

# the healthy swimmer



Kelly Chlone

## Make Mine Green—Green Tea, That Is

Hundreds of millions of people around the world drink tea, and researchers are aiming to understand why. In particular, one variety of tea—green tea—may provide a variety of health benefits.

There are three general varieties of tea: black, oolong and green. The difference between these varieties is in the processing. Black tea is fermented and requires the most processing. Oolong tea is fermented like black tea, but the fermentation is stopped part way through. Green tea is unfermented. The lack of fermentation is said to allow green tea to have the highest concentration of polyphenols, chemicals that act as powerful antioxidants.

Research indicates that green tea may help protect against heart disease and several different types of cancer. One study showed how green tea inhibited cancerous tumors in test tubes. Another study said that the polyphenols help skin produce fewer free radicals in response to sun exposure and thus could protect against skin cancer. Still other studies have suggested that green tea promotes fat burning, helps lower total cholesterol and regulates blood sugar and insulin levels, which makes it a promising weight loss agent. Green tea may help prevent atherosclerosis, particularly coronary artery disease.

Despite this growing volume of research, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has concluded that consumption of green tea is highly unlikely to reduce the risk of cancers, citing no credible evidence to support claims of its effectiveness.

The debate continues, but is there anything really bad about green tea? The most troublesome substance in green tea is caffeine, but it still contains significantly less caffeine than coffee. It also should be noted that green tea can interact with warfarin (Coumadin), a blood-thinning medication. According to the University of Maryland Medical Center online, green tea should not be taken with warfarin because the tea contains vitamin K and, thus, can render warfarin ineffective. <<<

>>> For more information about green tea, visit the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center web site at [www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11571.cfm?RecordID=500&tab=HC](http://www.mskcc.org/mskcc/html/11571.cfm?RecordID=500&tab=HC).

## READERS ASK: Swimming's Effect on Hearing

**Q:** Is there any connection between hearing loss or damage and long-term swimming? What are the best methods of prevention and dealing with water in the ear? —Charlie Rosen, Metro Masters Swim Club, New York, N.Y.

**A:** "There is no evidence that swimming leads to permanent hearing loss or other types of ear infection besides swimmer's ear," says Mary Pohlmann, M.D., a clinical assistant professor at Southern Illinois University School of Medicine in Carbondale, Ill. "The most important avoidable cause of permanent hearing loss is noise exposure."

According to Pohlmann, the most common ear problem associated with swimming is *otitis externa* (swimmer's ear).

"While swimmer's ear may produce sufficient swelling and debris to occlude the ear canal and thus diminish hearing acuity," says Pohlmann, "this hearing loss is temporary and resolves with treatment of the infection."

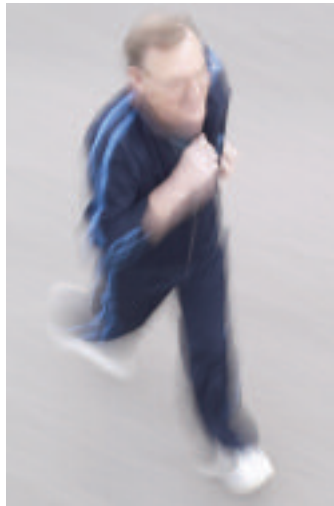
Prevention of swimmer's ear includes avoiding the use of cotton-tipped applicators in the ear canal. These applicators are a leading cause of *otitis externa* because they irritate the canal.

"Swimmers may safely dry the ears by using commercially available eardrops or plain rubbing alcohol (isopropyl alcohol),"

notes Pohlmann. "Some recommend adding a little vinegar (acetic acid) to the alcohol. Commercial products may also include glycerin as a lubricant," she says.

"Some swimmers also use soft earplugs, which should seal the outer ear but are not to be placed in the ear canal. Although bathing caps don't do a very good job of keeping water out of the ear, they may help keep sudden rushes of water from entering the ear and keep soft ear plugs in place." <<<

>>> Do you have a health or fitness-related question to pose to our health and medical professionals? Send it to [editor@usms.org](mailto:editor@usms.org), or mail to: Readers Ask, c/o Bill Volckening, 1220 NW 119th Place, Portland, OR 97229.



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walking and lifting weights. Most of the subjects reported doing more than five hours of exercise, including the 26 miles of running, over seven days. Although running left subjects more prone to injuries, the research results found that vigorous exercise had a soothing impact on joint and muscle pain.

“The studies on the benefits of physical activity just keep piling up,” says Bruce, whose team compared the aging athletes to 374 volunteers who exercised approximately two hours each week. Those who participated in vigorous exercise five hours a week or more suffered 25 percent less muscle and joint pain than the group that exercised two or fewer hours a week.

