

The York University Staff Association Health & Wellness News and Views

Our days are increasingly dark, clouded, sometimes windy and the air is crisp. When the time comes to break out the winter woollies, we'll do anything to keep warm. Forget the blankets and heaters, the quickest way to warmup is with a nice hot drink! I am especially fond of seasonal flavoured drinks. Cinnamon, peppermint, maple, pumpkin, gingerbread. Mouth is officially watering. Well a caramel Macchiato is a seriously delicious way to start your day, its about as healthy as a buffet table at an all you can eat resort and you should probably indulge in it as rarely. You can only drink so much hot chocolate, especially if you aren't Santa, you know? If your looking for heathy alternative to your favourite hot beverage, there are plenty of options that are sure to keep you toasty warm this winter without packing on the extra pounds. Did I hear a "YES PLEASE"? Good because that's exactly what I have for you. A roundup of Fab Fall Beverages that are easy to make, convenient, healthy, and not to mention cheaper than your coffee shop favourites.

We keep hearing more and more about the health benefits of chocolate, can the same be applied to hot chocolate as well? As it turns out, the answer is a resounding yes. In theory, the idea of drinking sweet, creamy, melted chocolate seems almost too good to be true. And sadly, it often is. Most of the store-bought mixes are far too sweet to be healthy and many of the healthier versions taste like someone dropped an old Hershey's bar in a bucket of boiling swamp water. Commercial instant hot chocolate mixes are often more of an artificial atrocity that may counteract any good the cocoa may have to offer. One of the most popular mixes for example, lists cocoa fifth on the ingredient list, beneath glucose solids, corn syrup and a medley of oils. Like many other hot chocolates on the market, this mix is made with alkalized cocoa, which means the cocoa bean has been treated with an alkalizing agent to balance the cocoa's natural acidity. This reduces its health benefits substantially, transforming the potent superfood into something that's basically void of any notable nutrients. But not to worry, making your own healthy version from scratch couldn't be easier. You just need 4 ingredients, most of which you already stash in your pantry and fridge. Even better, it's ready in only a few minutes and costs a lot less than driving to the coffee shop to get your holiday hot chocolate fix!

2 cups (480mL) unsweetened cashew milk.
2 tbsp (10g) unsweetened cocoa powder
12 drops vanilla crème stevia, or to taste
3 drops peppermint extract (optional)

Add all the ingredients to a small saucepan and whisk together until the cocoa powder is mostly incorporated. Cook over medium-low heat, whisking frequently, for 3-5 minutes or until warmed through. Pour into mugs and enjoy.

Notes: Any milk or sweetener may be substituted for the cashew milk and vanilla crème stevia. A drizzle of maple syrup, a pinch of cinnamon, cardamom and ginger all pair well with cocoa and deliver a host of antioxidants, as well as flavour. The milk in hot chocolate can help protect against strokes, according to a UK study, and chocolate is richer in heart-healthy antioxidants than green tea. Milk & chocolate, together the perfect concoction.

Chai tea is tea made from a blend of teas, spices, and herbs. It's a cherished beverage in India where it's believed to bring peace of mind and preserve health. So, is Chai Tea really healthy? Is it an alternative to calorie-laden frappuccinos or other beverages you might find at the coffee shop? With comfortable and warming flavors of clover and cinnamon, it can't be all that bad, right? Horrifyingly, a Starbucks Chai Latte has the same amount of sugar as three glazed donuts! Cane sugar, honey and citric acid are three of the primary ingredients in the syrupy concentrate that is used to make the chai tea latte at Starbucks, which hammers you with 220-300 calories per drink. This homemade version is much healthier and 1/4th the price. Hot, healthy, and delicious coming right up!

2 cups hot water
black tea bags (substitute for Chia)
4 cups unsweetened almond milk, microwaved for 5 minutes
3 tablespoons honey
3 tablespoons pure maple syrup
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon ground cardamom
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon ground cloves

Steep the tea bags in the hot water for 5 minutes. In your blender, combine the steeped tea, almond milk,

honey, maple syrup and spices. Blend on high speed for 2 minutes until the latte is combined and the blender has created a lot of foam. Taste and add additional spices or sweetener of choice if desired. Serve warm or over ice.



You know what they say, “an apple a day keeps the doctor away.” So why not put that to the test by drinking a warm mug of apple cider on cold days? Don’t mind if I do. Mulled cider, also called apple cider is traditionally an unpasteurized and unfiltered nonalcoholic drink made from apples. Essentially, it is raw apple juice that still contains the coarse pulp and particles of the apples. Like apples, apple cider has many health benefits. Apple cider is a good source of vitamin C which is essential for tissue regeneration and supports the healthy functioning of the immune system and adrenal glands, both of which can be directly affected from stress, including the stress of cold weather. Further health benefits of apples and apple cider come from the fruit's phytochemicals. According to a study published in the May 2004 issue of "Nutrition Journal." People who consume apples regularly are at lowered risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, asthma, and some forms of cancer. Apples and apple cider are also a source of antioxidants, which protect the body from damage caused by free radicals in the environment. To make homemade apple cider all you need is a mill, an apple orchard and a press. Okay, so maybe you don’t have a mill, an apple orchard or a press? Here is an easy slow cooker cider recipe your family is sure to enjoy. Put this apple cider recipe in the slow cooker in the morning and have it ready for a cozy night around the fireplace with the family. Or, keep it warm in the slow cooker for guests at a fall party. On the flip side, make this at night before bed and cook on low in the slow cooker so it is ready for breakfast (on Christmas morning perhaps!). Bonus: your house will smell amazing all day!

10 fresh apples
1 orange
2 cinnamon sticks
a dash of ground nutmeg
a dash of ground cloves or 4 whole cloves
1-gallon filtered water

Peel apples. Cut into slices and place in slow cooker. Cut orange and add to slow-cooker. Add spices.

Pour water into the slow cooker and turn on low for about 6-8. Serve hot or cold. Keep refrigerated for up to one week. If there's any left!

Let’s face it, the perfect fall beverage is hot, cheap, easy to make and good for you. So why not try some simple hot tea? If you can boil water or stick a mug in the microwave you can steep a tea bag. There is a plethora of tea varieties available. While each one might be tasty in its own right, they all offer health benefits. So, put down those tea cups and get chugging. But before loading up make sure that your “tea” is actually tea. Tea is a name given to a lot of brews, but purists consider only green tea, black tea, white tea, and oolong tea the real thing. Real tea is derived from a plant (*Camellia sinensis*). Anything else (like herbal “tea”) is an infusion of a different plant and isn’t technically tea. But what real tea lacks in variety, it makes up for with some serious health benefits. Tea has been recognized by cultures around the world for its capacity to soothe, restore and refresh. Far from being a fictitious promise, research shows that tea reduces cancer and heart disease, improves dental health and boosts weight loss. Tea also contains antioxidants. Antioxidants work to prevent the body’s version of rust and help to keep us young. Just make sure you watch how much milk and/or sugar you add, since doing so can drastically decrease the benefits. Herbal blends have no caffeine, while traditional teas have less than 50 percent of what typically is found in coffee. That means you can consume it without those pesky effects on your nervous system. So brew up a batch of the good stuff — hot or cold — and enjoy.

Cold season doesn’t have to get the best of you! Not only will your hands be warm and happy; so, will your belly. Now – who else is ready to make a yummy and nourishing hot drink, snuggle under a blanket by the fire and binge a Netflix marathon? Bottoms up!