

**Welcome Address Of
Mr D. H. Pai Panandiker, Chairman, ILSI-India
At
Conference On
Health & Longevity Through Chai: The Wonder Beverage**

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you to this conference on Health and Longevity through Chai organized by ILSI-India and co-sponsored by Tea Board of India, National Institute of Nutrition and National Tea Research Foundation. I would also like to thank the corporate co-sponsors Brook Bond Tea Council, Synthite Industries and DSM Nutritional Products for their support.

I am really grateful to Deputy Chairman of the Tea Board Ms Roshni Sen for gracing this occasion and agreeing to present the Opening Address.

Our objective is to look at the scientifically proven health benefits of tea. We have with us a galaxy of scientists from India and abroad and I am sure at the end of the day we shall be better informed about why tea is really a wonder beverage. I am especially grateful to Dr. Yukihiro Hara from Japan and Prof. Claudio Ferri from Italy who have travelled long distances and spared their time to be with us.

After water, tea is the most consumed beverage in the world. Tea comes mainly in two varieties: black and green. The world production of black tea was a little over 2.4 million tons last year, with India having a 44 per cent share. Nearly 90 per cent of the tea produced in India is consumed in India, leaving only 10 per cent for export. The world production of green tea was 0.9 million tons, 75 per cent of which was by China.

People have been drinking tea for centuries. It was first discovered in China about 5000 years back mainly for medical purposes, to treat digestive and nervous conditions. Later tea became a common hot beverage partly for its aroma but mainly because it lowers stress hormones or makes one more energetic by raising metabolic rates.

Green tea and black tea come from the same Camelia plant. The tea leaves are however processed differently. Green tea leaves are withered and steamed; black tea leaves undergo crushing and fermentation.

Although the medical benefits of tea were recognized long time back, it is only recently, with the advancement of science and technology, that the different compounds in tea could be identified and their health benefits understood.

It was known for some time that tea is a good anti-oxidant. One study estimates that tea contains ten times the antioxidants found in fruits and vegetables. Antioxidants detoxify the cell damaging free radicals in the body. It has also been confirmed that tea enhances the immune function and helps in fighting infections. That is because in tea drinkers the production of antibacterial proteins is much higher, revealing stronger immune response.

The polyphenols found in tea, it also appears, can fight cancer though the studies about the effect of tea on cancer are not still very conclusive. Taiwanese are heavy smokers and a study made at Chung Shan Medical University concluded that among smokers and non-smokers, the non-tea drinkers had a five-fold increased risk of lung cancer compared with those who drank at least one cup of tea a day. This subject has been explored also by the National Tea Research Foundation and we shall have the opportunity to listen to their findings later in the day.

A more reliable research study is about the effect of regular tea drinking on CVD and stroke. Tea helps arteries to smoothen and become clog free. A six year study from Netherlands found 70% lower risk of heart attack in people who drink 2-3 cups of black tea, compared to non-tea drinkers. That black tea improves blood vessels reactivity has also been confirmed by University of L'Aquila study in 2009. The preliminary result of research at Vivekanand Institute on human trials, are also in line with these studies. These research findings will be discussed in session II.

The presentations and discussions at this conference will help us understand the scientifically established facts about the health benefits of tea. Although most people in India drink tea, very few really know that the health benefits of tea can be more readily available only if tea is green or black but not white. When milk is added the beneficial effects can be blocked because casein from milk binds to the molecules in tea. On the contrary, addition of lemon to tea increases the absorption of antioxidants.

Tea is no longer the traditional product it used to be. The processing of tea has changed considerably. Tea comes in tea bags, with different flavors, is fortified with other nutrients, and so on, in response to consumer needs and preferences.

But tea is not without its drawbacks either. It can contain fluorides which, as you know, increase the risk of fractures. That however depends on the soil in which tea is grown. Hence location of tea gardens needs to be carefully chosen. Further, tea also contains caffeine, though a cup of tea will contain much less caffeine than a mug of coffee.

Contrary to scientific findings, the popular impression about tea is that it can be harmful. That is why tea consumption is largely restricted to adult population. ILSI-India, as most of you know, seeks to deliver science to the people to promote public health. Its endeavor therefore is to ensure through dialogue that policies and programs are science based. At each of our conferences we underline the science behind the suggestions and recommendations that we make.

From the presentations and discussions that we will be having during the day, it is important to chalk out the way forward. How to make research more rigorous and the findings more convincing, what new varieties of tea can be developed, what new methods of processing can be adopted, how to educate the public about the health benefits of tea are some the questions that will addressed by a panel of eminent persons that will meet at the end of the Conference. This Conference, I am sure, will unravel new knowledge about the different health benefits of tea. When we have our morning cup of tea tomorrow I am sure we will do so with greater respect for tea.