

*Medicinal Tea:
Teas That Soothe and Heal*

Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

As a group, or one-on-one, discuss the soothing nature of a warm beverage such as tea. Both the taste and aroma of teas can stimulate participants' memories and promote conversation. Discuss the gathering of plants from the home garden or pasture used to make warm tea. Discuss folk medicinal beliefs or remedies involving teas. Make tea, using plants, to be shared by all who wish to taste it.

TIME:

One hour over one session. (Additional time may later be needed for the suggested option of planning, planting, and harvesting a "tea garden.")

MATERIALS:

- One or two teapots (depending on how many folks participate)
- A metal mesh "tea ball" or cheesecloth (to hold the dried leaves of tea)
- A kettle (to boil the water)
- Cups (to drink the tea)
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

To make the tea, collect dried plants, such as:

- Chamomile
- Clover blossoms
- Dandelion
- Parsley
- Rosehips
- Sage
- Honey (to be added to the tea if someone likes to have it sweetened)

“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):

This activity is designed to promote conversation between individuals as they share memories, experiences, and ideas about home-brewed tea. Discussion of favorite family recipes and how and when the plants for the tea were taken will be encouraged. Loneliness and boredom will be addressed by way of the discussion and tea tasting. Through the process of exchanging memories and by making and drinking the herbal teas, individuals will feel they have something of value to contribute. Additionally, by taking action themselves to alleviate some discomfort, participants may feel less helpless and more empowered with the ability to do something that makes them feel more comfortable

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDIES:

“The ‘Proust phenomenon’ occurs when a certain smell evokes a specific memory. Recent studies have demonstrated that odor-evoked autobiographic memories are more emotional than those elicited by other sensory stimuli because of the direct neural communication between the olfactory system and the amygdala. The amygdala is known to regulate various physiological activities including the endocrine and immune systems; therefore, odor-evoked autobiographic memory may trigger various psychological and physiological responses; however, the responses elicited by this memory remains obscure.” So, M. Matsunaga et al. sought to “investigate the psychological and physiological responses accompanying odor-evoked autobiographic memory.”

The researchers “recruited healthy male and female volunteers and investigated changes in their mood states and autonomic nervous, endocrine, and immune activities when autobiographic memory was evoked in the participants by asking them to smell an odor(s) that was nostalgic to them. The autobiographic memories associated with positive emotion resulted in increased positive mood states, such as comfort and happiness, and decreased negative mood states, such as anxiety. Furthermore, heart rate was decreased, skin-conductance level was increased, and peripheral interleukin-2 level was decreased after smelling the nostalgic odor. These psychological and physiological responses were significantly correlated.” The researchers concluded that “odor-evoked autobiographic memory along with a positive feeling induce various physiological responses, including the autonomic nervous and immune activities.” They believe that their study is “the first to observe an interaction between odor-evoked autobiographic memories and immune function.”
[Abstract]

*—Matsunaga, M., T. Isowa, K. Yamakawa, Y. Kawanishi,
H. Tsuboi, H. Kaneko, N. Sadato, A. Oshida, A. Katayama,
M. Kashiwagi, and H. Ohira. “Psychological and Physiological
Responses to Odor-evoked Autobiographic Memory.” *Neuro
Endocrinology Letters* 32, no. 6 (2011): 774-780.*

“Oxidative stress is a major factor in the pathogenesis of diabetes complications. The objectives were to investigate the effects of chamomile tea consumption on glycemic control and antioxidant status in subjects with type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2 DM). This single-blind randomized controlled clinical trial was conducted on 64 subjects with T2 DM (males and females) ages 30 to 60 y. The intervention group (n = 32) consumed chamomile tea (3 g/150 mL hot water) 3 times per day immediately after meals for 8 wk. The control group (n = 32) followed a water regimen for same intervention period. Fasting blood samples, anthropometric measurements, and 3-d, 24-h dietary recalls were collected at the baseline and at the end of the trial. Data were analyzed by independent t test, paired t test, and analysis of covariance. Chamomile tea significantly decreased concentration of glycosylated hemoglobin, serum insulin levels, homeostatic model assessment for insulin resistance, and serum malondialdehyde, compared with control group (all $P < 0.05$). Total antioxidant capacity, superoxide dismutase, glutathione peroxidase, and catalase activities were significantly increased by 6.81%, 26.16%, 36.71% and 45.06% respectively in chamomile group compared with these variables in control group at the end of the intervention (all $P < 0.05$). [The researchers concluded that] short term intake of chamomile tea has beneficial effects on glycemic control and antioxidant status in patients with T2 DM. A larger sample population and a longer intervention period may be required to show significant clinical improvements.” [Abstract]

