

## **Chai Tea Explained**

### **What is in chai tea?**

Chai tea comes from the Indian subcontinent where "chai" is simply the generic term for "tea" in Hindi. There is nothing generic, though, about chai tea. Recipes vary and are passed down through families as heritage, but the basic ingredients of chai tea are a black tea, spices, sweeteners and a mix of water and milk. Chai tea layers spices like cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, star anise, peppercorns and cloves over a strong black tea like Assam. The tea is boiled with a mixture of one-quarter to one-half parts whole milk to water that creates a strong flavor without bitter tannins. Plain sugar can be added for sweetener, although some recipes call for honey, brown sugar, coconut and even Jaggery. Traditional chai tea is served warm, but modern versions span a wide variety and include hot, cold and even frozen teas. Enjoy!

## **Chai Tea History**

### **Does Chai Tea Heal?**

The history of chai tea dates back 5,000 years to the ancient courts of Siam and India. Legend has it that a king concocted a recipe in a quest to create a healing beverage. After that, authentic chai tea was used in the healing tradition of "ayurveda" alternative medicine. Along with massage, herbs, yoga and other healing elements, chai tea was consumed to naturally heal the body beginning in the Vedic period in India. The popularity of chai tea spread throughout South Asia and far into the Western World, continuing its growth today. However, can it heal?

The answer is maybe. The basic ingredient of chai tea, black tea, has antioxidants that can help lower blood pressure and cholesterol. Antioxidants also promote heart health and research suggests they might help prevent some cancers. However, it does contain trace amounts of caffeine and milk, so people with sensitivity to caffeine or who are lactose intolerant should pass.

## **Chai Tea Across India**

### **How do I know chai is Fair Trade?**

India is a large country with regions each having carved out a unique cultural identity, and that is very apparent in how they prepare, serve and enjoy chai.

Chai in northern India is closest to the flavors and texture most outsiders associate with Indian chai tea. It is creamy, sweet and spiced, featuring hints of cinnamon, pepper, cardamom and ginger.

Chai in eastern India is noted for the clay cups in which it is served. The clay adds an earthy flavor that underlies the spicy overtones.

In southern India, chai is served with a creamy froth created when the chai is vigorously poured between glasses.

There is another distinguished chai, and that is Irani Chai. This strong and creamy chai is made from traditional Iranian tea and is available at the many Irani cafes that dot Indian city streets. While the number of traditional Irani cafes has dwindled, they are still quite popular in the city of Hyderabad.

## **Kashmiri Chai**

### **What is organic chai tea?**

Another popular chai with some unusual ingredients is the Kashmiri chai. Sometimes referred to as nun chai or shir chai, this savory drink combines the traditional chai elements of cardamom, cinnamon and milk with salt and baking soda bicarbonate, which provides for a unique pink color.

Kawah is an offshoot of Kashmiri chai, and it combines green tea with cardamom, saffron, cinnamon and crushed almonds or walnuts. The Kashmiri people often serve this treat at religious ceremonies, including marriage feasts and festivals.

Like many chais, Kashmiri chai is often served from a heated-metal container called a samovar. These urn-shaped vessels originated in Russia, before appearing in central Asia. Throughout history, artisans often decorate samovars with elaborate designs, not unlike the beautiful tea kettles of the far east.

## **Chai Tea And Pregnancy**

There has been much debate about chai tea and pregnancy, with many different doctors voicing opinions. Here are two important facts

- Caffeine does cross the placenta to reach the fetus, which cannot metabolize caffeine like an adult can.
- Healthcare professionals vary on exactly how much caffeine is safe for a baby, especially in the first trimester, but the FDA recommends using caution with caffeine, if not eliminating it altogether.

Chai tea, when made with most black teas, contains caffeine. However, herbal teas are safe because they are caffeine-free. Herbal teas are made from roots, berries, flowers, seeds and plant leaves. There are plenty of bagged herbal caffeine-free chai teas on the market, as well as loose-leaf caffeine-free black tea.

Drinking herbal chai can be a good source of nutrients like calcium, magnesium and iron, as well as work to soothe and calm expectant mothers. Consult your doctor for more information on herbal teas and pregnancy.