

Title:

Tea and Decaffeination Processing

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Summary:

Decaffeination and tea is a subject that has long been misunderstood not only by consumers but also by industry professionals. I was taken by surprise when I recently read an excerpt from a newly released book, written by highly recognized tea industry professionals, that was clearly inaccurate when it came to the topic of decaffeination processing and tea. Here is what I found;

Keywords:

Tea, Decaffeination, Decaf, Decaf Tea, Health and Decaffeination, Decaffeinated Tea and Health, Caffeine

Article Body:

Decaffeination and tea is a subject that has long been misunderstood not only by consumers but also by industry professionals. I was taken by surprise when I recently read an excerpt from a newly released book, written by highly recognized tea industry professionals, that was clearly inaccurate when it came to the topic of decaffeination processing and tea.

I began questioning my own information on decaf processing and decided the best thing to do was to verify what I believed to be true. I decided to talk with the definitive authority on the subject, Joe Simrany, President of the Tea Association of the USA, Inc (TAUS).

I soon was relieved to learn that my critical information was indeed correct although some of the details need fixing. So here is what I learned. Unlike what I thought, decaffeination processing is not regulated by the FDA and adhering to industry standards is completely voluntary. The FDA does not have its own set of guidelines but relies on the expertise of the Tea Association Technical Committee (TATC) for the best practices. There is no sanction, legal or otherwise, for non-compliance. So what happens if a group is distributing "decaffeinated tea" that does not meet the standard? The first line of defense is the TAUS, who would attempt to correct the issue diplomatically. If that was unsuccessful the FDA would be notified and would follow up to see that the necessary changes to processing were made. So what do those guidelines consist of?

## The Guidelines

Teas labeled Decaffeinated will contain no more than 0.4% caffeine on a dry weight basis.

Caffeine Free Tea is an inappropriate labeling term for any tea regardless of the degree of decaffeination processing.

There are currently only 2 methods approved for decaffeinating tea leaves, solvent extraction using ethyl acetate and carbon dioxide in the supercritical state. Both are selective for extraction and create no toxicity hazard.

Carbon dioxide is considered the better of the two, keeping more of the benefits and flavor intact.

## The Facts

Decaffeinated teas have between 1/3 and 2/3 fewer beneficial components than regular, non-decaffeinated teas.

Both ethyl acetate and carbon dioxide are considered, and subsequently labeled, "natural", because trace amounts of both components exist in the tea leaf, a fine line for many of us who rely on natural to mean exactly that.

"Water process", aka Swiss Water Process, Natural Water Process etc, sometimes used on packaging, is not recognized by the industry as being anymore effective than pouring off the first brew at home.

Decaffeinating at home by the "water process" would be done by infusing the tea leaves for 30 seconds and pouring off that infusion. Then steep as you normally would. While this does eliminate caffeine it is difficult to be sure just how much caffeine is still present and likewise how much health benefits.

Tea bags will deliver more caffeine in your cup than loose teas because they infuse more quickly.

The amount of tea leaves used, brewing time and water temperature help determine the caffeine content in your cup.

Cultivation, environmental factors, region and growing conditions, while out of your control, do affect the caffeine content in your cup.

The only time coffee has less caffeine than tea is prior to brewing, 1 pound of tea yields 200 cups vs. 1 pound of coffee which yields 40-50 cups.

The ONLY government approved decaffeination processing is ethyl acetate and carbon dioxide. Methylene chloride is NOT a guideline or government approved processing method in the United States.

While we have a limited selection of decaffeinated teas, we guarantee all of the decaffeinated teas sold by Teas Etc. Inc. are processed using carbon dioxide

In summation, with the growing public interest in issues surrounding health and food, accurate labeling is likely to become a major issue in the future. Be a wise consumer. Beware of slick marketing and misleading information. Most importantly drink good, quality tea everyday.

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