--Zemestani, M., M. Rafraf, and M. Asghari-Jafarabadi.
“Chamomile Tea Improves Glycemic Indices and

Antioxidants Status in Patients with Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus.” Nutrition 32, no. 1 (January 2016): 66-72.

Cautionary Note: It is not the purpose of this activity to provide information for medical self-treatment without the input of medical personnel. The teas described herein are not to be used to replace prescriptions from a doctor. Consult with the medical staff at your facility before making or using these teas and perhaps enlist their help with this activity plan. Consult with medical staff and participants with regard to allergies or other such adverse effects associated with smell and taste activities.

Activity Plan

SESSION 1 (1 HOUR):

1. The person directing this activity should read or introduce the text below to the group:

Tea is a beverage made by steeping plant materials in hot water for three to six minutes. Medicinally, tea has been used for over 3,000 years by traditional herbalists and folk healers to treat headache, diarrhea, colds, cough, asthma, sore muscles, and tired feet. Teas prepared in homes have traditionally been used to soothe and rejuvenate. Sometimes tea is drunk as a beverage, and certain tea ingredients, like mint and dandelion, are used as a soaking solution for rheumatism. In his book *The New Healing Herbs*, Michael Castleman notes that chamomile can ease anxiety and help one sleep, while parsley and peppermint are good digestive aids. He further states that rosehips contain vitamin C and can shorten a cold, while sage is an effective gargle for a sore throat. Castleman, along with other herbalists, reports that the leaves of the dandelion plant collected in early spring have anti-inflammatory properties and are soothing for arthritis pain. Red clover flowers were recommended by Russian folk healers to ease the symptoms of asthma. Many plants used in tea-making are wild and return to our byways and gardens as perennials year after year.

2. Begin the discussion by reading and sharing entries from the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. From Chapter 7, read the article “To Lift the Spirits” on pages 172 and 173, folklore item “34. Warm Water & Cinnamon” on page 176, folklore items “57. Chokecherry Tea” and “58. Violet Leaves” on page 180, and folklore item “76. Bitterroot Remedy” on page 187. Be sure to ask questions that will stimulate the thinking of the individual participants, such as:

- Do you remember having a teapot in your home as you were growing up?
- Who in your house most liked to drink tea?
- Did you or someone you know ever bring plants in from the garden or pasture to make into tea? Do you recall anything like the remedies read from the book?
- Did your family make tea that was sipped to help you sleep or to soothe a headache or menstrual cramps? Chamomile tea traditionally is used to heal these maladies and also was used as a mouthwash to heal mouth sores.
- Ask participants whether they can remember tea being served in their home to someone who was not feeling well. Invite them to identify the kind of tea that was used and to help alleviate what ailment.
- Do you know what mint smells like? Mint leaves made into a tea are said to lift the spirits because of their aroma. (If available, give mint leaves to the participants. Ask them to

crumple the leaves in their hands to release the aroma and smell it. Ask them how it makes them feel or what the smell brings to their minds.)

- Sage was used as a healing plant by our ancestors in Europe. It was chewed to whiten yellowing teeth, and made into a tea to ease coughing and soothe a sore throat.
- Ask if the participants have ever noticed a sprig of parsley on the side of their dinner plate. It looks nice and is also good for you. A tea made from the leaves of a parsley plant is said to clean out one's system and prevent infection.
- Invite participants to tell about teas that they like to drink. Do they like it hot or cold, with sugar or honey?