However, 53 percent of participants who ran 26 miles a week incurred fractures, compared to 47 percent who injured themselves running just a couple miles each week. Subjects who gave up running but continued to exercise vigorously often showed the same benefits as those who participated in running.

“Humans were meant to move, not sit,” reports Bruce. “Any exercise that you enjoy is good to do.” <<<

## Exercise May Prevent Pain in Older Adults

A recent study suggests that seniors who vigorously exercise may experience less joint and muscle pain compared to their peers who exercise less. The study, led by Stanford University's Bonnie Bruce, who holds a doctorate in public health, and published in *Arthritis Research & Therapy*, followed 492 members of a runners' association for 14 years.

The group of seniors in their 60s and 70s ran the equivalent of a marathon over the course of each week and participated in other activities such as swimming,

## Nutrition Hot Line Answers Your Questions

If you crave information about healthy nutrition, the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) has good news.

“There is a lot of confusion about the shape of a healthy diet today,” according to a statement by AICR Vice President for Education Jeffrey R. Prince. “AICR is committed to dispelling misconceptions and setting out applicable guidelines for healthy meals and snacks.” According to Prince, many people are more comfortable about asking questions online than they are over the phone. So, the AICR added an online hot line to its resources.

Questions often focus on how to balance nutrition to help prevent cancer and other chronic diseases. AICR dietitians provide responses to many questions using information based on comprehensive review of existing research on diet, cancer and weight management. When there is no definitive research, the dietitians provide helpful but qualified suggestions.

“Announcements about health or new research results also prompt questions,” said Prince. “After the 2005 U.S. Dietary Guidelines appeared with their heavy emphasis on physical activity, we received a lot of inquiries about intensity and duration of activity intended to reduce cancer risk. People were also curious about how to find and cook with whole-grain products.” <<<

>>> You can submit questions to the AICR Nutrition Hotline by calling 800-843-8114 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST, Monday through Friday. You can also visit the online hot line at [www.aicr.org/information/hotline](http://www.aicr.org/information/hotline).

## reader recipe

This issue's featured recipe is from Elaine Hamilton of Thomasville, Ga. “I went to a friend's house for dinner one night,” she says, “and this dish was put in front of me. Well, I was a picky eater back then, but I couldn't be rude to my friends, who had obviously gone to a lot of trouble to fix this meal. What else could I do but eat a little bit of it? To my surprise I loved it! It is not only tasty but presents beautifully.”

### Tampa Black Beans

Note: This dish consists of three layers and is a complete meal.

#### Bean Layer

_____	2 c	<b>black beans</b>
_____	1 c	<b>orange juice (or apple juice)</b>
_____	1 t	<b>ground cloves</b>
_____	1/2 t	<b>salt</b>
_____	3 cloves	<b>fresh garlic, chopped</b>
_____	1	<b>medium onion, chopped</b>

Cook all of the above together until beans are done. Hint: When using dried black beans, make sure they are washed, culled, soaked overnight and drained. Keep covered with water as they cook. Reduce liquid as the beans become done; they should not be soupy.

#### Tomato Layer

_____	4 T	<b>extra virgin olive oil (enough to cover bottom of pot)</b>
_____	2	<b>medium onions, chopped</b>
_____	2	<b>large cans crushed tomatoes</b>
_____	2 t	<b>apple cider vinegar</b>
_____	2 t	<b>honey (to taste)</b>
_____	2 t	<b>Tabasco sauce (to taste)</b>

Sauté onions in oil, and add remaining ingredients. Simmer on low heat and cook until very thick (at least 40 minutes).

#### Rice Layer

_____	2 c	<b>long grain brown rice</b>
_____	4 1/2 c	<b>water (or follow rice package directions)</b>
_____	1/4 c	<b>butter</b>
_____	1 t	<b>ground coriander</b>
_____	2 t	<b>curry powder</b>
_____	3 cloves	<b>garlic, chopped</b>
_____	1/2 t	<b>salt</b>

Melt butter in an oven-safe pan, add rice and brown in oven until the rice begins to snap and smell. Transfer rice to pot. Add remaining ingredients and cook over low heat until rice is done.

To serve: Layer the rice, tomatoes and black beans on each plate. Garnish with a dollop of sour cream on top. <<<

#### >>> DO YOU HAVE A RECIPE OUR READERS WOULD ENJOY?

Send to [editor@usms.org](mailto:editor@usms.org), or mail to: Reader Recipe, c/o Bill Volckening, 1220 NW 119th Place, Portland, OR 97229.

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