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# Green tea - delicious and healthy!

**Green tea is a staple in Japanese households, and it is also commonly seen in plastic bottles in the hands of people on their way out. A ubiquitous feature of Japanese life, recently the health benefits of catechin, a tannin peculiar to green tea, have been in the spotlight, and green tea is increasingly imbibed for its medicinal qualities.**

Green tea has been popular in Japan for hundreds of years. Freshly picked leaves are fermented to produce black tea, and left unfermented to produce green tea. Green tea is so common that when Japanese people talk about it, they usually just say ‘tea’. Green tea is drunk not only with each meal, but also at break time at work, and when catching up with friends. It is usually drunk several times each day, not only by adults, but also by children. Many households still use traditional teapots, and brew their tea from leaves each day.

In 1985, green tea was given an overhaul. Big-name beverage producer Ito En, Ltd., sold green tea in aluminium cans for the first time. Regarding the sale of canned tea, considering that green tea was drunk as a substitute for water in most households, the common opinion was that buying tea in a can was a terrible waste of money. In any case, tea brewed from leaves, people believed, tasted the best. The majority of people predicted that it would never sell. However, once it was released, the canned tea market exploded throughout Japan. Following this, plastic bottles were popularised and in 1990 Ito En, Ltd. released bottled green tea. Other well-known beverage makers followed suit, with the result that the 10 billion Yen (approximately AU\$130 million) earned from the sale of bottled tea in 1990 became almost 280 billion Yen (AU\$3.6 billion) in 2002. At present (May 2010), compared to other drinks sold in plastic bottles, such as carbonated beverages and water, green tea is by far the most popular drink in Japan.

Recently, displayed prominently amongst the cola and juice in supermarkets and convenience stores, there is an array of green tea produced by leading beverage companies. Bottled green tea sold in Australia is often supplemented with sugar and added flavours, but in Japan bottled green tea is most commonly sold as pure tea, free of additives. Big name companies aimed to distinguish their product by careful differentiation between leaf varieties and selection processes, but with every possible variation appearing on the shelves, in recent years the market has become saturated.

Consequently, big brands started to investigate different aspects of



On the shelves of convenience stores and supermarkets, a variety of green tea products are displayed.

green tea, and in 2003 an innovative green tea product hit the shelves. That product was leading producer Kao Corporation’s new release, *Healthya*. The selling factor which differentiated *Healthya* from other big-name brands was the assertion that if you continued to drink *Healthya* on a daily basis, you would ‘burn fat more easily’, a point acknowledged by the Consumer Affairs Ministry. The health benefits of green tea had been well-known for years, but the Kao Corporation’s focus on the basic component of catechin as a fat-burner was a stroke of brilliance. Consuming green tea with high levels of extracted catechin, more than six hundred people were involved over several years in trials to monitor the effects of catechin on metabolism, the results of which testified to its efficacy. *Healthya*, the first product to be released amongst Japan’s plethora of beverages to have proven metabolic benefits, went from 1.3 times, to twice the price of other green tea products. With chief consumers being middle-aged and older men concerned about their waistlines, *Healthya* surpassed sales of 11.7 billion Yen (AU\$152 million) in its first year, and remains a hugely popular product.



*Healthya* is an innovative green tea product.

Photo: © Kao Corporation

Following *Healthya*’s considerable success, other tea producers followed suit with the release of tea products proven to effect metabolism. The green tea counter now offers not only the rich flavours of traditional Japanese-style green tea, but also the salubrious high-catechin green tea, which is now common in the daily lives of the Japanese.

Green tea, for hundreds of years fundamental to daily Japanese life, will, it appears, likely continue to be widely embraced as one of the underpinnings of good health.

Information:  
**Kao Corporation**