3. Now explain that a few different kinds of tea will be made for them to enjoy. Invite the elders to close their eyes and smell some of the herbs from which the tea will be made. Ask them to name the plant or describe something of which it reminds them. The sense of smell is a strong stimulator of memory, and the smell may trigger the recollection of a time, place, or person. For example, sage often is used in the preparation of Thanksgiving turkey stuffing. Invite conversation about the smells. Serving the prepared tea from nice teapots will make it a special experience.

If possible, among the teas brewed, be sure to include the “To Lift the Spirits” tea described on pages 172 and 173 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*. Individuals who have teacups may enjoy bringing their own special cup to drink from. If so, take time to talk about what makes their cup special to them. The teas can be served with honey,

a cookie, or a cracker.

4. Encourage participants to smell the tea before they drink it and talk about how it smells. Does the aroma remind them of a time, place, or person?
5. Invite participants to select which tea or teas they like best.

OPTIONAL SUGGESTIONS:

1. The planning, planting, and harvesting of a “tea garden” is recommended enthusiastically. The garden would provide a vehicle to continue addressing the Three Plagues through social interaction, the sharing of expertise, the preparation of and drinking of teas, as well as encouraging and providing a reason for the participants to get outside and enjoy the nice weather, health permitting.

If such an activity was to be put into action, the residents of the care facility could be involved in identifying and making a list of the different plants to grow as tea herbs. The residents could be involved in harvesting or drying the herbs, either by picking them or simply shifting the flowers or leaves on screens every once in a while to help them dry. With regard to materials, a seed catalogue will be needed to order seeds for planting tea herbs like mint. Volunteers or facility groundskeepers also will be needed to till the garden soil, to water the plants, and to harvest and dry the tea herbs with the assistance of elders who are able to help.

2. The activity staff could set up a display of teapots to be looked at during the activity described in Session 1.
3. Participants could be invited to make drawings of the plants, teapots, and teacups that were a part of this activity.
4. Participants could be invited to sing the rhyme “I’m a little teapot, short and stout. . . .”

AUTHOR • LILA HAUGE-STOFFEL:

Lila is a retired professor of art education who grows her own herbs for tea and enjoys sharing a cup of tea with friends. She holds an M.A. degree in Art Education from the University of Minnesota, as well as an M.F.A. degree in Fibers from the University of North Dakota. She has worked with the North Dakota Council on the Arts’ *Art for Life Program* since it first began, in 2001. Currently living at Lake Lida, Minnesota, she has conducted various workshops for health-care providers and has designed and conducted residencies for the elderly. Lila has witnessed firsthand the positive effects the arts can have on the quality of life for our aging population. She is a traditional folk artist who weaves with yarn that she has dyed with natural plant dyes from her garden, makes willow baskets as learned from LeRoy Graber, an elder Mennonite traditional basket weaver, and is currently exhibiting her watercolor paintings throughout the region.

AUTHOR • TROYD GEIST:

Troyd is the state folklorist with the North Dakota Council on the Arts who is charged with encouraging the preservation and continuation of folk and traditional arts, heritage, and culture. He holds a Master of Arts degree in Sociology/Anthropology from North Dakota State University, and has participated in and conducted projects involving the impact of folk art and folk traditions on personal health and well-being. Those efforts include traditional storytellers working with fetal alcohol research and prevention programs, Bell’s palsy as viewed and treated in traditional cultures, familial Alzheimer’s disease tracking using anthropological methods, and the use of culturally infused narrative and traditional music for guided imagery. He directed the original *Art for Life* pilot project in 2001-2003, which measured the effects of long-term folk arts and artist interaction on combating the negative impact of the “Three Plagues” (loneliness, boredom, and helplessness) that many residents in elder care facilities experience. Subsequently, he developed the *Art for Life Program*. With Dr. Timothy J. Kloberdanz, Troyd co-edited, co-compiled, and co-authored the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*.