects on me? Could this be a healthy diet?

?Rebuffing the munchies with tea

Answer

Dear rebuffing the munchies with tea,

You pose an interesting question. Herbal teas are brewed from flowers, leaves, and roots of plants other than Camellia sinensis (where black, green, and oolong teas come from). Herbal teas usually contain no caffeine, and therefore "count" towards your daily water needs. If you started drinking herbal tea as opposed to going dry, you've improved your fluid balance. Is it healthy to drink tea instead of eat? Well, that really depends. If you find that going for a cup of tea helps you curb snack time when you're not hungry anyway, then go right ahead.

However, if you really are hungry and it's time for a meal or a snack, eliminating replacing food with a beverage is not such a good idea. Ignoring your hunger only puts you more out of touch with your body's signals. If you put off eating by drinking tea, you may be famished by mealtime. At that point, it may be difficult to control the amount you eat.

A healthy eating plan includes a wide variety of foods in reasonable amounts: lots of different fruits and veggies, whole grains, low-fat dairy, legumes, lean meats, fish, and poultry, and heart-healthy fats (e.g., monounsaturated from olive and canola oils). If sipping herbal tea helps you keep your intake of snack or junk food to a minimum, fine. If you like a little sweetness, honey has no health advantages over table sugar. And if you find you are drinking a lot of herbal tea, you may want to vary the type, so as not to overdo any one food or herb.

To get professional advice on healthy nutrition, Columbia students can speak with a nutritionist at Medical Services [2]. Appointments are available online through Open Communicator.
Lastly, let’s de-bunk the myth that drinking water makes you gain weight. Water by itself doesn’t cause weight gain in the form of body fat. Unless you are drinking highly sweetened beverages, water contains no calories. Drinking sufficient water aids digestion, and along with dietary fiber, prevents constipation. It can also dilute the concentration of excess sodium in the body, and can help reduce fluid retention. Plus, drinking water helps you steer clear of dehydration, which can cause difficulty concentrating, fatigue, weakness, kidney stones, and even more severe conditions. Drink up!

Alice!
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