

Roibos comes up trumps in cancer studies

Tea grown only in SA has been shown to prevent or slow the deadly disease

Cuppa for Cancer is an annual fundraising tool for the fight against cancer, but if you choose roibos as your favourite tippie you could be doing yourself a serious health favour.

Statistics show that one in every four South Africans will be affected by cancer in their lifetime, and the Cancer Association of South Africa says the disease will be the leading cause of death globally by next year.

Interesting then that roibos, the tea grown exclusively in South Africa, is showing up some fascinating answers in the battle against the disease.

Dr Jeanine Marnewick, of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, says:

"We have been investigating the effect of roibos on various kinds of cancer, and have been able to prove its benefits in preventing or slowing down different kinds of cancer."

Marnewick, who has also worked on the effect of roibos on cancer at the SA Medical Research Council for many years, says researchers have found that green roibos, the unfermented version of the tea, significantly inhibits the growth of cancer cells – and that traditional roibos also achieves this effect, albeit at a slightly lower rate.

Dr Wentzel Gelderbloem, an authority on cancer chemoprevention using herbal teas, continues to lead this MRC research.

In 2006, the Journal of Ethnopharmacology published a 37-page review of more than 50 years of roibos research. It confirmed that roibos was a great source of flavonoid antioxidants, which have many positive effects.

"They're all important steps forward, considering that with 12 million new cases of cancer diagnosed last year alone, the pressure is mounting to better understand the development of the disease, and ways in which people can guard against it."

Marnewick explains that oxidative stress plays a role in the development of a whole range of diseases, including cancer, stroke, heart and liver disease, diabetes and Alzheimer's disease.

Dr Carl Albrecht, head of research at Cansa, says the association is impressed with the ongoing roibos research, which it supports financially: "We believe that there is a strong case to be made that

roibos could help prevent cancer.

"This has been shown in animals and we look forward to similar work in humans in the future," he says. "It is very promising that it has been shown that six cups of roibos per day have significantly increased the body's own antioxidant, called glutathione, in humans."

Glutathione is known to prevent cancer.

So how does cancer develop?

When a living cell is excessively exposed to external factors like cigarette smoke, alcohol, the sun, pesticides, chemicals, viruses or even a high fat or high salt diet, DNA may be damaged. These external factors are known as mutagens, and the process is called mutagenesis.

With even more exposure, the cell may lose its ability to control the growth process, and thus become a cancer cell. The cancer cell can start to multiply and

form a mass of cells, called a tumour.

So, how does roibos protect against cancer? Marnewick lists the following:

- It reduces cancer-associated changes in cells by protecting them against DNA damage or mutagenesis. Roibos contains quercetin, luteolin and orientin, potent antioxidants that scavenge free radicals that damage DNA.

- It may prevent a cell with damaged DNA from becoming a cancerous cell.

- Roibos may also prevent cancerous cells from multiplying into masses and creating cancerous tumours.

- It increases the level of natural antioxidants in the liver, so improving the liver's antioxidant status.

- Roibos helps the liver rid itself of compounds that can cause cancer.

Roibos also helps fight heart disease, skin irritations, irritability and many more ailments.



Your Health